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DIGITAL INCLUSION THROUGH CSO EMPOWERMENT (DICE): EMPOWERING CSOs TO ADVANCE INCLUSIVE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

**A brief report of
the project's baseline and needs assessment results**

Ulaanbaatar 2024

A BRIEF REPORT OF THE PROJECT'S BASELINE AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT RESULTS

OBJECTIVES OF THE BASELINE & NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The baseline and needs assessment seeks to capture perceptions regarding the challenges and opportunities faced by Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), the overall digital transformation process, the current status of CSOs' digital literacy in Mongolia, as well as their knowledge and engagement in evidence-based research, policy development, and monitoring and advocacy efforts.

METHODOLOGY

We employed a mixed method approach, utilizing a questionnaire survey for quantitative analysis, and key-informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) for qualitative insights. Both quantitative and qualitative methodologies were structured to gather data on the organization's current digital literacy, practices, and capacities, while also assessing gaps and capabilities of digitalization policies, legislation, and regulatory frameworks.

PARTICIPANTS

The employees of the CSOs selected for the project, and relevant representatives of the government organization responsible for digital policy and its implementation participated in the assessment (Table 1).

Table 1: Participants

No	Participants	Total	Of which (number):			
			Male	Female	UB	UG
1	Questionnaire	98	74	24	76	22
	Focus group discussions (FGDs)	24	19	5	9	15
2	National and local government representatives	5	4	1	3	2
Total		127	97	30	88	39

In terms of geographic location, 77.6% of CSOs are in Ulaanbaatar city (UB), with the remaining 22.5% located in Umnugobi (UG) province (Figure 1).

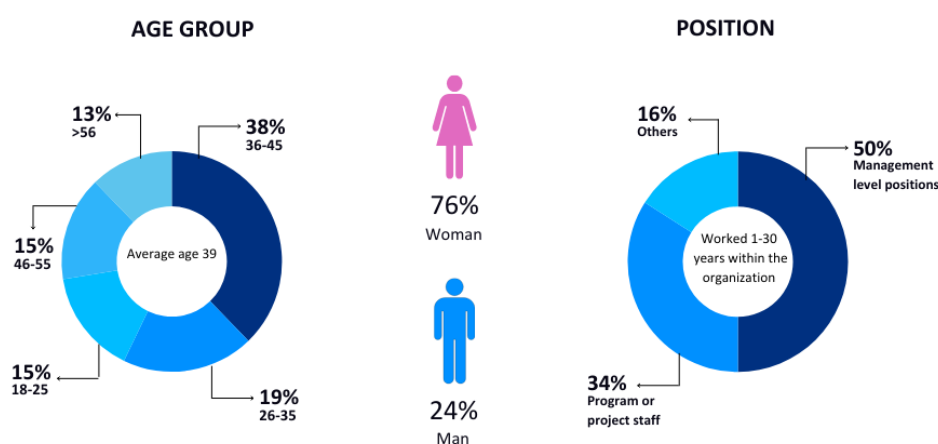


Figure 1: Age, gender, and position of the respondents

The assessment encompassed 55 participating organizations, a notable majority of more than 40% of them working in the field of education, community-based activities, women empowerment, and youth

development. Meanwhile, approximately 30-40% of these organizations are primarily engaged in advocating for the rights and protection of persons with disabilities, policy advocacy, and child protection (Figure 2).

