



Troutbeck Resort **Action** **Agenda and** **Resolutions** **Document**

Presented to:

14th NGO Directors Summer Retreat

Presented by:

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14th Edition of the NANGO Annual NGO Directors Summer Retreat

Theme: *Empowering Civil Society to Navigate the Evolving Landscape
for Collective Impact*

23 - 25 October 2024, Troutbeck Resort, Nyanga

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Designed By: Chris Katsaura, Communications and Visibility Officer, NANGO

Introduction

The National Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (NANGO) held its 14th edition of the Annual NGO Directors Summer Retreat from 23 to 25 October 2024 at Troutbeck Resort Hotel, Nyanga, Zimbabwe. The retreat is an annual conference for sharing experiences, collective reflection, and developing innovative strategies to build a vibrant civil society in Zimbabwe. The two previous editions of the retreat (2022 and 2023) have been centred around developing the skills and capacity of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to articulate and advocate for alternative solutions through strategic narrative changes. It emphasized the need to craft and shape 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.

We, the leaders of CSOs in Zimbabwe, convened for the 14th Edition of the NANGO Directors' Summer Retreat, mindful of the growing complexities and challenges that face our sector today. This edition of the retreat welcomed 143 participants from across Zimbabwe, demonstrating an intricate web of NANGO's membership, network, and ecosystem.

Recognizing the timeliness and critical importance of this retreat, we gather at a moment when the civic space is under increasing threat. The recent passage of the Private Voluntary Organisations (PVO) Amendment Bill in Parliament, coupled with restrictive directives from local authorities and the heightened scrutiny and limitations imposed on the work of CSOs, underscore the urgency of collective action.

Acknowledging the additional pressures exerted by an unstable economic climate, environmental concerns such as the looming El Niño-induced drought, and the rise of social ills, including drug and substance abuse, we recognize that CSOs are called to adapt and respond to a broader spectrum of needs in our communities. This necessitates a unified and strategic approach to advocacy, humanitarian assistance, and sustainable development.

Acknowledging the pivotal role of CSOs as champions of democratic values, social justice, and human rights, we recognize their unwavering commitment to fostering inclusive development, holding institutions accountable, and amplifying the voices of marginalized communities. CSOs continue to be instrumental in bridging gaps between government, citizens, and vulnerable groups, actively contributing to policy dialogue, legislative reforms, and public awareness on critical social issues. Through advocacy, partnerships, and citizens engagement, CSOs help to build resilient communities and promote transparency and good governance. Their contributions remain vital to shaping a democratic society where civic freedoms are protected, and development is participatory and equitable

Cognizant of these realities, the objectives of this retreat were to:

1. Equip CSOs leaders with the necessary tools to effectively navigate the evolving regulatory and operational landscape.
2. Strengthen the capacity of CSOs leaders to foster an enabling environment for civil society, ensuring that they continue to play a pivotal role in advancing inclusive development and good governance in our country.
3. Enhance coordination and movement building among CSOs, encouraging collective action and policy advocacy in response to the pressing challenges confronting our communities.
4. Develop a shared action agenda that will guide our strategic interventions and amplify our impact across all sectors.

As we conclude this retreat, we present this action agenda and resolution blueprint as the culmination of our deliberations, representing our collective resolve to safeguard civic space, promote accountability and governance, and champion sustainable development and good governance. We stand united in our efforts to ensure a resilient and impactful civil society in Zimbabwe, fully committed to the upliftment of the people of Zimbabwe.

The following are key action points drawn from the Conference:

1. Preamble

Observing that CSOs in Zimbabwe are facing an increasingly complex operating environment characterized by regulatory changes, such as the proposed Private Voluntary Organizations (PVO) Amendment Bill, which impacts their operational autonomy and capacity to engage meaningfully in national development.

Cognisant of the significant role that CSOs play in promoting accountability, transparency, and equitable development, as well as the need for a supportive regulatory framework that allows CSOs to fulfil these roles effectively without undue restrictions or interference.

