

FORUMCIV.

**REGIONAL
STRATEGY FOR
LATIN AMERICA
AND THE
CARIBBEAN**

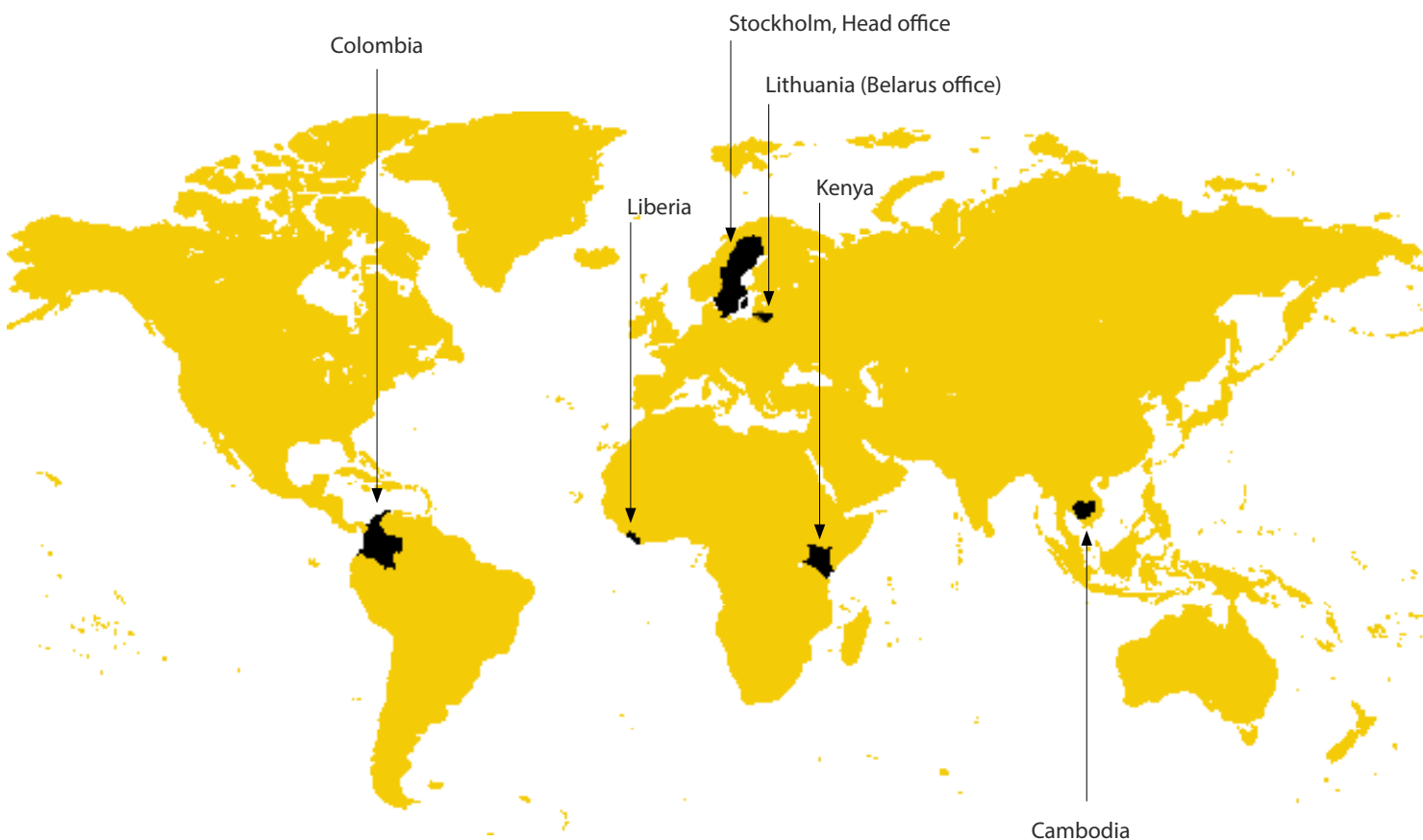
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Introduction

What is this document?

ForumCiv has the objective of strengthening the capacities of civil society to operate as a social agent for strategic change. We achieve that through shared and collective work with partners and allies.

