



AWC's Comments and Recommendations on the World Bank Group's Proposed New Country Engagement Approach

The proposed CPF prioritizes **selectivity and country-defined development goals**, yet it lacks a clear commitment to **meaningful citizen engagement**. In the MENA region, where civil society space is shrinking due to [restrictive laws](#) and [crackdowns](#) on CSOs, a country engagement approach [cannot be effective](#) if it relies solely on governments to define priorities. The draft fails to acknowledge the civic space challenges faced by many of the World Bank Group's (WBG) client countries. In many countries in the region, CSOs face increasing legal, institutional barriers, intimidation, and reprisals.

The WBG's review of Citizen Engagement and Social Accountability (CESA) – which is being reviewed separately, with [consultation](#) taking place this year—[highlights](#) the importance of meaningfully involving citizens and CSOs in the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of WB-supported projects, which is crucial for achieving effective development outcomes. However, despite strong corporate commitments, the review points out that CESA remains "***largely peripheral and poorly funded***" at the Bank, a concern that should be addressed. For the CPF to reflect genuine national development priorities, the framework must ensure that citizens, local communities, and rights-holders are actively involved in shaping country strategies.

The CESA review also highlights that understanding and addressing civic space issues is fundamental for the WBG to meet its development goals. The Bank's high-level commitments to transparent, accountable, and participatory development, along with its engagement with citizens and CSOs, **are all influenced by the state of civic space**.

Without safeguards to enable CSOs and affected communities to engage freely and safely, the new country engagement framework risks reinforcing exclusionary development models that marginalize those most affected by International Financial Institutions (IFI) policies.

The WBG must understand the **dynamics of a country's civic space**—the actual environment in which communities will engage. The Bank should systematically integrate **civic space analysis** when developing country strategies. The following paper written by international partner CSOs provides guidance and practical tools on how to achieve this: [link to paper](#).

Given the challenges in the region—from restricted civic space to governance failures and human rights concerns—the framework must explicitly commit to:

1. Integration of civic space analysis when developing country engagement strategies.
2. Proactive engagement with civil society and marginalized communities.



3. Stronger safeguards for civic space.

Without these commitments, the CPF risks becoming a top-down process that perpetuates existing inequalities rather than addressing them. AWC urges the WBG to integrate these recommendations into its final approach to ensure that country engagement is *inclusive, participatory, and rights-based*.