



2020 CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATION SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

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2020 CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATION SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

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LOCAL PARTNER

UGANDA NATIONAL NGO FORUM (UNNGOF)

Chris Nkwatsibwe
Miriam Cherukut
Moses Mulindwa
Andrew Dushime
Wobusobozi Amooti Kangere, Independent Consultant

PROJECT MANAGERS

FHI 360

Michael Kott
Eka Imerlishvili
Alex Nejadian

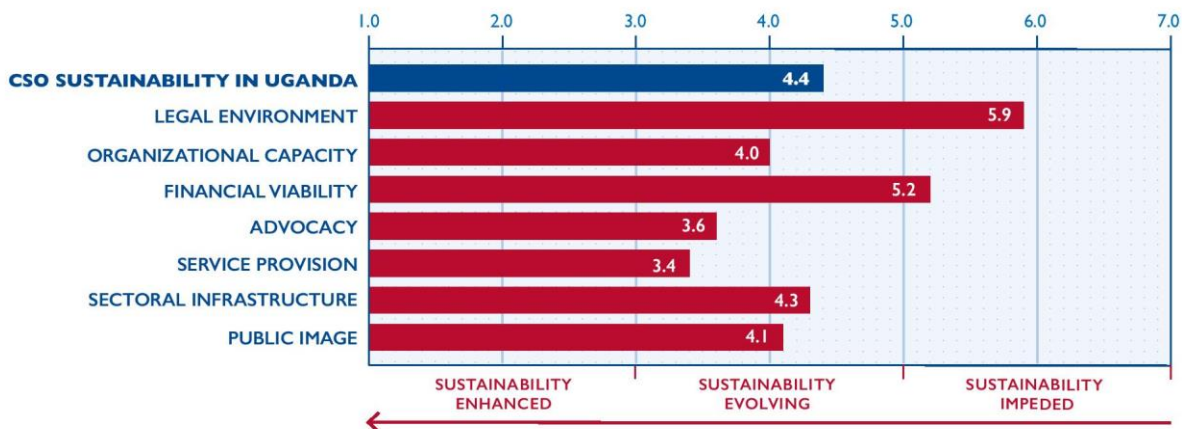
INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR NOT-FOR-PROFIT LAW (ICNL)

Catherine Shea
Jennifer Stuart
Marilyn Wyatt

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Theo Dolan, Irene Petras, Kellie Burk, Faye Haselkorn, and Tracey Durner

OVERALL CSO SUSTAINABILITY: 4.4



The year 2020 put seismic pressures on Uganda’s civil society sector. On March 18, before the COVID-19 virus was detected in the country, the government announced a thirty-two-day lockdown (which was later extended to sixty days). Private and commuter transport was grounded, all businesses were closed save for markets and shops selling essential commodities, and an indefinite curfew prohibiting movement after nine o’clock at night was established. Except for organizations working in service delivery or with staff within walking distance of their beneficiaries, CSOs were grounded during the lockdown, and their functions and services continued only if they could be performed online. The government’s enforcement of the pandemic directives led to several cases of human rights abuse. Videos and photographs of local defense units, or paramilitary groups that provide community policing services, as they battered and detained people for flouting the restrictions were uploaded by citizens onto social media, creating a climate of fear that undermined CSOs’ work.

As the country prepared for national elections in 2021, Uganda’s already reduced civic space came under intense attack. Political tensions were stoked by the rise of rapper-turned-politician Robert Kyagulanyi (also known as Bobi Wine), who rapidly became popular among Ugandan youth, the largest voting bloc, who were disenchanted with the thirty-four-year rule of President Yoweri Museveni. Kyagulanyi’s National Unity Party and People Power movement used social media and international press to mobilize resistance to Museveni, whom they called an existential threat to the political order. The state responded with selectively applied legal measures and iron-fist brutality. Journalists were assaulted and detained; the bank accounts of leading advocacy CSOs such as the Uganda National NGO Forum were frozen; CSO leaders were arrested on trumped-up charges; and regressive legislation that would block access to social media was proposed. Since the Electoral Commission lacked the legal authority to enforce equitable access to media, both government and private media effectively excluded several opposition candidates. On several occasions, when popular candidates such as Kyagulanyi attracted large groups of people despite the bans on public gatherings, violent clashes with security services broke out and dozens of people were killed.

