



2nd Edition of the CSO Symposium Commemorating World NGO Day

Consolidated Report

27 February 2025



Introduction and Background

On 27 February 2025, the second edition of the CSO Symposium commemorating World NGO Day was held simultaneously across NANGO's four regions—Eastern, Midlands, Northern, and Western. NANGO, in collaboration with the National Association of Youth Organisations (NAYO) and with support from the European Union (EU) under the Action to Empower NGOs for Effective and Inclusive Governance and Development in Zimbabwe (ENERGIZE) project, led the organisation of this high-profile event. The symposium brought together a diverse group of stakeholders, including government officials, civil society representatives, development partners, private sector actors, independent commissions, apex organisations, and media professionals. A total of 228 participants attended across the four regions, comprising 91 men, 135 women, and 6 Persons With Disabilities (PWDs). The event marked a significant milestone in fostering dialogue on the role of NGOs in Zimbabwe's development landscape, building on the success of the inaugural edition held on 27 February 2024, under the theme "Building a Sustainable Future: The Role of NGOs in Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)."

World NGO Day, observed annually on 27 February, is a globally recognised day dedicated to acknowledging the critical contributions of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in driving social, economic, and environmental progress. Officially recognised in 2010, the day serves as a platform to celebrate the work of NGOs in advocating for human rights, delivering humanitarian aid, and fostering sustainable development. Governments, international institutions, and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) worldwide use this occasion to highlight the indispensable role of NGOs in addressing pressing societal challenges. The day not only recognises the dedication of NGOs and their personnel but also encourages collaboration, networking, and knowledge-sharing to enhance their impact. Additionally, it raises public

awareness on the importance of civic engagement and volunteerism in advancing positive transformation. As a global observance, World NGO Day offers stakeholders the opportunity to reflect on progress made, discuss policy and funding challenges affecting the sector, and advocate for a more enabling operational environment for NGOs.

The 2nd CSO Symposium was held under the theme “Strength in Solidarity: Celebrating NGOs’ Impact and Building Financial Sustainability,” providing a crucial platform to acknowledge the role of NGOs in Zimbabwe’s development while addressing the sector’s increasing challenges, particularly funding constraints, restrictive regulations, and shrinking civic space. Discussions centred on policy advocacy, financial sustainability, strengthening partnerships, and safeguarding the operational environment for civil society. Against a backdrop of shifting donor priorities and tightening legal frameworks, the symposium enabled participants to assess the evolving landscape, strategise on innovative financing models, and reinforce collaborative approaches to sustain NGO operations. Speakers and panellists underscored the critical role of CSOs in service delivery, human rights advocacy, governance, and community empowerment, while also emphasising the need for NGOs to adapt to changing economic and political conditions through resilience, innovation, and collective action.

Beyond discussions, the symposium facilitated knowledge exchange, best practice sharing, and networking, strengthening ties among NGOs, policymakers, businesses, and development partners. The event reaffirmed the importance of a strong, well-resourced, and independent civil society sector in advancing national development goals, ensuring inclusive governance, and safeguarding human rights. As participants engaged in meaningful dialogue, they reiterated their commitment to strengthening solidarity within the sector, advocating for a supportive policy environment, and securing long-term financial sustainability for local NGOs.

Rationale

Following the successful inauguration of the symposium at the national level in 2024, the second edition was strategically decentralised to the NANGO regional level to enhance inclusivity, accessibility, and meaningful engagement among its members, partners, and stakeholders. This approach was adopted to ensure broader participation, particularly for grassroots organisations that may have faced logistical and financial challenges in attending a centrally hosted event. By holding the symposium at the regional level, NANGO aimed to foster deeper discussions on localised challenges and opportunities, allowing for more context-specific solutions that align with the needs of different regions. Additionally, this decentralisation enhanced networking opportunities among regional actors, strengthened collaboration within local civil society networks, and amplified visibility across all four NANGO regions. Ultimately, this initiative reinforced NANGO’s commitment to promoting equitable participation, fostering dialogue, and driving impactful transformation at both the regional and national levels.



Key Messages from the Symposium

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The 2nd CSO Symposium provided a platform for stakeholders to reflect on critical issues affecting local NGOs and the broader civil society space in Zimbabwe. Across the four regional symposiums, discussions emphasized financial sustainability, civic space protection, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and inclusive development. Participants engaged in robust exchanges, sharing insights and recommendations on how NGOs can navigate an increasingly challenging operating environment while remaining impactful and sustainable.

