



Priority Actions for Advancing Pluralism within Civil Society and Media Programs

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Pluralism offers a positive response to diversity, where the dignity of everyone is recognized and everyone feels that they belong as equal and legitimate members of society. In pluralistic societies, decisions and

actions are taken to respond positively to differences, to see diversity as the basis for more just, peaceful and equitable societies. Pluralism goes beyond measures to “include” previously excluded groups in existing systems and power structures and demands engagement with difference in a more transformative way. Pluralism gives actors agency to collectively (re)design systems to challenge intolerance, counter power imbalances and advance democratic values and behaviors.

Civil Society and Media – Strengthened Together and Advancing in New Directions (CSM-STAND) provides a vehicle for advancing and transferring knowledge and tactical strategies for pluralism successes and avoiding duplication of shortfalls. CSM-STAND in collaboration with the Global Centre for Pluralism have outlined priority actions for the consortium and more broadly civil society and media programming to support the advancement of pluralism through programs.

A Pluralism Framework

Globally, inequality, marginalization and divisions are on the rise.¹ Recent contractions of civic space and media freedoms around the world are a manifestation and a consequence of this reality.² In many countries, inequalities of opportunity and agency based on group identity are embedded in societal norms, values and behaviors and codified through laws. Polarization, marginalization and horizontal inequalities

and exclusions (based on markers of difference) may drive violent conflict.³ The task of building peaceful and inclusive societies is urgent and yet civic and media actors often lack holistic approaches and tools to adequately respond.

Pluralism provides a framework to help societies think about how they approach difference through institutional and behavioral and relational responses. Advancing pluralistic societies requires a dual focus on **institutions** (hardware) and **societal mindsets and behaviors** (software), and the complex interactions between them.⁴ Pluralism results when norms of inclusion (software) inform institutional choices (hardware) about how to treat diversity and disrupt power disparities so that political, economic and social powers are inclusive and equitable across diverse groups. Conversely, legislation and institutional frameworks can motivate a shift in norms and behaviors. This hardware and software framing helps to explain why having inclusive laws and policies do not automatically result in more equitable, inclusive societies without the widespread social mindset and behaviors to implement and sustain them.

The relationship between hardware and software goes to the heart of mainstream societal narratives about **“who belongs”**. These narratives can inform policies and the extent to which rules and policies are implemented. Inversely, policies and laws are further shaped and reinforced by societal norms, perceptions and behaviors. These interactions can lead to more pluralistic developments or toward marginalization and polarization. Building pluralist societies requires laws and systems of governance and changes in public attitudes and behaviors that foster inclusion and equity. Both hardware and software are equally important; however, an intervention should be based on the societal context and a nuanced understanding of existing barriers and potential levers to advance pluralism.

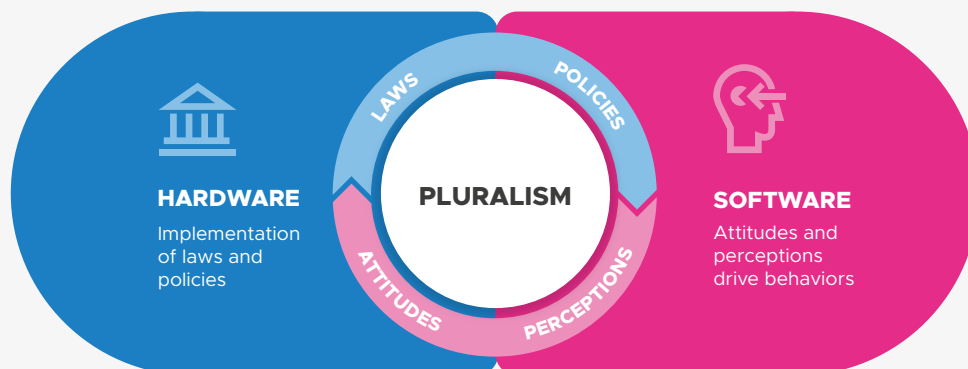


Figure 1: Hardware and software of pluralism

Priority Actions for the Advancement of Pluralism through Programs

Applying a pluralism lens to civil society and media programming enables program implementors and other stakeholders to identify a broader range of initiatives to address sources of exclusion and opportunities for inclusion. Pro-pluralism programs are characterized by their positive embracing of diversity, recognition

of difference and a shared sense of belonging both within the organizations implementing the program and through their programming more broadly. Pro-pluralism program designs apply a pluralism lens and address a combination of hardware and software elements.



Priority Action #1: Assess the state of pluralism.

Effective interventions are only possible if inequalities are recognized and the factors driving them are understood. Assessment should identify key manifestations of pluralism/anti-pluralism as well as the drivers of and barriers to pluralism. The capacity to understand, analyze and track a society's progress in supporting the hardware and software pathways to empower marginalized groups is critical when advocating for the advancement of pluralism. Assessments of the state of pluralism integrate institutional and social factors, context-specific identities, identity-group perceptions and experiences, group-based inequalities and relations,

conflict prevention and a commitment to monitoring and learning. Assessments can include measures of a country's legal commitments in support of pluralism; practices by state institutions to realize commitments; the role of societal actors, including media, civil society, the private sector and political parties; the state of group-based inequalities; and intergroup relations and belonging. Examples of indicators include (i) prominence of news media actors that espouse pluralistic values; (ii) equitable access to justice; (iii) levels of intergroup trust; (iv) availability, accessibility and protection of group-based inequality data among others.