The COVID-19 crisis seriously undermined Uganda’s economy. According to the Ministry of Finance, Planning, and Economic Planning, projected revenue shortfalls and additional expenditures in 2019–20 and 2020–21 left the government with a \$190 million funding gap. Real growth in the gross domestic product grew at 2.9 percent, compared to 7.5 percent growth in 2019, the World Bank reported. Poverty was declining in Uganda before the pandemic, but an additional 780,000 Ugandans were pushed into poverty in 2020 as unemployment increased and household incomes declined, according to the minister of finance.

The overall sustainability of the Ugandan CSO sector was unchanged in 2020. The legal environment deteriorated moderately as the government clamped down on civic space by selectively applying laws and threatening closures and deregistration. At the same time, CSOs’ organizational capacity improved slightly as CSOs adapted effectively to constraints imposed by the pandemic. Advocacy also improved slightly as organizations sought to protect

human rights during the pandemic. CSOs' contribution to the pandemic response strengthened their service provision slightly. The sectoral infrastructure was slightly improved by new local grantmaking initiatives and CSOs' more intentional efforts to collaborate. CSOs' financial viability and public image were unchanged.

According to the National Bureau for Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), about 13,000 organizations were registered in Uganda's CSO database at the end of 2020, down from 14,000 in 2019. The reduction was due to the government's effort in 2020 to verify that all CSOs in the database inherited from the NGO Board, which was replaced by the National Bureau for NGOs in 2016, had valid contact information as proof of their existence.

LEGAL ENVIRONMENT: 5.9



The legal environment governing the CSO sector deteriorated moderately in 2020 as the government selectively applied laws and threatened closures and deregistration in an effort to clamp down on civic space.

All CSOs are governed by the NGO Act of 2016 and NGO Regulations of 2017. Registration procedures did not change in 2020 and continued to be burdensome and expensive. CSOs register as NGOs under the NGO Act, as companies limited by guarantee under the Companies Act, or as trusts under the Trustees Incorporation Act. After signing memoranda of understanding with local authorities in the geographic areas in which they intend to operate and obtaining letters of recommendation from their line ministries, organizations then apply to the NGO Bureau for certificates of registration. CSO must

also obtain operating permits, which are normally renewed annually, although depending on their ability to pay the prescribed annual fees, and at the NGO Bureau's discretion, organizations may renew the permits for up to five years. Community-based organizations (CBOs) go through a similar process that culminates in registration with district NGO committees, which act as NGO Bureau representatives. Smaller groups such as professional or village associations register with local government authorities. Fees are incurred at every step of the registration process and are often determined arbitrarily. The NGO Bureau may revoke operating permits at its discretion.

According to the NGO Bureau, only 2,234 of the roughly 13,000 CSOs in its database in 2020 had valid certificates of registration and operating permits. When the NGO Bureau conducted a three-month exercise in 2019 to verify the legal status of operating organizations, many CSOs viewed the exercise as lacking a legal basis and were reluctant to comply, especially since the process was cumbersome and expensive. But several national and regional CSO networks encouraged CSOs to validate their registration status in 2020, and, thanks to efforts led by the Uganda National NGO Forum and Human Rights Center Uganda, the NGO Bureau's threat to close all CSOs that had not validated their status was postponed. However, most CSOs continued to work under threat of closure for non-compliance in 2020, although the state usually invokes this rule only in the case of CSOs whose work runs counter to its political interests, such as those that engaged in advocacy and governance work. Among the organizations known to be indefinitely suspended in 2020 were the Bryan White Foundation and Give Directly. Other CSOs were reported to be quietly deregistered, but these accounts could not be corroborated.