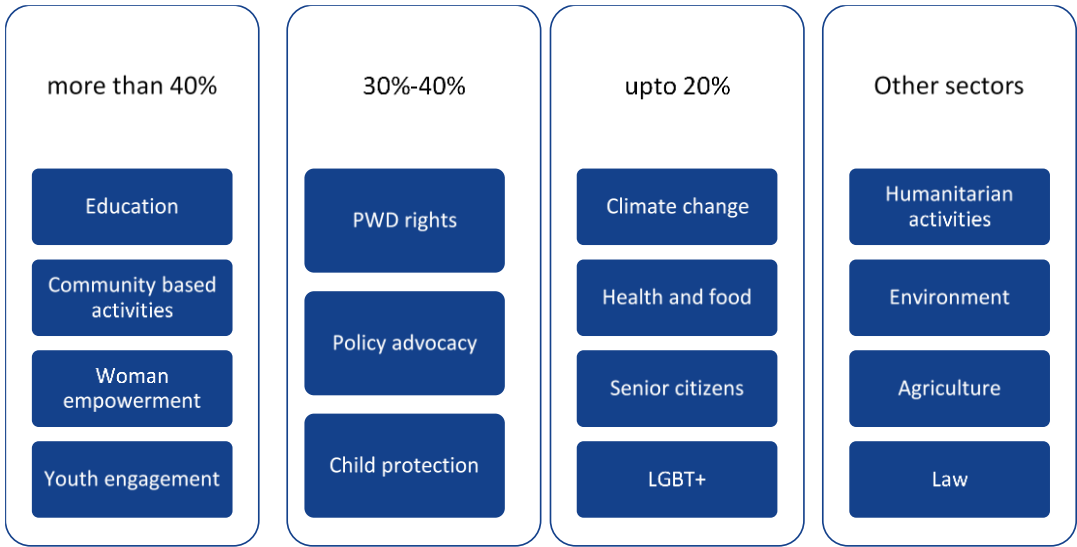


Figure 2: Operational sector of the organization

The participating organization aims to reach a diverse target group, with 69% of respondents targeting women, 66% youth, 63% children, 42% men, 37% the elderly, and 35% people with disabilities (Figure 3)

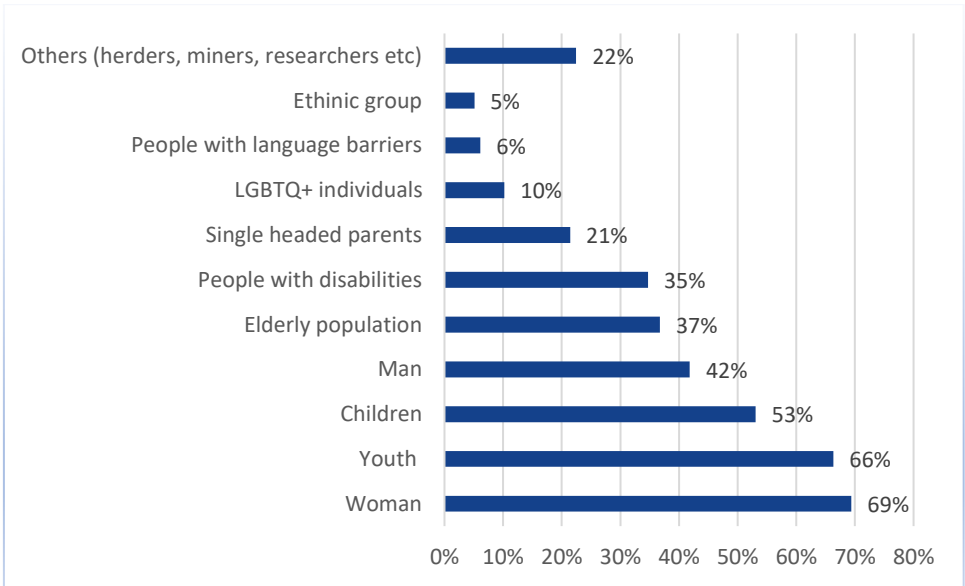


Figure 3: Target social groups of the organization

Putting this information together, it appears that these CSOs work with social groups who may lack digital skills and limited digital inclusion.

FINDINGS

1. UNDERSTANDING OF THE TERMINOLOGY:

DIGITAL LITERACY, DIGITAL INCLUSION, AND DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

None of the terminologies of digital literacy, digital inclusion, and digital transformation have been defined or reached a common understanding. However, some repeated definitions that emerged during the assessment include (Table 2):

Table 2: Understanding of the terminology

Terminology	From the perspective of government agency representatives	From the perspective of CSO employees
Digital literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning about the technology and using it A person's basic ability to use information technology every day to obtain basic information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to apply what you learn online in your daily work and life Everyone needs different digital skills, depending on what they do and what their needs are Skills needed for <u>young people</u>
Digital inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is very broad term and involves using digital technology to express one's voice in government policies, decisions, and activities Citizens can receive e-government services online, express their opinions online, and participate in government decision-making electronically, ensuring equal inclusion for all, which is itself digital inclusion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An increase in the number of people using digital skills to the extent it should be The ability to spread one's knowledge in the digital environment Something that happens through digital skills
Digital transformation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It's a multi-step process that involves establishing a legal environment and preparing users. Rather than downloading files and uploading them back into the system, the process involves downloading through the system and directly delivering to the citizen, or 100% hands-free delivery to the citizen. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Daily use of digital technology Any campaign implemented at the policy level (eg: environmental protection) Range and number of online participators

In conclusion, the assessment reveals varied perspectives among participants regarding digital literacy, digital inclusion, and digital transformation, particularly among CSO representatives, who exhibit differing and sometimes contradictory views. For instance, while some emphasize digital skills as essential for everyone, others specify these skills as crucial for young people. This difference could be related to the absence of official definitions explaining these concepts, and a common understanding.

