



13th Edition of the NANGO Annual NGO Directors Summer Retreat

Theme: Reimagining the Future of Civil Society in Zimbabwe: From Analysis to Action

Victoria Falls Action Agenda and Resolutions Document

The National Association of Non-Governmental Organisations held its 13th edition of the Annual NGO Directors Summer Retreat from 22 to 24 November 2023 at Elephant Hills Hotel, Victoria Falls – Zimbabwe. The summer retreat is an annual conference for sharing experiences, collective reflection, and developing innovative strategies to build a vibrant civil society for inclusive development in Zimbabwe. From the previous edition of the Summer Retreat held in 2022, NANGO's work has revolved around developing the skills and capacity of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to articulate and advocate for alternative solutions through strategic narrative changes. This edition emphasized crafting and shaping new narratives that reaffirm the vital role of civil society in addressing people's needs and concerns. It also explored strategies for countering narratives that aim to discredit CSOs, demonise their communities, and restrict civic space.

The sessions covered various strategies for reimagining an ideal future, focusing on rebuilding systems that support collective foresight, collaborative scenario planning, and deliberative spaces for envisioning and working towards a stronger civic space. This included creating resource hubs to support CSOs in key competence areas and foster collaboration, along with investing in strengthening local civil society to enhance resilience and build solidarity.

In essence, the Summer Retreat focused on how CSOs can improve their anticipatory capacity to engage with and influence key trends, thereby strengthening, expanding, and reimagining civic space. A vibrant civil society geared towards shaping narratives for pro-people development is crucial amidst Zimbabwe's current economic downturn. The 13th edition of the NGO Directors Summer Retreat welcomed a total of 138 participants from across Zimbabwe, demonstrating an intricate web of NANGO's membership and network.

The following are Key Action Points Drawn from the Conference:

1. Preamble

- 1.1. Observing** the important role that Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) play in complementing the government with regards to the promotion of human rights, rule of law, and constitutionalism; the implementation of social policies, improving access to essential socio-economic services, and other humanitarian assistance in times of disasters and need in the country,

- 1.2. **Cognisant** of the urgency to act and drive CSOs contribution and influence for inclusive and sustainable economic growth, gender equality, youth inclusion, disability inclusion, human rights, rule of law, constitutionalism, and climate action,
- 1.3. **Reaffirming and recommitting** to a democratic Zimbabwe in which every human being lives a dignified, peaceful, and secure life and participates freely in issues that affect them,
- 1.4. **Believing** that cooperation and partnerships between the state and non-state actors and among the non-state actors is an important ingredient of good governance,
- 1.5. **Concerned** about instruments regulating CSOs in Zimbabwe that have become more restrictive and, the independence and autonomy of the NGO sector are further compromised,
- 1.6. **Further concerned** about the high levels of inequality and poverty resulting from the sluggish and inconsistent implementation of laws and policies aimed at empowering citizens and equitable access to opportunities and resources within our country,
- 1.7. **Reiterating** that CSOs are independent development actors, playing a vital role in advocating for the respect of human rights, shaping development policies, and overseeing their implementation.

Therefore:

2. On Enabling Environment

- ~~2.1.~~ We call on the Government of Zimbabwe to provide for an enabling environment for CSOs to participate in and constructively engage with national processes and discussions on developmental priorities at all levels of governance. This includes the complete removal of burdensome administrative requirements such as clearance letters, Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs), and unwarranted demands from NGOs at all levels of operations. We welcomed the commitment pledge by the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare (MoPSLSW) to have quarterly engagement meetings to improve operational modalities between CSOs and state institutions, and broadly improve the CSOs-Government relations.
- 2.2. We resolve that NGOs in Zimbabwe develop and advance a self-regulatory framework that seeks to formulate and operationalise a Code of Ethics and Standards to be applied across the sector in line with the international best practices and standards for NGOs' Development Effectiveness. We further call upon development partners to fully support the self-regulation initiative with adequate financial, human, and material resourcing.
- 2.3. We are encouraged by NANGO's commitment to revisiting the NGO Corporate Governance Manual to review it to meet the evolving context and reposition civil society priorities for enhanced CSOs legitimacy, transparency, and accountability. This includes the strengthening of the CSOs coordination platforms and mechanism hence we committed to expedite the finalisation and operationalisation of the **Zimbabwe Social Investment Impact Exchange (ZimSIIX)** platform in partnership with the Centre for Humanitarian Analytics (CHA). CSOs committed to avoiding unhealthy competition and working in a unified and well-coordinated manner.
- 2.4. We are further encouraged by CSOs' commitment to engage and maintain open dialogue spaces with regulators across the country. This includes ensuring compliance with regulations

and practicing good governance. NANGO affirmed its commitment to bridging the knowledge gap in the sector through the rolling out of the **Quality Assurance Mechanism (QuAM)** initiative.

