



**Terms of Reference**  
**Scoping Study of national NGO platforms' experiences in promoting an enabling environment**

March 2020

Forus is an innovative global network empowering civil society for effective social change. Its members include 69 National NGO Platforms and 7 Regional Coalitions from Africa, America, Asia, Europe and Pacific. National platforms bring together NGOs and CSOs in their country across a wide variety of thematic areas. The platforms are mandated by their members to represent the sector and to act as a key interlocutor of the state. As a result, national platforms are often at the forefront of defending civil society space in their countries

Forus is recruiting a consultant to conduct a **Scoping Study on the experience of its national NGO platforms in promoting civic space and an enabling environment for civil society.**

**1. Background**

This scoping study commissioned by Forus, with funding support from Bread for the World, will influence the global network's future work and positioning on Civic Space and Enabling Environment for civil society, particularly where its own members are concerned.

Civil society in over half of the world's countries is facing serious restrictions on its freedom to engage, express itself and be heard. With increased surveillance, persecution and even violence against civil society, many civil society organisations (CSOs) have come under attack, particularly those advocating on behalf of excluded groups and minorities, for democratic rights and environmental defenders. Human rights defenders in Africa, Latin America and Asia but also, in other parts of the world are targeted, as well as CSO representatives. Technology advances have also brought increased surveillance and new risks for civic space.

As restrictions multiply across the five continents where Forus operates, the issues of civic space and an enabling environment for civil society have become cross-cutting priorities for the network. Forus launched its Global Initiative in 2018, which is a long-term effort to strengthen the power, capacities, independence and future impact of civil society in all regions of the world. Supporting an Enabling Environment for CSOs everywhere is one of eight pillars of the Global Initiative. However, baseline, up-to-date consolidated information is currently lacking on national platforms' experiences in responding to shrinking or closing civic space and promoting an enabling environment. This lack affects the ability of these platforms to support each other as peers and to contribute to the wider learning of the sector.

## 2. Study Aims & Objectives

The overall objective of this study is to generate information and learning about current experiences and approaches to promoting an enabling environment, with a focus on the role of national platforms that are members of Forus and on the added value that Forus itself would be able to play in this field. This will be achieved through a **Scoping Study** involving national platforms' and focused on their activities promoting an enabling environment.

This study aims to examine and report on:

- (i) the experiences, including successes and failures, of Forus members working with civic space and enabling environment in their countries
- (ii) the needs and expectations of Forus members regarding how the global network can support their work on civic space and enabling environment and increase their capacities in these areas
- (iii) an analysis of strategies and actions linked to civic space and enabling environment already developed by other CSO networks or other key actors.

The results of the Scoping study will enable Forus to better understand the issues and challenges faced by its members at national level where civic space and enabling environment for civil society are concerned. The results of the study will inform a future Forus strategy on promoting civic space and an enabling environment for civil society at national, regional and international levels.

The study will enable Forus to enhance its usefulness and relevance as a global network for its national members where their work on civic space and an enabling environment for civil society is concerned.

The study will also raise awareness within the Forus network of other actors and initiatives focused on civic space and enabling environment which will help to identify the added value that Forus can bring to work in these areas, while avoiding duplication.

## 3. Scope of the Study

The target groups for the study are Forus members, partners and allies.

Forus members are 7 regional coalitions and 69 national platforms, including 27 platforms from Africa, 15 from Europe, 11 from Latin America, 9 from Asia, 4 from the Pacific, 2 from North America and 1 from North Africa/Middle East.

**National platforms** will be the key focus of this scoping study. National platforms generally perform three key roles in their countries:

1. Pooling of technical and physical resources including information sharing, communication and capacity development, allowing members to share services and expertise, and benefit from economies of scale.
2. Building and promoting collective positions, through mobilizing the expertise of their members or external expertise. Platforms are particularly well-positioned to defend the 'space and identity of NGOs and promote an enabling environment for civil society.
3. Advocacy and relations with other actors: on behalf of their members, platforms are well positioned to be the main representative of their members with national, regional or international public authorities, as well as other actors such as the media.

All 69 national platforms will be invited to participate in a preliminary online survey. 10 national platforms will subsequently be selected to participate in individual interviews according to agreed criteria.

**Regional Coalitions** will also be included in the study. Regional coalitions convene national platforms, allowing for the consolidation of positions, the sharing of experience and the coordination of activities at regional level. The regional and international levels also can play a protection role, as belonging to a Regional Coalition and to Forus can also bring institutional reinforcement and support to national platforms affected by closing space. All Regional Coalitions will be invited to participate in an online survey. 1 Regional Coalition will be selected to participate in an in-depth interview.

The study will also have a focus on the role and experience of **women defenders/women's groups** in promoting and defending civic space and an enabling environment, particularly where they are promoting the specific rights of women such as reproductive rights. A specific outreach to a network of women's organisations will be sought in order to better understand how closing space affects women's groups, and how national platforms can take this into account.