Reaffirming our commitment to fostering an enabling environment for CSOs through collaborative efforts, strategic advocacy, and consistent dialogue with regulatory bodies and government institutions, ensuring that civil society can thrive and contribute to Zimbabwe's democratic growth.

Believing that a balanced, transparent, and inclusive approach to regulatory frameworks is essential for fostering a healthy civic space where civil society can participate freely in governance, promote human rights, and drive socioeconomic progress without fear of undue limitations.

Concerned by the tightening regulations and constraints on CSOs, exemplified by recent policy proposals and local-level guidelines that challenge CSO independence and hinder their efforts to support the most marginalized communities and promote good governance.

Further concerned that restrictive regulatory approaches may lead to reduced public trust, limited civic engagement, and a weakened platform for addressing issues of social justice, economic equality, and environmental sustainability, which are critical areas where CSOs provide essential leadership and advocacy.

Reiterating the need to ensure CSO resilience, promoting inclusivity within CSO operations, and enhancing organizational capacity in the face of evolving challenges. As CSO leaders, we stand united in our pursuit of these commitments and underscore the necessity for open dialogue with regulatory bodies, transparency in governance, and continued collaboration for the benefit of all Zimbabweans.

Therefore:

2. On Enabling Environment

- **Considering** the shrinking of civic space has become a global phenomenon through repressive laws and burdensome administrative requirements, there is a need for CSOs to consider shifting spaces through adaptation and coping mechanisms. NANGO should continue to develop tools that will help members navigate the ever-evolving landscape, such as digital technologies and strategic partnerships for development.
- In light of the threats posed by the PVO Amendment Bill and other operational requirements, there is a need for CSOs to adopt multipronged approaches that include engagements with the relevant authorities, provision of alternative models and frameworks through research, and establishment of platforms to demonstrate CSOs legitimacy, accountability, transparency, and collective impact. Strengthening NGO sector-wide systems and infrastructure, including harmonisation of practice, is key in consolidating strength to advocate for an enabling environment.
- We note and are encouraged by the recommendation by regulators for the sector to adopt a self-regulatory mechanism. 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 stakeholders and partners to fully support the self-governance initiative.
- We are encouraged by the decision by MoPSLSW to review and update the 2003 Policy for NGOs in Humanitarian Assistance to resolve administrative and operational requirements for NGOs. As CSOs, we commit to take part in the process of the review and provide alternatives based on the best international practices and learnings from other jurisdictions.

CSOs hereby commit to leveraging key spaces and platforms, such as the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC), as platforms of advocacy and influence in pursuit of the operating environment. As NANGO, we commit to facilitating consultation and representation and providing feedback to the sector. Further, NANGO commits to strengthening coordination in harmonizing various processes around civic space with clarity and message discipline.

3. Improve CSOs-State Relationship, Collaboration, and Trust Building

- We are encouraged that CSOs and regulators have agreed and committed to implementing the **Talk to Your Regulator** Initiative designed by NANGO. As such, NANGO commits to facilitating systematic and regular engagements and dialogue between the CSOs and regulators to bring clarity and streamline compliance in pursuit of an enabling environment. This also calls for the need for more outreach, effective communication, and a clear flow of information around compliance requirements with built-in feedback mechanisms.
- NANGO affirms its commitment to bridging the knowledge gap in the sector through the rolling out of the Quality Assurance and Accountability Certification Mechanism (QuAAM) initiative.
- 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, and 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).