This strategic plan was built with the participation of member organizations and local partners and is a roadmap for the articulated work we envision to promote and develop in the region. By seeking the strategic priorities of Social, Economic and Climate Justice; Gender Equity and Equality; and Democracy and Human Rights, the Regional Strategy will act as a guiding document for the design and development of all activities, relationships and support provided by ForumCiv Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean. The strategy will be periodically evaluated to assess its value and accuracy.



We are represented on four continents, with six offices



About ForumCiv

What is ForumCiv?

ForumCiv is a politically and religiously unaffiliated development cooperation organisation, which was founded in 1995. It is also Sweden's largest civil society platform with over 200 member organizations. ForumCiv's activities complement and strengthen the work of its members to achieve the vision of a just and sustainable world where all people have the power to effect change.

ForumCiv's Head Office is in Stockholm, with regional offices in Colombia for Latin America and the Caribbean, in Kenya for Eastern and Southern Africa, in Lithuania for Eastern Europe and country offices in Cambodia and Liberia.

What is our purpose?

ForumCiv vision is a just and sustainable world where all people have the power to effect change, by strengthening marginalised people around the world who organise to claim their rights and by advocating for change.

ForumCiv has adopted a theory of change that shows how its operations lead to the vision, in the long-term. Each of ForumCiv's strategies, programmes, projects, and initiatives, in turn, develop a specific theory of change under the frame of this theory of change; adapted to context, targets, and thematic areas.

ForumCiv also integrates the rights based approach and three development perspectives (gender equality, environmental and climate justice, and conflict sensitivity and do no harm) into its operations.

ForumCiv's theory of change



How do we work?

We use a rights-based approach as a way of challenging unjust power structures and discriminatory norms caused by a multitude of civil, political, social, cultural, and economic injustices. By actively working with non-discrimination, popular participation, and accountability, we can address the barriers and root causes that prevent people from realising their rights. Rights holders are at the center of development and, therefore, must be actively involved in decisions that affect them.

ForumCiv's work is operationalized through:

- Empowering people who organise to demand their human rights, worldwide. This is done primarily through financial support to members and their partner organizations, as well as through access to capacity development for all those working within the member and partner organizations and ForumCiv.
- Spreading knowledge and promoting commitment to changes that contribute to a just and sustainable world. This is done in collaboration between ForumCiv and its member organizations and focuses on both decision-makers and the general public, mainly in Sweden and the EU.

Through the Colombia Country Programme, since 2001 ForumCiv has built an extensive experience in the design and implementation of grants and provided support to civil society organizations, collectives and other organizational expressions for the promotion and creation of environments that are inclusive and facilitate participation. ForumCiv's work promotes access to and fulfilment of rights and the sustainable use of goods and services from local ecosystems through a gender perspective, while contributing to peacebuilding and territorial development.

Through the implementation of global and regional programmes, regional office Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) has interacted with Swedish civil society and its local partners in several countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, articulating efforts towards capacity exchanges, advocacy and strategic partnerships. In the LAC region, ForumCiv is a platform for sharing experiences and joint advocacy. We are an influential voice on development issues and support the role of civil society in promoting democracy and human rights. We know that through civil society, people can change their own lives and society at local, regional, national and global levels.

Who do we work with?

Compliance with our objectives depends on our organization's management, but essentially relies on the results obtained by civil society with the support of ForumCiv, along with the achievements and work with other strategic allies.

The assumption behind focusing the support on civil society actors is core to ForumCiv's identity: civil society is a broad and complex arena of groups with different orientations, sizes and interests. We believe that a diverse civil society is fundamental to allowing a larger group to be heard and to be an active force contributing to sustainable development.

ForumCiv's definition of civil society comprises groups of people, distinct from the state, political

parties, individual households and businesses, acting together to achieve non-profit objectives. Civil society is organised at a local, regional and global level and includes popular movements, networks, foundations, institutes, loosely organised groups, among others.

