



15th NGO Directors Summer Retreat Conference Report

Theme: *“Navigating New Frontiers: Development Financing and Civic Space in Transition”.*

27-28 November 2025 | Urban Lifestyles Hotel | Masvingo





**Conference Facilitator
Andy Hodges**

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National Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (NANGO)
2 McGowan Road, Milton Park
Harare, Zimbabwe

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Design/Artwork

Chris Katsaura. Communications and Visibility Officer, National Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (NANGO).

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Acronyms

AML/CFT/PF	Anti-Money Laundering / Counter-Financing of Terrorism / Proliferation Financing
APD	African Protocol on Disability
APRM	African Peer Review Mechanism
BVTA	Bulawayo Vendors and Traders Association
CBOs	Community-Based Organisations
CDPA	Cyber and Data Protection Act
CPRD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DC	Data Controller
DPO	Data Protection Officer
ESAAMLG	East and Southern Africa Anti- Money Laundering Group
EU	European Union
FATF	Financial Action Task Force
FBOs	Faith-Based Organisations
FIU	Financial Intelligence Unit in Zimbabwe
FODPZ	Federation of Organisations of Disabled People in Zimbabwe
GPEDC	Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation
JHWO	Jointed Hands Welfare Organisation
MoFED&IP	Ministry of Economic Development & Investment Promotion
MoPSLSW	Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare
MRDC	Masvingo Rural District Council
MoYEDVT	Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Development and Vocational Training
NANGO	National Association of Non-Government Organisations
NASCOH	National Association of Societies for the Care of the Handicapped
NAYO	National Association of Youth Organisations
NDS2	National Development Strategy 2
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
NPOs	Non-Profit Organisations
NPRC	National Peace and Reconciliation Commission
POTRAZ	Postal & Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe
PVOs	Private Voluntary Organisations
PWDs	Persons with Disability

QuAAM	Quality Assurance and Accountability Mechanism
SAYWHAT	Students and Youth Working on Reproductive Health Action Team
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SHDF	Self-Help Development Foundation
TIZw	Transparency International Zimbabwe
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USG	United State Government
WALPE	Women's Academy for Leadership and Political Excellence
WCoZ	Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe
WICO	Women in Communities
YETT	Youth Empowerment and Transformation Trust
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association Zimbabwe
ZACRAS	Zimbabwe Association of Community Radio Stations
ZAHA	Zimbabwe Alliance for Humanitarian Assistance
ZEC	Zimbabwe Electoral Commission
ZGC	Zimbabwe Gender Commission
ZHRC	Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission
ZimRights	Zimbabwe Human Rights Association
ZLHR	Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights
ZRP	Zimbabwe Republic Police

Letter from the Executive Director

On behalf of the National Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (NANGO), it is my honour and privilege to present this report of the 15th NGO Directors Summer Retreat, which was convened from 27–28 November 2025 at the Urban Lifestyles Hotel in Masvingo, under the theme **“Navigating New Frontiers: Development Financing and Civic Space in Transition.”**

The Retreat brought together 186 high profile delegates composed of NGO Directors, development partners, policymakers, private sector actors, and other key stakeholders to engage in robust dialogue on the evolving development landscape. At a time when Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) are navigating shrinking civic space, changing donor priorities, and emerging development financing models, the retreat provided a timely and critical platform for reflection, learning, and collective strategising.

Discussions during the two days were rich and forward-looking, focusing on innovative financing mechanisms, strengthening strategic partnerships, safeguarding civic space, and enhancing institutional resilience and sustainability. The diversity of perspectives shared by panellists and participants alike reaffirmed the central role of civil society in advancing inclusive, accountable, and people-centred development in Zimbabwe and beyond.

NANGO remains deeply grateful to our valued partners, sponsors, facilitators, and speakers whose technical expertise, financial support, and unwavering commitment made this retreat a success. We also extend our sincere appreciation to all participants for their active engagement, insightful contributions, and dedication to strengthening the civil society sector.

As captured in this report, the outcomes and recommendations from the 15th NGO Directors Summer Retreat provide important guidance for policy engagement, organisational practice, and future programming. NANGO remains committed to amplifying the collective voice of civil society, promoting an enabling operating environment, and supporting its members to effectively navigate emerging development frontiers.

15th NGO Directors Summer Retreat Report

We trust that this report will serve as a useful reference for stakeholders and contribute meaningfully to ongoing discourse and action on development financing and civic space in transition. Your continued collaboration will be essential as we implement the outcomes of the retreat. To access the Masvingo Action Agenda and Resolutions, please [click here](#).

I thank you all for your continued partnership and commitment to a vibrant and resilient civil society.



Mr. Ernest Nyimai

Executive Director, NANGO.