2. DIGITAL LITERACY LEVEL OF CSO EMPLOYEES

The digital literacy of CSO employees was assessed using a set of 16 questions aligned with the six competence areas outlined in the "DigComp" digital literacy framework developed by UNESCO and the European Union. This evaluation takes into account employees' digital skills across five distinct proficiency levels.

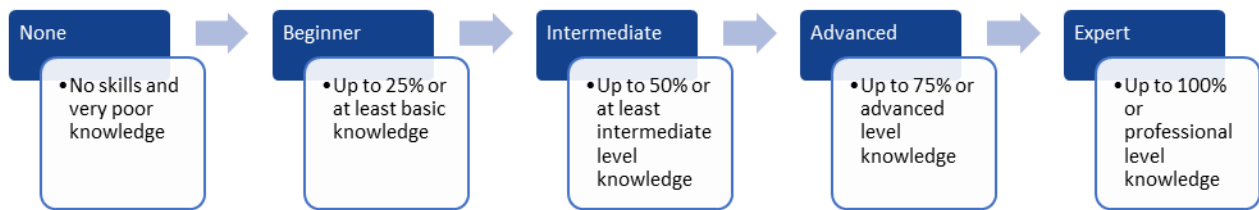


Figure 4: Proficiency level of digital skills

Let's examine the proficiency levels of digital skills among CSO employees who took part in the assessment, focusing on each of the following competencies individually.

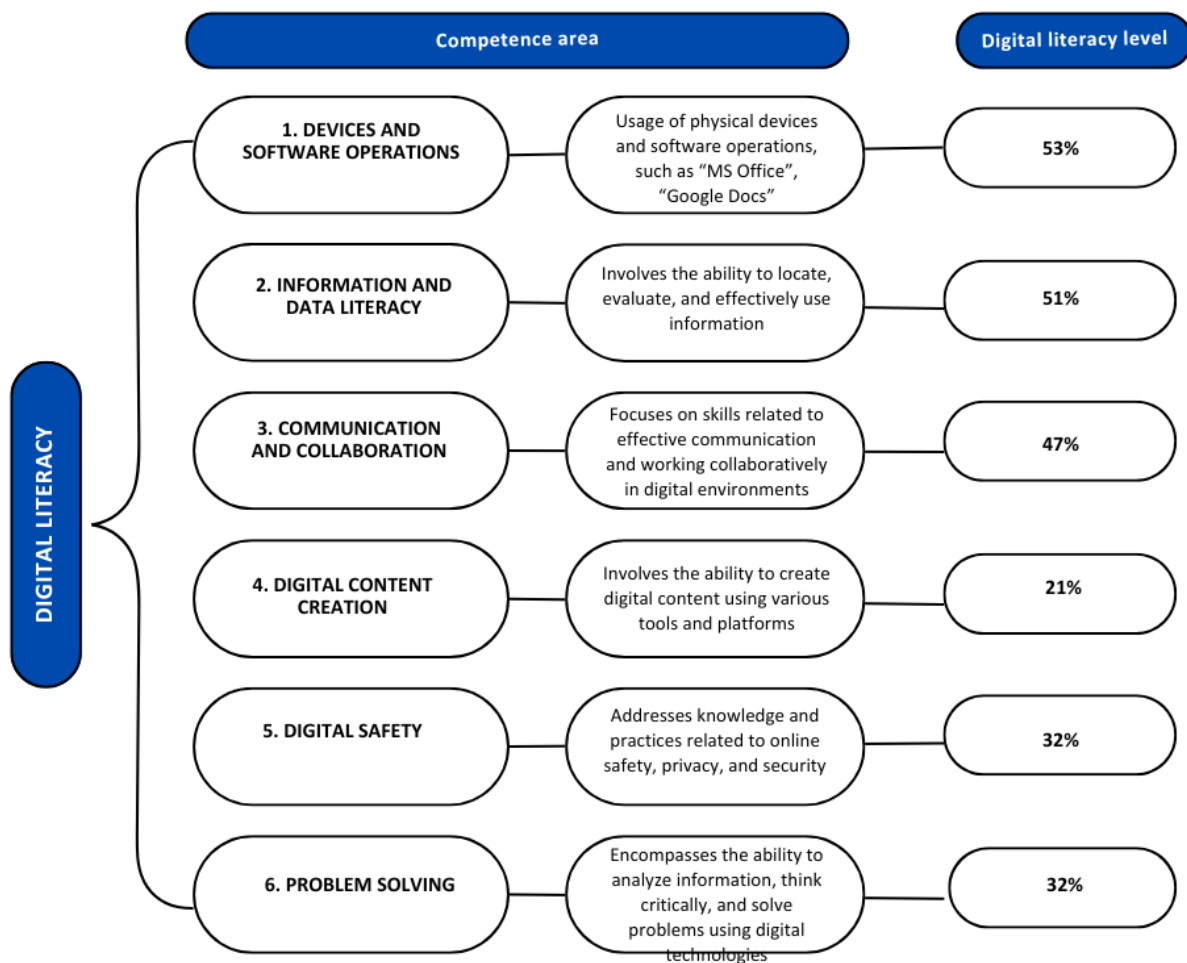


Figure 5: Digital literacy level

Among participants who assessed their knowledge level as advanced or expert, 51-60% hold management level positions within CSOs, 21-29% are program or project staff, and 15-21% belong to other categories.