All CSOs must file annual reports and returns with the NGO Bureau and Uganda Registration Services Bureau. They must also register and file annual financial returns with the Financial Intelligence Authority (FIA). Regulation 45(1) of the Anti-Money Laundering Regulations of 2015 requires every accountable person to report its level of compliance to the FIA at the end of each calendar year in a process that can be long and tedious.

In 2020, the government selectively applied laws and pandemic directives to target CSOs it deemed supportive of the opposition. Several cases were reported of state reprisal against CSOs engaged in advocacy on the elections, democracy, and accountability. For example, in anticipation of the general elections in January 2021, a renowned human rights lawyer was arrested on trumped-up charges of money laundering and released on bail only after significant pressure from CSOs and development partners. Several CSO members of the Election Observation coalition were denied accreditation by the Electoral Commission, and in November, the bank accounts of key

members of the coalition, including the Uganda National NGO Forum and Uganda Women's Network, were frozen. National Election Watch Uganda (NEW-U), a coalition of sixty-four domestic CSOs planning to observe the elections, was arbitrarily declared illegal and suspended via a public statement issued by the NGO Bureau on October 29. NEW-U had operated under a legal loophole in which coalitions are not expressly required to register. NEW-U members decided to work independently to carry out election observation activities and pool their information until the police stopped them days before voting in January 2021.

Of major significance was a ruling by the Constitutional Court on March 26, 2020, that repealed sections of the Public Order Management Act (POMA). The law is notorious for serving as a favorite tool of security agents seeking to harass CSOs. Section 8 of POMA, which gave the inspector general of police sweeping powers to stop public gatherings and was often used to block opposition rallies and CSO events, was among the repealed sections. The ruling reversed one of the most invasive claw-backs of civic rights and freedoms in Uganda's legal system. The attorney general has appealed this ruling at the Supreme Court.

On September 7, the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) issued a public notice requiring all persons broadcasting audio-visual content through digital channels or web services to register with it if the broadcasts were generated in Uganda. Although the UCC was ostensibly fulfilling its mandate to regulate the data communication infrastructure as provided under the Uganda Communications Act (2013), CSOs regarded the move as an effort to restrict their use of social media. The public, mobilized in part by CSOs, signed several online petitions protesting the requirement and successfully generated enough pressure to force the UCC to back down from implementing it.

The taxation of CSOs did not change in 2020. CSOs continued to pay value-added, pay-as-you-earn, withholding, and local service taxes, as well as a tax on all financial transactions made through mobile phones. Under the Non-Governmental Organizations Regulations, 2017, many CSOs were stripped of existing tax exemptions and had to re-apply for them in a process that remained unclear and complicated. Very few organizations were granted exemptions in 2020. The new regulations favor CSOs engaged in service delivery, in that CSOs are required to demonstrate the way in which they contribute to the country's development when applying for tax exemptions.

Under the NGO Act, CSOs may operate businesses, with any proceeds taxed under the rules for private businesses. Few organizations take advantage of this opportunity, mainly because of the widespread belief that nonprofit organizations are prohibited from operating businesses. However, some civic actors who find the space for CSOs too restrictive have registered as social enterprises, which enables them to generate income that can be used to fund their missions. According to a 2020 study by the Siemens Stiftung on social enterprises in Africa, approximately 27,400 social enterprises, or nearly twice the number of CSOs in the national database, exist in Uganda.

CSOs are free to mobilize resources from foreign sources. However, the compliance burden, including the maximum five-year duration of operating permits and the need for memoranda of understanding with local authorities and line ministries, can limit CSOs' ability to negotiate long-term partnerships with potential donors. The FIA requires Ugandan banks to enforce a wide range of verification measures regarding funds coming into CSOs' accounts from external sources, and many CSOs reported blocked funds and frozen bank accounts in 2020.

CSOs are free to participate in calls for bids on projects in which the government is the lead implementer.

CSOs had access to adequate legal resources in 2020, despite the intensification of the state's efforts to close civic space. For example, CSOs such as Chapter Four Uganda helped register provincial organizations that lacked the legal capacity to go through the validation process on their own. In general, few CSOs took advantage of available legal services, mainly because they were not aware of them.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY: 4.0

CSOs' organizational capacity improved slightly in 2020 as they adapted effectively to the constraints imposed by pandemic-related restrictions.