Finally this project will involve **institutional partners and allies** of Forus including academic institutions, international institutions, academic institutions, philanthropic and donor organisations and civil society organisations outside of the Forus network, Most of these partners are active in the area of civic space and enabling environment, and therefore it is important for Forus to engage with them as part of the Scoping study, to share knowledge, minimise duplication and coordinate action, including in terms of long-term operational and funding partnerships. Approximately 15 external partners and allies of Forus will be invited to participate in the study.

#### **4. Methodological Approach**

The study is expected to include both qualitative and quantitative elements, including a literature research review, an online survey, in-depth qualitative interviews, and 2 field research trips.

Forus' members will be the main stakeholders of the data collection process and a balance in representation will be ensured (including geographical, cultural, gender and age diversity). External civil society partners and allies of Forus will also be consulted, as well as institutional partners. The consultation will be carried out by the consultant in a manner that ensures safe communication in order to minimise any risks involved for both members and partners.

#### **5. Roles and function of the consultant**

The role of the **consultant** is to propose a complete methodology for the Forus scoping study on civic space and enabling environment, carry out a comprehensive literature review, carry out the survey and in-depth interviews with Forus members and partners, write up the final report and facilitate webinars to share findings. The consultant will also be expected to participate in regular online calls with members of the Forus Team to update them on progress with all aspects of the study.

Overall guidance of the study will be the responsibility of the Advocacy Section of the **Forus Secretariat**, which will develop the terms of reference for the scoping study, participate in the selection of the external consultant, provide advice to the consultant while the study is being conducted and guide and provide regular support to the consultant in the work with national platforms, regional coalitions and external partners.

## 6. Deliverables

The key deliverables that will be expected from the consultant as part of the study include:

- A state-of-the-art, international literature review of key research, campaign and project initiatives on civic space and enabling environment for civil society.
- Design of online survey on civic space for completion by all Forus members and in-depth analysis of survey results
- Conduct of in-depth qualitative interviews on experiences of civic space and enabling environment with 10 selected national platforms and 1 regional coalition, and analysis of findings.
- Design of online survey and/or conduct of individual interview on topic of civic space and enabling environment for civil society with 10-15 external Forus partners and allies, and analysis of survey/interview findings
- A study report in English summarizing literature review, presenting and analyzing results of online survey and qualitative interviews, and making recommendations for future Forus action on civic space & enabling environment

The study report will present:

- An executive summary
  - An internal/larger version
  - An external/shorter version, to be published in Forus' website
- The facilitation of sharing of research findings for Forus members as part of the dissemination of the shareable findings of the study and provide feedback to national platforms and regional coalitions through webinars in English and in French or Spanish, or during Forus' General Assembly in October 2020 in Cambodia.

## 7. Profile and qualifications of the consultant

Forus is searching for a consultant with a strong academic and practical understanding of the issues of civic space and enabling environment for civil society. The position advertised will require strong research skills- both qualitative and quantitative and candidates will be expected be able to provide evidence of same. Previous experience of working in a developing country context on civic space will be an advantage.

The successful candidate will preferably have:

- A postgraduate degree (PhD or MSc) in the field of research or development studies
- A strong understanding of issues related to civic space and enabling environment for civil society, and preferably previous practical experience working on civic space and enabling environment issues with NGOs and networks active in developing countries and/ or countries where civic space is closing
- Strong qualitative research skills. Experience in field research, online interviews as part of evaluations and research projects
- Skills for intersectional analysis taking account of gender, culture, etc,
- High levels of cultural awareness, sensitivity and capacity for intercultural communication
- Excellent levels of written and spoken English and Spanish/ French.
- Digital security and safe communication skills

## 8. Application procedure

The application documents must be submitted no later than 5 April 2020 in electronic format to the following address: [recruitment@forus-international.org](mailto:recruitment@forus-international.org) specifying “Scoping Study of national NGO platforms’ experiences in promoting an enabling environment” in the subject line.

The application file should include:

- A detailed and complete Curriculum Vitae for the consultant, including links to similar studies and previous work carried out, and at least 3 references for the consultant
- A proposal for how the work will be carried out, including an outline of the approach to the survey of national platforms on their experience of civic space and enabling environment and an overall methodology for the study highlighting the approach and constraints, the timeframe and calendar for the research
- A detailed budget including fees and activity costs

Applicants should clearly highlight any current or previous working or personal links to Forus members, as well as any risk around conflict of interest.

Forus’ budget for this study is EUR 19,000. which will cover all consultant fees and travel costs. The interviews will take place in April 2020. An English language selection panel composed of Forus staff will conduct interviews.

## 9. Provisional calendar

Consultants search	March - April
Contracting of consultants	April
Inception phase	End April
Research phase	May - August 2020
Research report finalised	September 2020
Sharing of research findings through webinar or side-event of Forus’ General Assembly	October 2020