According to the results, the digital skills of CSO employees in Ulaanbaatar city appear to be relatively stronger compared to those in Umnogobi province. Particularly, proficiency in using physical devices and software operations, as well as information and data literacy, stands out, with rates of 53% and 51%,

respectively. However, digital content creation skills exhibit the lowest average at 21%, indicating a significant need for improvement in this area (Table 3).

Table 3: Digital literacy level (in percentage)

№	Competence area	None (0%)		Beginner (25%)		Intermediate (50%)		TOTAL		
		UB	UG	UB	UG	UB	UG	UB	UG	Total
1	Devices and software operations	1	0	8	3	32	3	41	6	47
2	Information and data literacy	1	0	12	4	28	4	41	8	49
3	Communication and Collaboration	3	0	12	2	27	9	42	11	53
4	Digital content creation	7	4	26	3	31	8	64	15	79
5	Digital safety	4	0	20	5	30	9	54	14	68
6	Problem-solving	5	0	19	3	32	10	56	13	68

In line with the findings, digital content creation ranked lowest, with 79% of participants rating it up to intermediate level, followed by digital safety and problem-solving skills, at 68%, and communication and collaboration at 53%. Notably, employees of CSOs in Umnogobi province rated their digital skills higher than those in Ulaanbaatar city, indicating potential regional differences in proficiency levels.

According to the insights gleaned from focus group discussions with representatives of CSOs, it is evident that employees within these organizations exhibit deficiencies not only in digital content creation and problem-solving skills but also in information and data literacy.

All competencies need to be improved, particularly information and data literacy, digital content creation, and problem-solving skills are needed by our staff.

(Focus group discussion participant)

The usage of CSO employees in utilizing online platforms for public services:

During the assessment, we also inquired about the utilization of online platforms for accessing public services among employees CSOs. 99% of participants commonly use "e-mongolia," with 84% utilizing "e-barimt" applications. However, the adoption rates for applications such as "e-registration," "e-education," "e-health," "e-halamj," and "e-business" range from 13% to 32% (Figure 6).

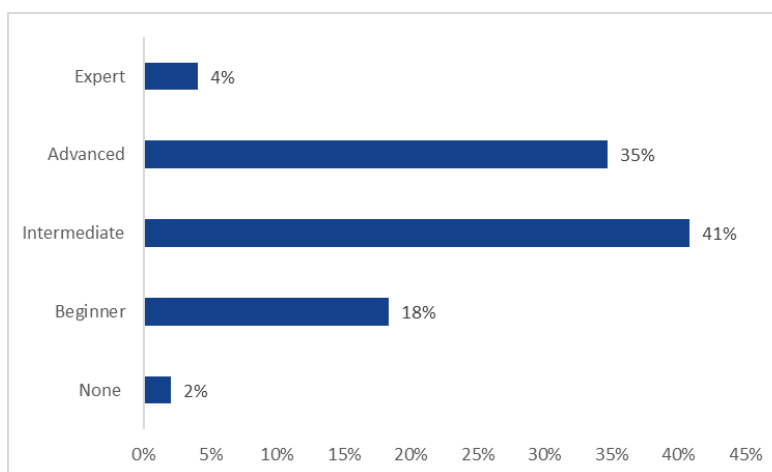


Figure 6: The current level of skills in using those platforms

The majority, comprising 41%, reported using these platforms at an intermediate level, while 35% indicated usage at an advanced level. Additionally, 4% stated that they utilize these platforms at an expert level.

3. DIGITAL LITERACY AND DIGITAL INCLUSION OF TARGET GROUPS OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

Target group's current level of digital literacy:

The CSOs engaged in the assessment, serving a diverse range of individuals and organizing activities tailored to their respective needs. These include herders, children residing abroad, as well as those in rural areas interested in studying abroad, preschool children, facing educational challenges, alongside their parents and guardians, high school students, young voters, individuals with low income, suburban residents, women, vulnerable children requiring protection, and sexual minorities were also among the groups served.

Children from rural areas seeking educational advice have very weak digital skills. For instance, a staggering 98% of these children lack basic knowledge of how to navigate the Zoom application, including basic tasks such as changing rooms.