The sector displayed remarkable resilience in finding innovative ways to support and strengthen their relationships with constituents in 2020, especially at the sub-national level. Many CBOs and regional CSOs ranked their performances during the crisis as better than in preceding years. For example, First African Bicycle Information

Organization organized its constituents into clusters of twenty members and distributed bicycles to each cluster to use in purchasing domestic goods and visiting health-care centers during the lockdown. At the regional level, CSOs such as the Public Affairs Center (PAC) and Lira NGO Forum offered their vehicles to regional taskforces distributing food and disseminating information about the standard operating procedures for COVID-19 prevention. In northern Uganda, Human Communications Resources used its network of podcasters to track reports of the virus in refugee camps and produced podcasts informing community members about the threats posed by the virus.

Most Ugandan CSOs have good relationships with their constituents. The majority of organizations consult with stakeholders before writing funding proposals and hold annual stakeholder meetings to enhance their accountability to beneficiaries. The lockdown and post-lockdown curfews and restrictions on movement and assembly made it difficult for CSOs to carry out these and other routine tasks requiring direct contact with beneficiaries. But not all organizations were adversely affected. CSOs in the service sector were incorporated into the pandemic response, especially at the regional level. For example, they contributed to relief and contact-tracing efforts by lending their vehicles and human resources to support the work of regional taskforces and raised awareness about available services and human rights issues intensified by the crisis.

Most CSOs have mission statements, objectives, and strategic plans and seek to follow them. However, the need for funding, coupled with the narrow and shifting range of donors' interests, sometimes forces CSOs to implement activities unrelated to their missions. CSOs usually have functioning management structures. For example, professional associations such as the Uganda Law Society, savings and credit cooperatives, and other membership-based organizations regularly conduct annual general assemblies to gather feedback from members or elect new leaders. Exceptionally strong management was evident in 2020 at the Uganda National NGO Forum, a leading umbrella organization, whose general assembly appointed a new board, which in turn selected a successor to replace the departing executive director, thus fulfilling its policy of fixed tenures for the leadership position.

Donors' shift in recent years from supporting institutional development to almost exclusively funding programs has diminished the sector's capacity to attract and retain qualified personnel. Some CSOs at the national level still have full-time professional staff. But other CSOs have adapted well to the decline in funding for human resources. Rather than hire full-time staff, for example, most organizations now offer temporary contracts. CSOs bridge gaps in personnel for accounting, project management, and other specialized functions by using digital resources. At the local level, CSOs' ability to retain professional staff is low, and most organizations have only one qualified staff member, usually the founder or executive director, and otherwise rely on under-skilled volunteer labor.

Many CSOs responded proactively to pandemic conditions by turning to remote working arrangements in 2020. Despite Uganda's low internet penetration and high data costs, stringently enforced restrictions on movement during the lockdown and post-lockdown period caused many organizations to rely on the internet to meet and maintain contact with beneficiaries. Popular tools included virtual meeting apps as well as WhatsApp and social media platforms. CSOs lacking technical capacity were trained by regional CSOs, such as the Defenders Protection Initiative (DPI), which provided free cyber-security training.

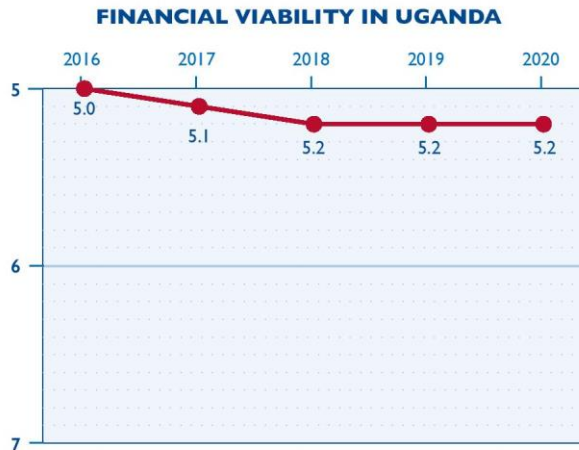
ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY IN UGANDA



FINANCIAL VIABILITY: 5.2

CSOs' financial viability was unchanged in 2020.