- 2.5. Realising that countries are weaponizing and securitising the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) Recommendation 8 thereby contributing to shrinking civic space, CSOs affirmed their commitment to participate fully in the FATF processes such as National Risk Assessments, Non-Profit Organisations (NPO) Risk Assessments, mutual evaluation, review of the best practice handbooks, and interpretive notes and in-country outreach programmes. Efforts will be made to engage with the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) and the National Task Force on Anti-Money Laundering and Countering of Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT).

3. Localisation Agenda

- 3.1. **Encouraged** by the steps being taken by donors and development agencies to implement the localisation agenda, local NGOs committed to engaging with the International NGOs to develop a clear and compelling context-responsive framework on the localisation agenda that emphasizes sustainability, responsiveness, and local ownership. The framework should resonate with diverse stakeholders' views and guide action. These conversations should also aim to earn trust and foster genuine collaboration, shifting away from controlling approaches that perpetuate power imbalances. Local actors deserve recognition, their voices need to be heard, and they must have a seat at the decision-making table.
- 3.2. The summer retreat identified governance and leadership as key institutional strengthening components for local NGOs to lead localisation agenda and exercising autonomy. NANGO should therefore focus on creating more autonomy for its members to lead the locally driven development agenda.
- 3.3. NANGO to facilitate interface meetings with development partners and donors to discuss issues to do with funding access and conditionalities to support equitable and locally driven development.

4. Leadership and Succession Planning

- 4.1. We call upon all CSOs in Zimbabwe to consider issues of succession planning seriously, allowing staff to comfortably exit without concerns about post-retirement survival. To achieve this, there is a need to establish systems to address economic challenges facing NGO staff and the conversations should include donors as well. There is a need to invest in transformative leadership targeting emerging young leaders.

5. Gender Equality and Women Empowerment

- 5.1. Call on women's rights organisations to increase the level of involvement and effective participation of women and girls at the grassroots level in development initiatives. This can be achieved by supporting community-led development efforts that prioritise women's voices and needs. Further, CSOs were challenged to apply the tenets of the "*Leave No One Behind*" principle to address the continued marginalisation of women. Specifically, a call was made to prioritise women's empowerment, particularly in areas of constitutional literacy and political participation.

6. Climate Action

- 6.1. Call on CSOs to insist on including children in national climate change policies and plans, ensuring their active participation in shaping their future, and advocating for a transition to green energy and sustainable farming practices as pathways to a healthier planet and economic stability.

7. Mainstreaming of Physical and Mental Health

- 7.1. Call for CSOs to prioritise the physical and mental wellness of their staff as part of organisational development strategies. This includes setting realistic work tasks and targets to prevent overburdening employees and create opportunities for relaxation and stress reduction activities, fostering a supportive work environment.

8. Call to Action for NANGO:

Call upon NANGO to:

- 8.1. Enhance the visibility of NGOs at national and sub-national levels.
- 8.2. Continue and accelerate the sharing of experience, knowledge, and information on various national processes and facilitate greater involvement, participation, and influence of CSOs on national processes.
- 8.3. Strengthen its coordination, capacity, and competency for participating and contributing to regional and global processes thereby enhancing the visibility of Zimbabwe CSOs and solidarity.
- 8.4. Develop and advance a networking and engagement framework that seeks to formulate a robust engagement mechanism between civil society and government on issues of enabling environment; and,
- 8.5. Invest in efforts to strengthen NGOs capacities to participate in dialogues and engagements being created at the national and sub-national levels to influence and improve the realisation of the development goals and objectives.


9. Partnership for Development

- 9.1. Understanding the strategic opportunities created through partnerships, NANGO committed to continue engaging and cooperating with development partners, private sector, non-state actors' groups, and state actors to improve the identification of mutual development areas and define mutually sustainable partnerships.

Signed:



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