Additionally, we are aware that civil society requires a strong interaction with duty bearers, to:

- influence and monitor policy in relation to its undertakings at all levels of society based on the principle of non-discrimination
- serve as an advocate and as a channel for popular participation in democratic processes even when also taking on the task of implementing political decisions and meeting urgent social service needs
- cooperate, wherever possible, in the defence of democracy and human rights.

Regarding the private sector, ForumCiv, its members and partners, expects the business sector to become an actor in sustainable environmental, economic and social development, thus demanding from them the protection and promotion of respect for human rights within their operations in a broad sense.¹

ForumCiv and its members recognize that achieving a just and sustainable world requires broad support. ForumCiv and its member organizations therefore share information and experiences with strategic actors, such as other civil society groups, donors, academics, the private sector, and Swedish decision-makers who drive Swedish policy in relevant bodies.



¹ Policy on the role of civil society. ForumCiv, 2013.

Latin America and the Caribbean

The region has a diverse and active civil society, however, it is facing both historical long-term and also new challenges, while becoming less of a priority for international development cooperation in comparison to other regions.

There is a significant global need to protect human rights by strengthening citizen participation in decision-making and demanding institutional transparency and accountability. This requires supporting civil society organizations working in repressive environments and those working towards sustainable development alternatives. It is during critical times like these that civil society is vital, as it supports and advocates for victims, monitors human rights and collects information to hold those responsible to account.



The LAC region has a pendulum swing in terms of the opening and shrinking of civic spaces for exercising democracy. In general terms, the human rights situation is worrisome, especially for minority populations or those in vulnerable conditions (ethnic peoples, diverse communities, feminist organizations, youth organizations, peasant organizations, among others), societies all around the region have mobilized to protest and act in response to economic shocks, and many are still active as they are moved by the deeper problems involving corruption, poor governance and economic inequalities.

Unfortunately, in many countries of the region, the right to protest, associate and inform is under attack. According to Civicus, “authoritarianism and populism remain powerful currents and come together in a political approach best described as popular authoritarianism, in which politicians speak to people’s demands for change to win elections and go on to dismantle democratic institutions, restrict civic space and violate rights”.² In some other cases, what can be seen as progressive turns are a result

² State of Civil Society Report. Civicus, 2023.

of a rejection of traditional ruling parties, this novelty creates opportunities for innovation and change, as well as for authoritarianism. Additionally, in many LAC countries organized crime has a critical impact on rural, afro-descendant and indigenous communities, controlling legal and illegal economies and threatening social movements and human rights defenders.

The social, climate and environmental justice narrative has gained ground in the international context, with multilateral concerns, talks and negotiations – such as the Escazu agreement – related to fighting climate change and biodiversity loss, the right to a healthy environment, equal participation in decision making, compensation schemes for loss and damage, as well as a critical approach towards green colonialism. However, as a consequence of the various crises of recent years, including the pandemic and the war in Ukraine, current geopolitical context has de-prioritized international commitments on these issues. In LAC, the most dangerous region to be an environmental rights defender and with a highly unequal and inequitable distribution and use of land, the climate and environmental emergency requires to be kept high on the agenda.



Even though the region is rich in biodiversity hotspots and natural resources, climate change and deforestation are affecting the livelihood and health of many communities and species as well as their collective and community rights. Temperatures are rising and several areas are experiencing drastic changes in precipitation patterns and severe weather extremes.

The consequences are increased risks of floods and droughts, disrupting food and water supplies, as well as melting Andean glaciers. In the case of the Amazon basin, historical issues related to colonization and exploitation of land and natural resources have destroyed, fragmented and degraded it. Academics estimate that if the current dynamics of extractivism in the basin continue, the forest conversion to savannahs will be irreversible, and it will happen in the next 30 to 50 years. A sustainable and just relation to nature including equitable access to land, requires appropriate laws, regulations, mechanisms, and the recognition of nature as a subject of rights.

The communities most affected by the consequences of ecological destruction and climate change-related impacts face the most critical and challenging situations, even though they have contributed the least to the global climate crisis and biodiversity loss. Under the premise that the climate crisis must be assumed as a human rights crisis, and in pursuit of environmental and climate justice, at ForumCiv, we

support local communities in their strengthening of organizational capacities to claim their rights and actively participate in the planning and management of their livelihood models, encompassing efforts towards food security, food sovereignty, social and solidarity economy, agroecology, and community-based conservation, among others.