(Focus group discussion participant))

The digital literacy of the target group of CSOs is not enough.

Furthermore, it was noted that individuals residing in suburban areas and those aged over 40 show notable deficiencies in digital skills. The CSOs in Umnugobi province highlighted that the elderly population and rural herders, in particular, possess relatively weak digital skills compared to other social groups. It is evident from the experience of CSOs working directly with these groups that digital skills among marginalized populations are insufficient.

We further clarified with the participating CSOs to identify the specific areas of deficiency within the six competencies among the target groups. According to their response, they believe that improvement is necessary across all six competence areas within the target group.

Initiatives of CSOs to improve the digital literacy of target groups: The survey findings reveal that CSOs involved in the assessment are not actively conducting targeted activities to enhance the digital skills of their target groups. A primary contributing factor to this is the insufficient level of digital literacy among the employees of these CSOs. This underlines the importance of addressing internal skill gaps within CSOs to enable them to effectively empower and support their target communities.

Digital inclusion of the target group: According to CSOs, the level of digital inclusion among their target groups is not very good. There are several reasons, which can be categorized into two main groups: Firstly, it depends on the individuals within the target group, and secondly, it relies on the quality of government efforts in implementing digital transformation initiatives.

4. DIGITALIZATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

It was emphasized that the internal operations of CSOs are somewhat digitalized, but employees' digital skills vary based on their roles within the organization. Additionally, CSOs face challenges in digitalizing their activities due to the limited digital literacy of their target citizen groups.

Employees use Google Docs and shared drives, which allow for visibility and editing by all users.

(Focus group discussion participant)

Specifically, the evaluation indicated that the utilization of digital tools and technology in the internal operations of CSOs in Umnugobi province was comparatively lower than those in Ulaanbaatar city.

In addition to our kindergarten teachers, the teachers from the other kindergartens we collaborate with lack the capability to communicate via email or send files through email. Instead, they mainly communication through Facebook.

(Focus group discussion participant)

During the discussion, some of the participants pointed out that the employees of government organizations lack email etiquette and are unaware of data protection and security, they share personally identifiable information through Facebook Messenger.

It was also observed during the discussion that there was no problem for participants to use the same communication method. This underscores the importance of incorporating digital safety-related content in training programs for CSOs to maintain secure communication practices consistently.

Network problems, poor fiber-optic cable quality, Univision service is getting worse, and frequent outages. Also, it is too slow to use portable devices such as ger internet in the local area.

(Focus group discussion participant)

During the discussion, it showed that CSOs are unable to purchase hardware (computers, tablets, etc.) and licensed software due to unstable funding, and they have not solved the problems of Internet speed and malfunctions.

5. CSOs PROMOTING AN INCLUSIVE DEMOCRATIC SPACE VIA DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

In Ulaanbaatar city, 50% of respondents reported frequent usage of digital technology, while a higher percentage, 68.2%, of respondents from Umnogobi province provided the same response.

This indicates a relatively higher adoption of digital technology among respondents from Umnogobi province compared to those from Ulaanbaatar city (Table 4).

Table 4: Frequency of using digital technology (by location)

Frequency	Total	Ulaanbaatar	Umnugobi
	%	%	%
Never	5.1	1.3	0.0
Rarely	19.4	10.5	13.6
Occasionally	33.7	38.2	18.2
Frequently	34.7	43.4	50.0
Very frequently	7.1	6.6	18.2

A significant majority, 88% of the total participants, indicated that they primarily use social media platforms in their activities. Additionally, 74% reported using digital platforms such as "Zoom," "Google Meet," and "Microsoft Teams." This suggests that while social media remains a dominant tool, there is also substantial adoption of digital collaboration platforms for various organizational activities (Figure 7).