The majority of CSOs in Uganda still rely on foreign sources of funding. In 2020, donor funding baskets prioritized responses to the pandemic over human rights and advocacy work, and some funders froze spending on regular programming.



Access to multiple and diverse sources of funding remained a challenge for all types of CSOs in 2020. Domestic sources of funding are still scarce, although evidence suggests that the private sector should become a more viable source of CSO funding in the future. For example, in a three-month period in 2020, the private sector donated \$7.5 million to the National COVID-19 Relief Fund, according to CivSource Africa. However, even when corporations dedicate a portion of their budgets to corporate social responsibility programs, no detailed legal framework regulates how much, how often, and to whom corporations must give. They usually channel funding to public relations efforts such as charity runs and raffle competitions or donate their products directly to beneficiaries, thereby bypassing CSOs in an effort to avoid clashing with the state.

In recent years, some effort has been made to create local funds for CSOs. CivSource Africa has emerged as a local grantmaking organization and is spearheading an effort to regularly document local giving. This effort is useful both for encouraging Ugandans to give through formal structures, such as organized funds and grantmaking institutions, and for helping CSOs identify potential private-sector partners. In 2020, a group of CSOs worked together to create the Ujasiri Fund, which collects periodic contributions from member CSOs, which are re-granted to organizations and initiatives requiring critical support. Although still starting up and undersubscribed, the fund is developing a membership along with awareness of the need for local funding alternatives. At the national level, the Uganda Women’s Network (UWONET) led a fundraising drive soliciting contributions to the National COVID-19 Relief Fund in 2020 and collected about \$2,800. The Dolphin Fund has developed a crowdsourcing, GoFundMe-type service that allows anyone to raise money for or donate to specific causes.

There is no direct funding from government to CSOs. However, in service delivery sectors such as health, agriculture, and refugee support, CSOs work closely with government. For example, local governments sometimes outsource implementation of program activities to local CSOs. Development partners sometimes channel funding for government programs through CSOs. Irish Aid, for example, provided support to the Human Rights Center Uganda (HRCU) along with the National NGO Bureau to conduct regional reflection meetings on the implementation of Uganda’s new regulatory framework for CSOs.

Although CSOs may legally sell goods and services to finance their operations, such activities have yet to serve as a viable source of revenue. The public believes that CSO services ought to be free, and most CSO beneficiaries have limited capacity to pay for the true costs of the products and services that they receive. Some CSOs offering services such as pads for poor teenage girls and youth skill training and employment are starting to generate income through business activities and social enterprises in tourism, transport, trade, and agriculture.

ADVOCACY: 3.6

Advocacy improved slightly in 2020 as CSOs effectively pursued human rights issues in the context of the pandemic.

Advocacy CSOs dealing with non-sensitive issues such as child protection, women’s empowerment, jobs training for youth, and reproductive health have productive ties with the central government and are often involved in its decision-making processes. For example, since 2019, the Civil Society Budget Group (CSBAG) has had a strong standing partnership with the Ministry of Finance, Planning, and Economic Development and regularly rallies both government officials and citizens to be more involved in the budget process. CSBAG has succeeded in opening up access to information on budget proceedings, thereby allowing citizens to contribute meaningfully to the decision-making process.

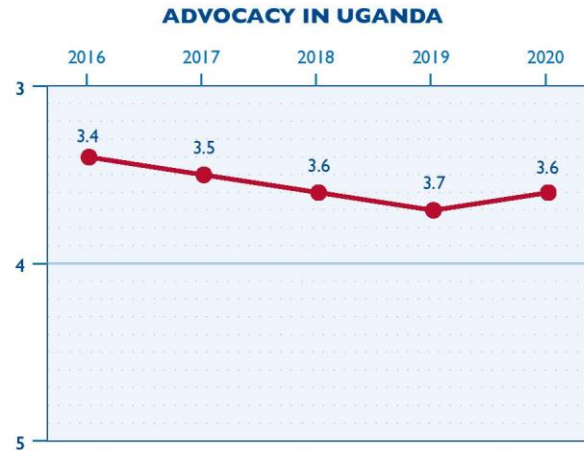
As 2020 was a pre-election year, the narrative that advocacy CSOs were conspiring with opposition politicians and undefined “foreign elements” to overthrow the government prompted many members of parliaments to avoid contact with such CSOs. Even more important, their preoccupation with campaigns made it difficult for CSOs to