4. Rethinking Resource Mobilisation and Fundraising to Ensure CSOs Resilience

- **Realising** that funding sources have become more constrained and only limited to a few organizations exposed to newfound trends of fundraising, NANGO is committed to facilitating a capacity strengthening of CSOs in fundraising and social investment. This will assist in ensuring that local CSOs and CBOs understand innovative and strategic funding models as well as managing donor relations. NANGO affirms its commitment to leveraging the QUAM process to perform organizational assessments aimed at facilitating organisational development, especially for CBOs.
- **Recognising** that the funding requirements are becoming tighter, there is a need for CSOs to take resource mobilization as an integral part of organizational development. Local CSOs must negotiate funding conditionalities to be flexible and accessible enough to accommodate CBOs lacking certain requirements owing to the nature and size of the organization. NANGO commits to developing a generic resource mobilisation strategy that can be used by members to develop their strategies.

5. Localisation Agenda

- **Encouraged** by the steps being taken by donors and International NGOs to implement the localisation agenda, local NGOs commit to engaging other actors to develop a clear and compelling context-responsive framework on the localisation agenda that emphasizes sustainability, responsiveness, and local ownership through establishing the Zimbabwe Charter for Change chapter. 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.

6. Strengthening CSOs Coordination and Capacity Enhancement

- We note the absence of publicly accessible platforms on the work that the CSOs are doing, their collective impact, and the knowledge gap about the role of CSOs. NANGO, in collaboration with the Centre for Humanitarian Analytics (CHA), commits to ensuring speedy finalization, activation, and operationalization of the Zimbabwe Social Investment Impact Exchange (ZimSIIX) platform, a one-stop centre for CSOs coordination.

7. Visionary Leadership and Staff Development

- CSOs are encouraged to make deliberate investments in leadership development in their organisations to strengthen leadership and support sustainability. NANGO considers developing Leadership Development Seminar Series or Webinars for different clusters of CSOs and working with experts to support organisations in need. The business community and development partners are encouraged to support CSOs in developing leadership skills or resourcing for leadership development programmes.

8. Protecting Human Rights Defenders: Strategies for Operating in Shrinking Civic Spaces

- **Recognising** the heightened risks faced by HRDs, it is recommended that continuous, localized risk assessments and early warning systems be established to proactively identify and address the potential threats for HRDs. Additionally, social safety nets should be provided for HRDs, ensuring they have access to mental health resources, physical security support, and emergency response mechanisms to sustain their advocacy efforts under pressure.
- Further, it is essential to increase funding flexibility to enable HRDs to prioritize safety and resilience-building measures amid a constraining environment. It is recommended that funding specifically covers capacity-building initiatives such as security and wellness training sessions, stress management, and holistic wellness support, which can empower HRDs to continue their work sustainably and securely.

9. Gender Equality and Social Inclusion

- To promote sustainable GESI integration within the NGO sector, it is recommended to implement targeted male engagement programs, encouraging male allies to actively champion gender equity and social inclusion agendas. This approach includes leadership training, mentorship, and advocacy platforms that empower male leaders to contribute to a more equitable and inclusive NGO environment.
- To create a safe and supportive workplace, it is recommended that NGOs adopt and rigorously enforce Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) policies, with regular training and accountability measures. This includes mandatory, organization-wide sensitization on PSEA standards and responsive reporting mechanisms, ensuring all employees work in a respectful, safe, and empowered environment.

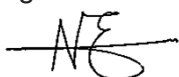
10. The Law-Making and Reform Process

- There is a need to strengthen CSO Engagement in Legislative Reforms Through Strategic Partnerships. CSOs are encouraged to establish structured partnerships with government departments, legislative bodies, and regulatory agencies, enhancing opportunities to contribute to law-making and reform processes.
- To maximize their impact on Zimbabwe's legislative framework, CSOs should invest in capacity-building programs focused on navigating the law-making process, understanding institutional roles, and leveraging advocacy channels. This includes training on policy analysis, legal drafting, and public participation techniques to enable CSOs to engage effectively at every stage of legal reform.

11. Partnership for Development

Understanding the strategic opportunities created through partnerships, NANGO commits to continue engaging and cooperating with development partners, private sector, non-state actors' groups, and state actors in fostering CSOs enabling environment.

Signed:



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NANGO Board Chairperson



Dr. Lamiel Phiri



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