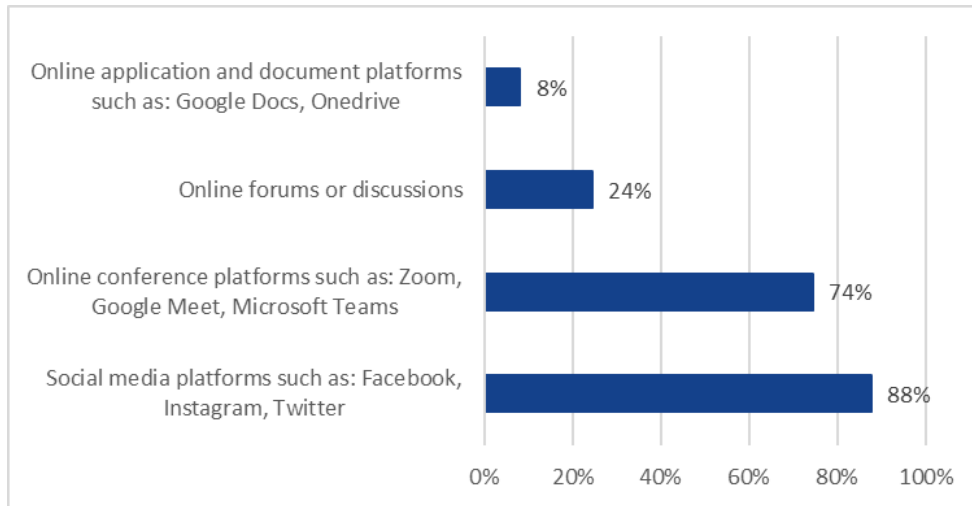


Figure 7: Platforms and tools used

The main challenges encountered by organizations in leveraging digital technology to engage in an inclusive democratic space within their operations related to the lack of technical skills and knowledge, as reported by 66% of respondents while another 68% highlighted limited resources or insufficient funding for digital initiatives (Figure 8).

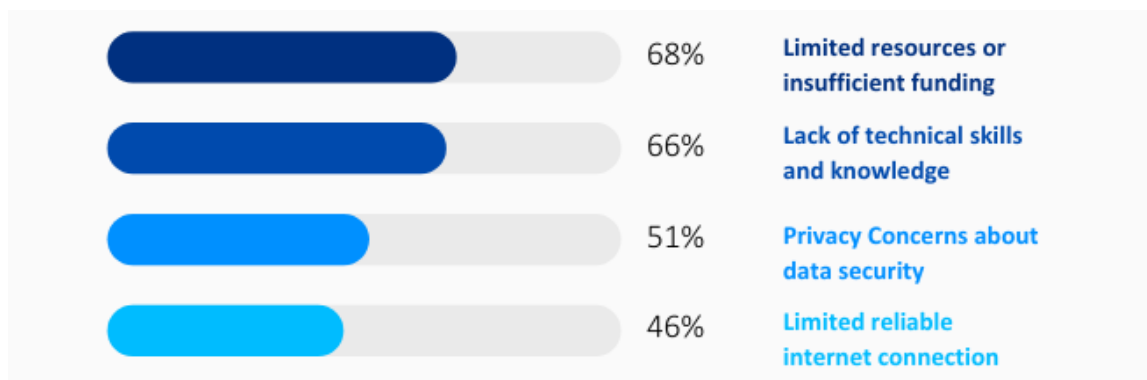


Figure 8: Main challenges of CSOs

Employees of CSOs in Umnugobi province emphasize privacy and data security compared to those in Ulaanbaatar, despite facing limited resources in the city compared to the province. The need for training in this area is underscored by 72% of CSOs' staff expressing the necessity for such education.

6. CSOs WORKING IN EVIDENCE-BASED RESEARCH, POLICY DEVELOPMENT, AND MONITORING AND ADVOCACY

According to CSO employees, 84.7% utilize evidence-based research in their activities, 78.6% engage in organizing or participating in advocacy and awareness-raising campaigns, 61.2% are involved in developing or recommending policy and policy dialogue, and 32.7% work on initiating or implementing monitoring efforts (Figure 9).