- **Financial Sustainability is Critical:** The shifting funding landscape emerged as a major concern, with local NGOs facing declining donor support and increasing financial constraints. Speakers underscored the urgency for organisations to transition from donor dependency to more sustainable financing models to ensure long-term operational viability. Several strategies were proposed, including domestic resource mobilisation through local philanthropy, corporate partnerships, and community-based fundraising efforts. The need for NGOs to establish social enterprises to generate internal funding and reduce reliance on external sources was also highlighted. Additionally, participants stressed the importance of policy advocacy to create a supportive legal framework that facilitates local fundraising and financial independence. They called for the development of legislative reforms that incentivize corporate and individual giving to NGOs, enabling the sector to thrive despite diminishing international aid.

- **Protecting and Enhancing Civic Space:** Participants raised concerns over the shrinking civic space, particularly for NGOs involved in governance, human rights, and accountability work. Discussions highlighted the restrictive implications of the Private Voluntary Organisations (PVO) Amendment Bill, H.B.2, 2024, which, if enacted, could limit NGO operations and constrain fundamental freedoms such as freedom of assembly, association, and expression. These three fundamental rights are essential for democratic participation, civil society activism, and human rights advocacy. They enable NGOs to gather, form groups, and voice their opinions without undue interference. Many speakers emphasized the need for continuous engagement with policymakers to ensure that legal frameworks support, rather than hinder, civil society's work. Strengthening coalitions and regional networks was also seen as a key strategy to amplify advocacy efforts and push for a more enabling policy environment. Participants urged NGOs to adopt a proactive approach to legal compliance while simultaneously advocating for policy reforms that protect their independence and operational effectiveness.
- **Strengthening Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration:** The symposium reaffirmed the importance of strategic partnerships in addressing development challenges and achieving sustainable impact. Speakers and panelists acknowledged that NGOs cannot operate in isolation and must strengthen engagement with government, private sector actors, development partners, the media, and independent commissions. The discussions underscored the need for structured CSO-Government dialogues to align NGO efforts with national development priorities while ensuring that civic space remains protected. Private sector collaboration also emerged as a critical area, with calls for stronger engagement between businesses and NGOs to drive social impact initiatives. Participants highlighted the potential for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs, impact investments, and public-private partnerships to enhance the financial sustainability of civil society initiatives.
- **Promoting Inclusive Development and Social Justice:** The discussions reinforced the pivotal role of NGOs in promoting inclusive development and social justice by ensuring that marginalized groups are actively involved in decision-making processes. Participants stressed the importance of youth engagement in governance, urging NGOs to create platforms that empower young people to participate in policy discussions, leadership, and economic opportunities. Gender equality also emerged as a central theme, with speakers calling for stronger advocacy against Gender-Based Violence (GBV), enhanced legal protections for women, and increased economic empowerment programs for female entrepreneurs. Grassroots interventions were seen as essential in tackling GBV, harmful cultural practices, and economic disparities affecting women and girls. Additionally, the symposium highlighted environmental sustainability and climate action as key development priorities, with NGOs encouraged to integrate climate resilience strategies, sustainable agriculture, and renewable energy solutions into their programs.



Summary of Keynote Addresses and Solidarity Remarks

The keynote addresses and solidarity remarks delivered during the symposium underscored the critical role of NGOs in Zimbabwe's development, the need for financial sustainability, and the importance of protecting civic space. Speakers from government, independent commissions, non-state actors' apex organisations, and development partners acknowledged the significant contributions of civil society in governance, social service delivery, and community empowerment.