gain access to lawmakers. Government officials snubbed the Strengthening Citizens' Engagement in Elections (SCENE) national stakeholder dialogue organized by UNNGOF, a major advocacy organization.

CSOs demonstrated remarkable resilience in responding to the government's aggressive enforcement of COVID-19 restrictions in 2020, which raised human rights issues related to freedoms of expression and assembly. Human rights organizations such as the Coalition of Human Rights Defenders took the lead in urging the government to ease the restrictions. Through video and photographic documentation, written formal complaints, and online petitions, CSOs pressured the government into withdrawing local defense units for retraining because of their abuse of human rights, including beatings, detentions, and killings. The president also issued public orders to deter the security units from treating citizens brutally. CSOs also advocated for police and local security forces to attend to the spike in domestic violence precipitated by the lockdown, with the result that the police established a hotline. During the year, HRCU provided the Uganda Police Force, Uganda Human Rights Commission, and judiciary with advisory and training support to reduce harassment of human rights defenders.

CSOs initiated legal action to defend civic space in 2020. For example, the Uganda National NGO Forum and Uganda Women's Network sued the attorney general and FIA for closing their accounts. The Center for Constitutional Governance (CCG) and Innovations for Democratic Engagement and Actions sought High Court review of the NGO Bureau's decision to suspend NEW-U. CSOs' joint action on a challenge of this magnitude resulted in a stronger collective voice on legal issues affecting the sector.

CSOs also made several efforts to promote a more favorable legal and regulatory framework for the sector. Chapter Four Uganda and several other organizations helped increase awareness of the registration process and enhance the legal capacity of smaller CSOs. Working with HRCU and the Uganda National NGO Forum, the NGO Bureau attempted to bridge the deepening divide between the government and the CSO sector by continuing to carry out regional reflective meetings to discuss the NGO regulatory framework and organized quarterly dialogues with the minister of internal affairs.



SERVICE PROVISION: 3.4



Service provision improved slightly in 2020 as CSOs continued to provide regular services while making a stellar contribution to the pandemic response.

CSOs in Uganda provide diverse services ranging from health care, education, and justice to vulnerable and hard-to-reach communities and underprivileged populations to awareness raising about social inclusion, civic participation, and government accountability. CSOs continued to provide most of their regular services, despite pandemic restrictions in 2020. CSOs also contributed to the pandemic response by engaging in community mobilization and sensitization, food distribution, and psychosocial support; producing studies on the social and economic impact of the pandemic, along with campaigns to raise awareness about spikes in

domestic violence, mental illness, and teenage pregnancies; and offering cash relief to micro- and small enterprises negatively affected by the pandemic. Mercy Corps helped health authorities deliver services in Karamoja region. Many CSOs in the health-care sector disseminated information about pandemic protocols with support from

USAID. Even advocacy organizations such as Public Affairs Center and Lira NGO Forum supported local governments with vehicles and personnel.

CSO services became more responsive to community needs in 2020. They were able to react more quickly than the government to the pandemic and offer innovative, community-based solutions. For instance, CSOs delivered internet-based educational services to students in communities with more limited access to technology and helped them access classes and reading materials through community centers, home visits, and loaned tablet computers. CSOs also ensured that basic social services such as health care, education, and agricultural extension programs continued to be delivered during the lockdown. CSOs' support was critical because of the centralization of the pandemic response and the severe revenue losses suffered by many local governments during the pandemic.