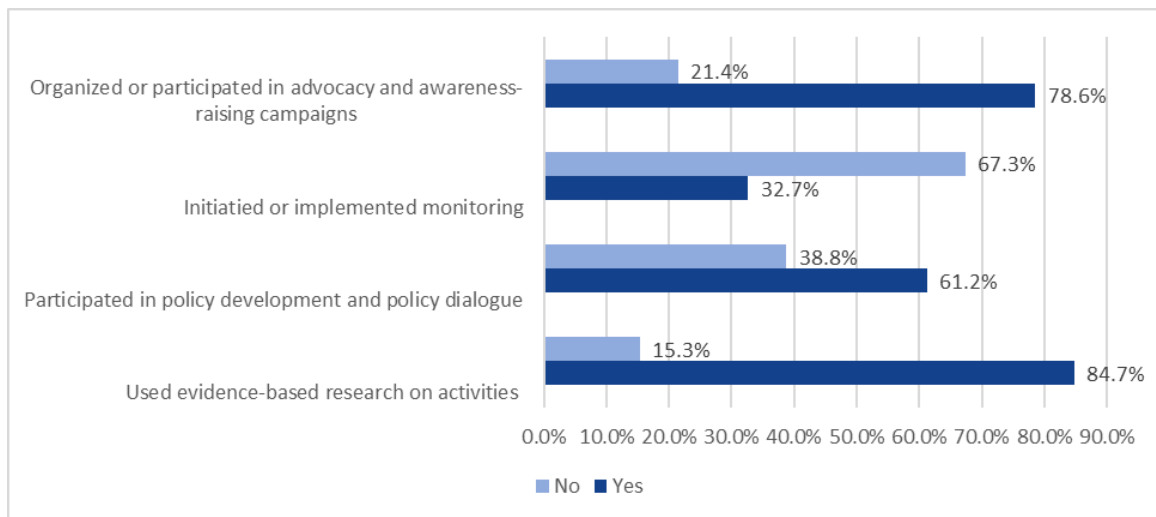


Figure 9: Experience of CSOs

Activities such as advocacy, participation in policy formulation and dialogue, implementation of monitoring, and utilization of evidence-based research are mainly within the fields of education and human rights, while fewer engagements are noted in supporting digital inclusion and budget monitoring. In conducting these activities, CSO employees primarily utilize physical and online meetings as their main channels, followed by social networks (Figure 10). This underlines the importance of both traditional and digital platforms in facilitating communication and collaboration within the CSO sector.

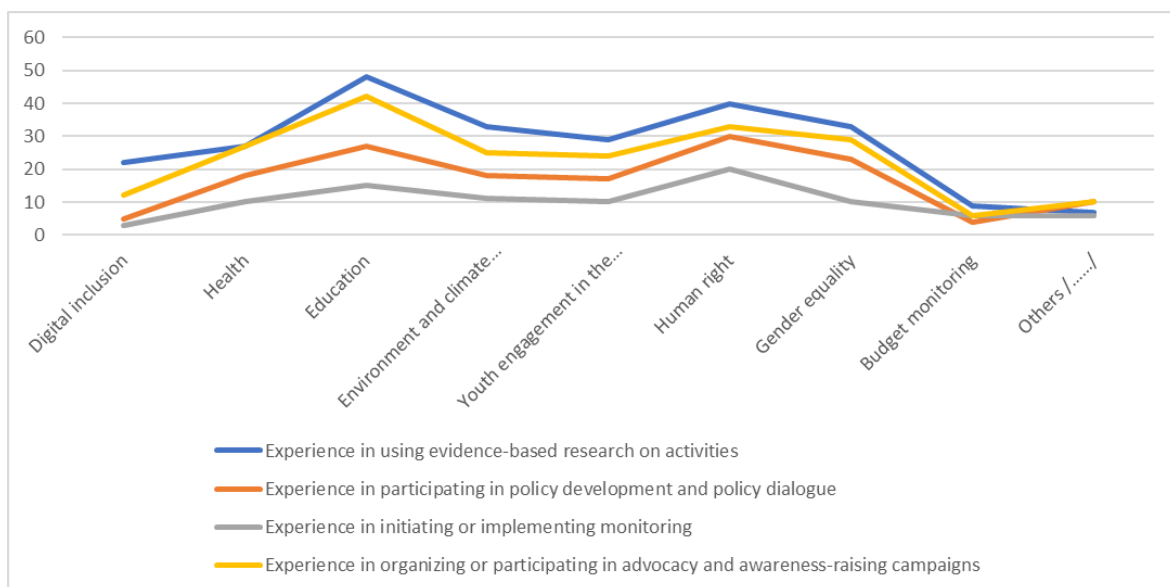


Figure 10: Experience areas of CSOs

The need for training in these areas is critical, as the current capacity level of CSO staff is likely a significant factor affecting the successful implementation of activities such as advocacy, policy formulation, monitoring, and research. Empowering CSO staff and organizations through targeted training initiatives is essential to enhance their capabilities and effectiveness in operating within these areas.

The CSOs face the following challenges:

- 1. Lack of knowledge and poor financial capacity: CSO employees face challenges due to inadequate knowledge and skills, while CSOs themselves struggle with limited financial resources.
- 2. Government support and transparency issues: Despite promises of support from government institutions, there is a lack of transparency, hindering effective collaboration between CSOs and the government.
- 3. Absence of networks and ecosystems: Networks, clusters, and ecosystems for CSOs are lacking, which limits opportunities for collaboration and resource-sharing.

During the assessment, 74% of CSO staff mentioned stable funding as one of the main obstacles. Additionally, CSOs require training in influencing skills alongside legal knowledge, data collection, processing, and reporting skills to overcome these barriers effectively.