On the other hand, although significant progress has been made in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) in terms of gender equity and equality through changes in laws, policies and social norms, women and LGBTIQ+ people continue to experience high levels of violence and discrimination, with 14 of the 25 countries in the region having the highest rates of femicides and crimes against women in the world, and an increase in the number of homicides of LGBTI people after restrictions of COVID-19 were lifted in the region. Likewise, in the vast majority of the region, gender gaps in participation rates in the paid labor market exceed 20%; and the most significant gender gap in the region is related to participation in the political sector, where parity reaches only 28.7%.

This context of persistent gender-based inequality requires more specific measures to overcome these gaps and to continue moving towards a safer and more equal region for women, girls and LGBTIQ+ people. Working towards gender equality and equity requires us to consider power relations between and within groups defined by age, class, disability, ethnicity, gender, nationality, political conviction, religion, sexual orientation and gender identity and expression.

In this context, civil society is a crucial actor and a vital force in working for sustainable development with environmental and gender justice. We cannot leave anyone behind to meet these challenges in the Latin American region. We need a strengthened civil society and empowered rights holders with access to resources and tools to continue supporting their communities.



Theory of change

The theory of change of this strategy expresses the changes in Latin America and the Caribbean that ForumCiv Regional Office can contribute to. It reflects how we work towards our overall vision by achieving the following impacts and to make these impacts occur, with an essential engagement and interaction within ForumCiv member organizations and its partner organizations in the region.

Vision for Latin America and the Caribbean

A democratic region, where civil society has the agency to demand and fulfil their rights, improve their livelihoods, vindicate social, economic, and climate justice while promoting gender equality.

Impact 1: Civil Society develops innovative initiatives that respond to their communities needs and are transparent, accountable, and gender inclusive.

1.1. Promote and strengthen alternative livelihoods of local communities, based on sustainable practices such as agroecology, community forest management, community-based conservation and restoration, among others.

1.2. Support initiatives from organizations working for access, promotion and protection of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), mainly of women, girls, and people with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.

1.3. Support initiatives to transform discriminatory culture, attitudes, and practices harmful to women, girls and people with diverse gender identities and sexual orientations.

1.4. Encourage citizen oversight mechanisms.

1.5. Strengthen and support marginalized civil society working towards inclusive democracy and fulfilment of human rights.

Impact 2: Civil society has strong capacities and dynamic experiences exchanges, thus promoting collective action and participation, claiming rights in the region.

2.1. Support the transformation of socio-environmental conflicts through the promotion of dialogue for change, enhancing the guarantee of indigenous people and local communities' rights to land, the sustainable management of their natural environments, and a strong local rights-based governance.

2.2. Promote the transformation of patriarchal masculinities among men and boys to contribute to more equitable gender relations and gender justice.

2.3. Enhance women, girls and LGBTIQ+ people's agency to claim their rights and be change agents.

2.4. Strengthen the agency and participation of women and LGBTIQ+ people.

Impact 3: Civil society implements articulated rights-based advocacy initiatives, promoting multi-actor dialogues towards building a stronger democratic multilateral system, accountable to the public interest and committed to a sustainable planet.

3.1. Defend and promote freedom of press and of expression in the region.

3.2. Advocate for companies' accountability regarding human rights in all their business activities to have opportunities to contribute to positive change, promoting the agency of local communities and strengthening their governance and organizational capacities.

3.3. Promote the protection of social and environmental defenders so that they can keep on their advocacy and activist work, without suffering threats, harm or being criminalized.

3.4. Advocate for the protection and defence of indispensable and highly threatened landscapes in the region, such as the Amazon basin, and the indigenous people and local communities that inhabit them.

3.5. Strengthen and promote the social inclusion of migrant and immigrant populations and those in situations of vulnerability (internally displaced people, immigrants) who are in transit and/or residing permanently in countries in the region.

3.6. Strategically position Regional Office LAC, members, and partners to engage at continental level.



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