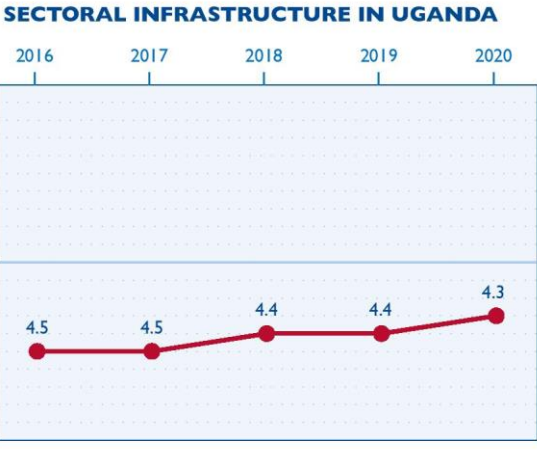
CSOs' capacity to generate revenue from services remained low in 2020. Organizations in areas such as education, agriculture, and health care typically charge cost-sharing fees, but most CSOs regard service provision as a not-for-profit activity. In any case, the majority of CSOs' clientele has limited capacity to pay for the services that they receive.

Local government leaders appreciate their close working relationships with CSOs and often make their appreciation known in comments to local audiences and media. The president praised CSOs' donation of funds to the National COVID-19 Relief Fund through the Uganda Women's Network in one of his televised national situational updates in 2020. Otherwise, the central government was largely suspicious of CSOs' activities in 2020. The contrast of CSOs' relationships with local and national governments is commonly known throughout the country.

SECTORAL INFRASTRUCTURE: 4.3

The infrastructure supporting the CSO sector showed slight improvement in 2020 as several recent local grantmaking initiatives strengthened their services and CSOs were more intentional about pooling their efforts.

Uganda's CSOs are served by a number of resource centers, including facilities that offer support specific to certain programming areas, such as civic education and social research, and regional hubs that provide technical assistance in a wide range of areas. Restrictions on movement during the lockdown rendered resource centers difficult to access, especially since most of them are located in urban areas, where sensitivity to the COVID-19 virus was high. Intermediary support organizations such as DPI provided training on the use and security of digital tools.



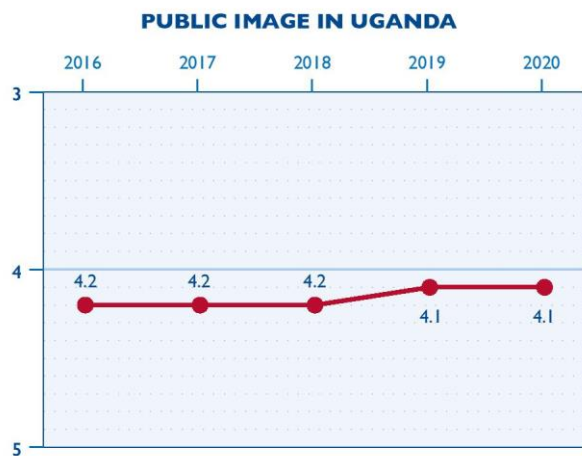
Local grantmaking efforts were considerably stronger in 2020. In particular, CivSource Africa now operates two major funds: the Zishaye Grassroots Fund, which supports grassroots initiatives in natural resource rights, emergency response, research and documentation, and leadership development, and the Kuonyesha Fund, which promotes diversity in the arts. The Dolphin Fund has developed a crowdsourcing, GoFundMe-type service that allows anyone to raise money for or donate to specific causes. In 2020, a new fund, the Ujasiri Fund, was launched to collect contributions from member CSOs and regrant them to organizations and initiatives requiring critical support.

CSOs have become more intentional about pooling their efforts since donors began to shift their support from institution-strengthening to programming, a trend that has had the unintended effect of enhancing intrasectoral collaboration. For example, CSOs increasingly rely on each other to fill gaps in their technical, human resource, and other capacities. Such cooperation was evident when NEW-U was able to pool the resources of its member CSOs to monitor the elections in 2020. The efforts of NEW-U members to overturn the arbitrary suspension of the coalition was in fact one of the biggest collective actions ever undertaken by CSOs, with more than sixty organizations involved. The power of collaboration among CSOs was also evident in the sector's response to the

pandemic. CSOs held weekly meetings to formulate the sector’s approach to the crisis and submitted a report on civil society’s contributions to the pandemic response to the prime minister’s Inter-Ministerial Technical Taskforce on COVID-19. Akina Mama, Unwanted Witness, Center of Policy Analysis, Uganda Women’s Network, and other organizations provided training to CSO leaders on using digital tools such as Zoom if physical meetings were not possible.