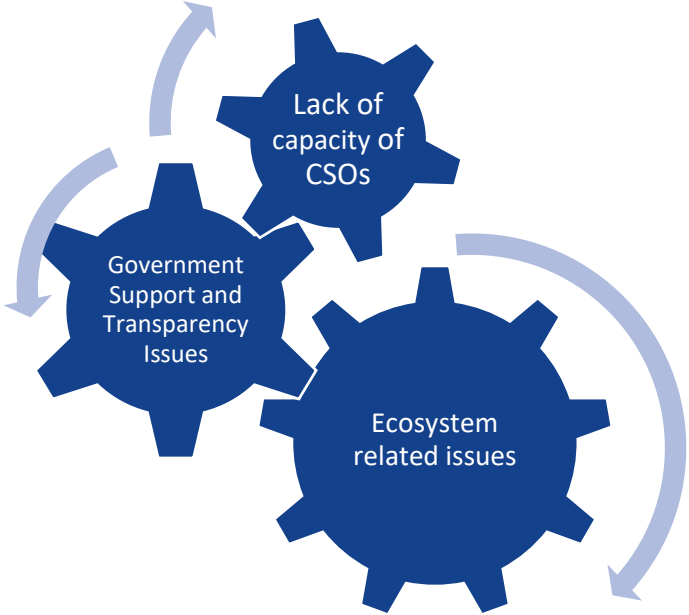


Figure 11: Main challenges

7. THE ROLE OF CSOs TO SUPPORT DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND DIGITAL INCLUSION

All participants in the Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) unanimously emphasized the significance of the role and participation of CSOs in achieving the stated objectives. Representatives from both national and local government organizations highlighted the importance of involving CSOs in efforts to improve community digital literacy. Specifically, the necessity of collaborating on digital literacy training content, promoting it to the public, and working together to change people's attitudes towards digital engagement (Figure 12).

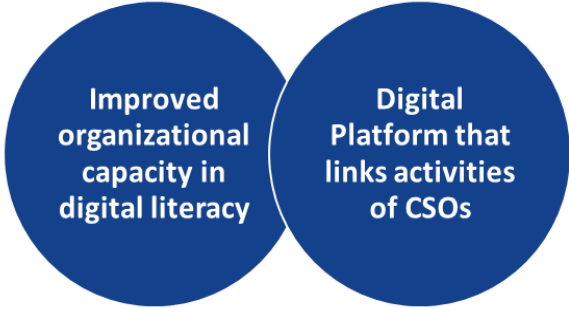


Figure 12: Expectations of CSOs from the project

When discussing the expectations of CSOs from the project, two primary areas emerge that are closely interrelated.

- 1. Empowerment of CSOs: This entails two key aspects. Firstly, enhancing the digital skills of the target group, engaging them in activities, and fostering increased participation. Subsequently, it involves enhancing the digital literacy of employees to digitize the organization itself. Additionally, there's a focus on improving their capabilities in policy formulation, monitoring, advocacy, and research. There's an expressed need to acquire skills in data processing, reporting, and influencing stakeholders.

2. Establishing a "platform" to connect CSO activities: This involves creating a centralized platform to coordinate and link the various initiatives and efforts undertaken by CSOs.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Due to the lack of a common understanding of the concepts of digital literacy, digital inclusion, and digital transformation, participants have different ideas and understandings about them.
- Therefore, it is important to consider whether there is a possibility for the project to contribute to defining and discussing these concepts, involving CSOs in doing so, and disseminating a unified definition to the public would enhance clarity and understanding.
- In terms of the digital literacy of the employees of the CSOs involved in the assessment, in addition to focusing on the development of digital content creation, digital safety, and problem-solving skills, their ability to use hardware and software, working with information and data literacy, communication and collaboration skills needed to increase.
- Therefore, to ensure efficiency, the training and consulting services implemented by the project should cover all six competence areas of digital literacy, and priority should be given to areas rated as deficient.
- According to CSOs, the digital inclusion of their target group of citizens is not very good.
- Therefore, the project can assist CSOs in executing micro-projects and initiatives designed to shift attitudes toward digital literacy and inclusion among the target demographic which should emphasize acquiring digital skills, and disseminating information to support their digital participation.
- The limited digital inclusion of the community prevents CSOs from effectively utilizing digital technology and tools to deliver their services to their intended audience. Consequently, the efforts towards fostering an inclusive, accessible, and democratic digital space are not progressing much.
- Last year, the The Ministry of Digital Development and Communications undertook an evaluation to assess the digital preparedness of government organizations and the adoption of digital practices, employing a methodology tailored to Mongolia's circumstances. If CSOs undergo similar assessments utilizing this methodology, the government will acquire data in this area. Consequently, this data could serve as a vital resource for informed decision-making and devising a roadmap for enhancing CSOs' involvement.
- CSOs are very limited in influencing any government activities and policies, participating in policy development, and monitoring.
- Therefore, it is worth looking for opportunities to take measures to address these barriers.
- CSOs with experience in participating and influencing policy development and whose work in this field has achieved tangible results are among the target organizations of the project, so it's advantageous to utilize their expertise to strengthen the capacity of other groups.