Figure 3: Pluralism assessments key components

Priority Action #2: Incorporate explicit pluralistic outcomes into project design.

Projects that promote pluralism should address laws and policies and long-standing assumptions, biases and exclusionary narratives that impede a shared sense of belonging. A pluralist design is framed around desired pluralistic outcomes co-designed with communities, civil society, and media.

Priority Action #3: Enshrine pluralist actions into projects.

Modeling pluralist behaviors and establishing pluralist project management procedures helps to ensure project staff, partners and other stakeholders take responsibility for promoting pluralism at all levels. This includes co-designing activities with diverse stakeholders, ensuring target communities have representation in project oversight structures and roles in decision-making, supporting accessible feedback mechanisms, and validating and sharing project data with a diversity of stakeholders.

Priority Action #4: Strengthen pluralism within institutions advancing pluralism.

Pro-pluralist project design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation is most effective when organizations take responsibility for understanding their internal barriers and opportunities for truly modeling pluralism. Often, this entails investing in organizational assessment and initiatives that deliberately and actively address discrimination, marginalization and exclusion-including within their organization. Organizational strengthening actions may include (i) reflecting on the degree to which organizations mimic societal patterns of exclusion, are diverse and representative of its target base; (ii) integrating pluralism into organizational visions, strategic plans, workplace culture, hiring and retention, and communications; (iii) establishing and monitoring equal standards of program quality and equality in program outcomes among others.

Priority Action #5: Monitor pluralism outcomes.

Monitor changes in the policies and commitments, practices, role in decision-making, and the public perceptions, attitudes and behaviors of leaders and marginalized groups as well as inter-group relations affecting specific groups experiencing political, economic, cultural, societal, and other exclusions. Evaluation of longer-term outcomes should assess changes in policies affecting marginalized groups targeted by the project, the degree to which these policies are implemented, changes in economic, social, and policy outcomes for these groups, as well as changes in software.

Illustrative pluralistic outcomes

- Enhanced legal frameworks and measures to protect and promote the rights of diverse groups
- Increased participation for other groups' participation in political, economic, social and cultural life
- Increased participation of diverse and previously excluded groups in news media
- Increased levels of trust in mainstream media
- Decreased news audience polarization

Find more pluralism outcome examples in the Advancing Pluralism Together:

A CSM-STAND Strategy for Integrating Pluralism into Projects.

[Find out more >](#)

ADVANCING PLURALISM ACROSS THE PROJECT CYCLE: AN EXAMPLE



Assess - Project identifies

- undocumented people are alienated due to exclusionary narratives
- undocumented people are unable to access services due to lack of documents and unwillingness of many businesses and government officials to serve them
- lack of legal identity documents is driving political and social alienation



Design - Project prioritizes

- increased participation of undocumented community members in political life
- support narratives around creating a sense of belonging



Implement - Project key interventions include

- advocacy for a new national identification system
- paralegal services for accessing documents
- support to media to promote pluralist narratives



Monitor, evaluate, learn - Project observes and learns from changes in pluralism measures

- legislation to protect undocumented communities
- accessibility of legal identity documents
- equitable political participation
- levels of trust in elected officials
- sense of belonging

Learn More

Learn more about what the CSM-STAND consortium is doing to advance pluralism, including:

Advancing Pluralism Together:

A CSM-STAND Strategy for Integrating Pluralism into Projects. A strategy that elaborates on the five priority actions.

[Find out more >](#)

Advancing Pluralism Together

A CSM-STAND instructional video on pluralism in four languages (Arabic, English, French, and Spanish).

[Find out more >](#)

1 - World Inequality Lab, World Inequality Report 2018. <https://wir2018.wid.world/files/download/wir2018-full-report-english.pdf>;
World Inequality Lab, World Inequality Report. (2022). https://wir2022.wid.world/www-site/uploads/2022/03/0098-21_WIL_RIM_RAPPORT_A4.pdf.

2 - For example, see Edith M. Lederer, "UN Told Failure to Deal With Diversity Is Root Cause of Wars," AP News, October 21, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/thabo-mbeki-sierra-leone-burundi-sudan-united-nations-8b700142cb570b2ef-5b56775a71ed03e>.

3 - Frances Stewart, Horizontal Inequalities: Barriers to Pluralism (Ottawa: Global Centre for Pluralism, 2017) <https://www.pluralism.ca/press-release/>

4 - Will Kymlicka, "The Hardware and Software of Pluralism", Accounting for Change in Diverse Societies Occasional Papers, March 2017, <https://www.pluralism.ca/press-release/hardware-software-pluralism/>

horizontal-inequalities-barriers-pluralism/; United Nations and World Bank, Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2018), <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/28337>.

5 - Will Kymlicka, "The Hardware and Software of Pluralism", Accounting for Change in Diverse Societies Occasional Papers, March 2017, <https://www.pluralism.ca/press-release/hardware-software-pluralism/>