CSOs in service-delivery sectors continue to work closely with the government in 2020. In particular, CSOs working in the health-care sector often supported local governments suffering from severe revenue losses by providing them with services and equipment along with services directly to citizens. CSOs continued to cooperate with the media through periodic formal partnerships, which help CSOs disseminate information and amplify their advocacy work. While CSOs have also started to pursue partnerships with businesses, they are still largely nascent.

PUBLIC IMAGE: 4.1



The CSO sector’s public image was stable in 2020.

Although the UCC attempted to silence political dissent in 2020 by requiring online broadcasters to obtain authorization and licenses for operation, CSO leaders continued to appear on popular talk shows on all major radio and television stations at the national and regional levels. Most media soliciting on CSOs participation were privately owned, and private media also adopted internal editorial policies to produce balanced stories about CSOs’ work. CSOs also contributed opinion pieces and articles to newspapers.

Public opinion of CSOs’ work was divided in 2020. After the ruling party alleged that CSOs were colluding with opposition leader Robert Kyagulanyi to bring war and homosexuality to Uganda, communities in rural areas,

where the ruling party’s base is strong and most CSO activity takes place, showed a new level of suspicion of CSOs. Some CSOs were able to push back against these allegations by engaging directly with their beneficiaries. But CSOs generally lacked a cross-sectoral strategy to conduct public perception surveys and defend the sector against attack. Otherwise, most of the public appreciated CSOs’ help in providing essential social services during the health crisis.

The government’s attitude towards CSOs was also mixed in 2020. Although the president publicly praised CSOs’ donations to the National COVID-19 Relief Fund, he accused CSOs of conspiring with undefined “foreign elements” to overthrow the state, prompting security agents to increase their harassment of advocacy CSOs and human rights defenders. The government’s worsening attitude towards advocacy CSOs was also suggested by the absence of government representatives at the Strengthening Citizens’ Engagement in Elections (SCENE) dialogue organized by UNNGOF. For CSOs in service delivery, government relations remained positive at both the central and local level, especially insofar as CSOs supported government relief efforts during the pandemic.

Despite the government’s negative attacks, CSOs continued to have good working relationships with the private sector in 2020. CSOs are a major source of income from goods and services, and private-sector perceptions of CSOs are particularly positive at the regional level. However, the central government’s anti-CSO rhetoric over the last five years has reduced the appetite of medium- and large-scale enterprises to work with CSOs. An indicator of their lack of enthusiasm was businesses’ failure to provide financial support to CSOs in 2020, in contrast to their contribution of \$7.5 million to the government’s pandemic relief effort in a three-month period.

In 2020, CSO leaders sought to counter the government’s narrative that the sector is a seedbed of foreign agents working against Ugandan interests. Organizations such as CCG established Civic Space TV, an online platform for promoting freedom of speech and expression in relation to civil society activities. Working together with Oxfam, several organizations also used mainstream media and social media spaces to spread messages about the role and

importance of NGOs to Uganda's development. CSOs organized several press conferences to demystify their work and respond to infractions of civic space by the government.

The Quality Assurance Mechanism (QuAM) self-regulatory model for CSOs continued to be used in 2020 to provide minimal benchmarks for governance and accountability. However, adoption of the QuAM model remains low, despite efforts to revive it. Several large CSOs publish their annual reports on their websites, while others present them to their general assemblies. Many organizations do not produce annual reports.

Disclaimer: *The opinions expressed herein are those of the panelists and other project researchers and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or FHI 360.*

U.S. Agency for International Development

1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW

Washington, DC 20523

Tel: (202) 712-0000

Fax: (202) 216-3524

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