Government representatives recognized NGOs as essential partners in national development, complementing state efforts in critical sectors such as health, education, and economic empowerment. In the Midlands Region, the Mayor of Gweru, His Worship Councillor M. Chivhoko, emphasized the need for stronger collaboration between local authorities and civil society and pledged to resolve impending issues of Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) acquisition procedure and application fees to encourage formalisation and compliance. In the Western Region, the Minister of State for Provincial Affairs and Devolution, Hon Judith Ncube, commended NGOs for their role in disaster response, human rights advocacy, and community development. The speaker encouraged NGOs to engage with regulators proactively to navigate legal and operational challenges while continuing to advocate for policy reforms that promote an enabling environment. The Mayor of Harare, His Worship Mr Jacob Mafume, who delivered a keynote address at the Northern Region symposium, acknowledged the critical role of NGOs in promoting social justice, governance, and economic development within the capital city and beyond. He emphasized that NGOs complement government efforts by reaching vulnerable communities, often providing essential services where public resources fall short. He further reiterated the Harare City Council's commitment to strengthening collaboration with civil society, particularly in waste management, housing, and social service delivery.

Independent commissions and legal experts raised concerns over the shrinking civic space, particularly regarding the PVO Amendment Bill, which threatens to curtail the operations of NGOs working in governance, human rights, and accountability. The Zimbabwe Gender Commission (ZGC) reaffirmed its commitment to working with CSOs to advance gender

equality and promote policies that protect women's rights and economic inclusion. The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) urged civil society to play a more active role in advocating for workers' rights and social protection, particularly as economic hardships continue to affect vulnerable communities.

The Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), the Zimbabwe National Chamber of Commerce (ZNCC), and development partners such as ActionAid and Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (FNF), expressed their solidarity with NGOs, emphasizing the importance of collaboration across sectors. The ZCC highlighted the shrinking space for civic engagement and the importance of religious institutions and civil society working together to defend democratic values and social justice. The ZNCC encouraged NGOs to explore partnerships with businesses to enhance financial sustainability through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs, impact investments, and social enterprises.

Development partners stressed the need for NGOs to adopt innovative funding models and leverage technology to enhance advocacy and service delivery. ActionAid reiterated that NGOs must build financial resilience by diversifying revenue streams and strengthening partnerships with regional and international stakeholders. Speakers also called for continued solidarity among CSOs to amplify advocacy efforts, particularly in addressing legal and regulatory barriers affecting the sector.

Across all regions, keynote speakers and solidarity messages emphasized the importance of unity, resilience, and strategic adaptation in the face of economic and policy challenges. They urged NGOs to remain steadfast in their mission, strengthen partnerships, and advocate for an enabling environment that allows civil society to thrive.





Recommendations from the Symposium

For Government:

1. To develop and implement legislative reforms that support local fundraising efforts and tax incentives for charitable giving.
2. To review and amend restrictive policies such as the PVO Amendment Bill to ensure they support rather than hinder NGO operations.
3. To establish formal, transparent dialogue platforms with CSOs to address regulatory concerns and promote policy co-creation.
4. To uphold constitutional rights to freedom of association, assembly, and expression by ensuring NGOs operate without undue interference.

For CSOs:

1. To explore alternative funding sources, including social enterprises, local philanthropy, and impact investments, to reduce donor dependency.
2. To strengthen financial management and resource mobilisation capacity through training and knowledge-sharing among NGOs.
3. To engage in policy research and evidence-based advocacy to support legislative changes that promote civil society operations.
4. To strengthen collaboration with the media to highlight the positive impact of NGOs and counter misinformation that undermines civil society credibility.

For Development Partners:

- To provide flexible funding mechanisms that allow NGOs to build internal financial resilience rather than solely focusing on short-term project-based funding.
- To support NGOs in developing financial sustainability models, including training on social entrepreneurship and innovative financing.
- To provide technical and financial support for advocacy campaigns and legal assistance to help CSOs navigate restrictive regulations.
- To facilitate multi-stakeholder engagement forums to foster stronger CSO-Government-Private Sector collaboration.



As NANGO, we recognize the need to continuously celebrate and elevate the contributions of NGOs beyond the annual CSO Symposium. To achieve this, we will improve the Annual NGO Awards, honouring outstanding individuals and organisations that have demonstrated exceptional impact in various thematic areas, from governance and human rights to environmental sustainability and social development. Additionally, we will organize public exhibitions through Expos, providing NGOs with platforms to showcase their work and directly interact with the communities they serve. To enhance visibility, we will launch digital storytelling campaigns, leveraging video documentaries, social media spotlights, and success story features to highlight the transformative work of NGOs across Zimbabwe. Strengthening media partnerships will also be a priority, ensuring continuous coverage of civil society initiatives through dedicated radio and television programs, as well as opinion pieces and feature articles in print and online publications. Furthermore, we will host policy dialogues and thematic knowledge-sharing forums throughout the year, facilitating ongoing engagement between

NGOs, policymakers, development partners, and the private sector. Through these initiatives, we reaffirm our commitment to ensuring that the critical role of NGOs remains widely recognized and celebrated, fostering a more supportive and informed environment for civil society in Zimbabwe.

Enhancing the Reach and Impact of the Next CSO Symposium

To enhance the reach and impact of the next edition of the CSO Symposium, the organisers will adopt a more inclusive, interactive, and outcome-driven approach that ensures broader participation and lasting impact. One key improvement will be expanding the symposium beyond a single event by incorporating pre-symposium consultations and post-event follow-ups. This will allow for deeper engagement, ensuring that discussions are informed by grassroots perspectives and that resolutions lead to tangible actions. Conducting regional preparatory meetings ahead of the main event will give a voice to smaller, community-based organisations while ensuring that key issues from all corners of Zimbabwe are well represented. Additionally, sector-specific dialogues focusing on thematic areas such as governance, human rights, climate action, and financial sustainability will allow participants to engage in practical, solution-oriented discussions.

To make the symposium more accessible, NANGO will introduce hybrid participation options, enabling civil society actors, policymakers, and partners who cannot attend physically to engage virtually. Digital tools such as live streaming, interactive Q&A sessions, and online discussion forums will be leveraged to increase participation from diverse stakeholders. Strengthening engagement with development partners and the private sector will also be a priority, ensuring long-term collaboration that goes beyond the symposium. Furthermore, to translate discussions into action, key policy recommendations from the symposium will be compiled into a policy brief to be shared with government officials and decision-makers for concrete follow-up.

To amplify the reach and visibility of the next CSO Symposium, NANGO will strategically leverage broadcast and print media to ensure widespread coverage and engagement. Partnerships with radio and television stations will be strengthened to provide live coverage, expert panel discussions, and post-event analysis, ensuring that key messages from the symposium reach a national audience, including those in remote areas. Additionally, NANGO will work closely with newspapers and magazines to publish feature articles, opinion pieces, and interviews that highlight the symposium's key themes, outcomes, and policy recommendations.

NANGO Action Plan: Addressing Key Issues Raised During the CSO Symposium

Based on the critical discussions and recommendations from the 2nd CSO Symposium, NANGO commits to implementing the following actions to strengthen civil society, enhance financial sustainability, and create a more enabling environment for NGOs in Zimbabwe:

- **Advocacy and Policy Engagement**
- Engage policymakers and legislators to advocate for civil society-friendly policies, including addressing concerns surrounding the PVO Amendment Bill and other regulatory frameworks.
- Strengthen collaboration with independent commissions, non-state actors apex organisations, and human rights institutions to promote solidarity, civic space, and freedom of association.
- Facilitate continuous dialogue between CSOs and regulatory institutions through the Talk to Your Regulator (T2R) initiative to improve transparency, accountability, and mutual engagement.

Financial Sustainability and Resource Mobilisation

- Conduct capacity-building workshops on alternative financing models such as social enterprises, impact investments, and local philanthropy to reduce donor dependency.
- Establish a Civil Society Resource Mobilisation Hub, providing NGOs with tools, training, and mentorship on fundraising and financial sustainability strategies.
- Strengthen partnerships with the private sector to explore innovative financing solutions, including CSR funding and Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs).

Strengthening Civil Society Collaboration and Networks

- Enhance regional coordination mechanisms within NANGO's regions to improve information-sharing, collaboration, and joint advocacy efforts.
- Organize sector-specific working groups focused on key thematic areas such as governance, human rights, climate action, and youth empowerment.
- Facilitate peer-learning exchanges and mentorship programs between established and emerging NGOs to strengthen institutional capacity.

Capacity Building and Institutional Strengthening

- Conduct training sessions on governance, financial management, digital advocacy, and compliance to build the resilience of NGOs.
- Fully roll-out the QuAAM initiative to member organisations ensuring the identification of capacity gaps hence ensuring that NANGO delivers tailored capacity building to its members.
- Support NGOs in adapting to digital transformation by providing guidance on leveraging technology for advocacy, communication, and resource mobilisation.



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