Executive Summary

The 15th NGO Directors Summer Retreat, convened under the theme “**Navigating New Frontiers: Development Financing and Civic Space in Transition,**” brought together 186 participants, comprised of civil society leaders, development partners, government representatives, private sector actors, and key stakeholders from 26–28 November 2025 at the Urban Lifestyle Hotel in Masvingo. The Retreat provided a strategic platform for reflection, dialogue, collective learning, and action planning in response to evolving development financing dynamics and a complex civic space environment.

Over three days, participants engaged deeply with critical issues shaping the future of Zimbabwe's civil society sector. The Retreat commenced with targeted masterclass sessions on crisis leadership strategies, gender and anti-corruption intersections, and civic leadership resilience—designed to strengthen organisational capacities in turbulent contexts. A dedicated reception dinner foregrounded gender-based violence advocacy, aligning with the global 16 Days of Activism campaign.

The Retreat's opening and deep collective reflection sessions were anchored by remarks from key note speakers, including perspectives from the United Nations, development partners represented by the European Union (EU); the Government represented by the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare (MoPSLSW) and Masvingo Rural District Council. Sessions explored the state of the civil society operating environment, drawing on insights from the Civic Space Watch Report 2025. Participants interrogated key trends, legislative developments, and inclusive strategies to foster a more enabling environment.

Interactive dialogues provided an opportunity for meaningful engagement with regulators on implementation progress following the enactment of the PVO Amendment Act of 2025, while high-level presentations unpacked the future of development financing amidst declining traditional aid, emphasising adaptive sustainability, resource diversification, and strategic partnerships.

The Retreat also facilitated work stream sessions that focused on strengthening accountability frameworks, addressing public-health-related resource challenges, and responding to digital

violence against women and girls. A preparation session on the FATF Mutual Evaluation 2026 built sector readiness for compliance and civic safeguards.

On the final day, thematic sessions spotlighted localisation efforts to shift rhetoric into practice, alongside knowledge-bridging discussions on the Cyber and Data Protection Act (CDPA) and its implications for NGOs. The retreat concluded with a grant makers roundtable discussion that brought donors, development agencies, and funders into strategic dialogue about evolving funding priorities and partnership opportunities. Structured action planning and a closing plenary reinforced commitments for sustained collaboration.

The 15th edition of the NANGO Annual NGO Directors Summer Retreat reaffirmed the sector's collective resolve to adapt to shifting development financing landscapes and defend civic space. Through inclusive and evidence-informed dialogue, the event strengthened shared understanding, built new partnerships, and equipped leaders with practical strategies to navigate the complex operating environment ahead.

Key Messages from the Summer Retreat

The current moment demands honest sector introspection, strategic recalibration, and bold leadership, as traditional CSO operating models are no longer sufficient in a volatile financing and civic space environment.

Strengthening institutional resilience, collective action, and constructive state–CSO engagement is essential to safeguarding civic space while maintaining CSO independence and accountability.

Civic space in Zimbabwe remains highly constrained, differentiated, and securitised, with governance, human rights, women's rights, and youth organisations facing disproportionate pressure due to regulatory and political dynamics.

Despite these challenges, sector resilience is evident through digital innovation, youth organising, regional solidarity, and emerging opportunities for strategic engagement—requiring coordinated advocacy and protection mechanisms.

Regulation itself is not the core challenge; rather, inconsistent, opaque, and securitised implementation of the PVO Amendment Act of 2025 undermines trust, compliance, and effective CSO operations.

Co-creation of regulations, harmonisation of procedures, and capacity-building of frontline officers are critical to building a predictable, proportionate, and enabling regulatory framework for diverse CSOs, including CBOs.

Declining traditional aid is a structural and long-term shift, requiring CSOs to move urgently beyond grant dependency toward diversified, adaptive, and locally grounded financing models.

Sustainable CSOs will be defined by strong governance, deliberate investment in resource mobilisation, collaboration over competition, and clear value propositions linked to measurable impact.

Cross-sector learning and thematic collaboration are essential to building a cohesive civic ecosystem capable of collective response to systemic challenges.

Localisation must move beyond commitments to genuine shifts in power, resources, and decision-making authority toward local CSOs.

A context-specific localisation framework, co-designed by local NGOs and INGOs, is essential for sustainable, community-driven development outcomes.

Compliance with digital governance frameworks such as the CDPA is now a core organisational risk and accountability issue, not a technical afterthought.

CSOs must invest in data protection systems, digital governance, and staff capacity to protect beneficiaries, organisational credibility, and civic trust.

Trust-based, transparent, and locally responsive partnerships are essential to rebuilding confidence between donors, CSOs, and communities.

Introduction and Background

The Annual NGO Directors' Summer Retreat continues to serve as a flagship convening within Zimbabwe's development landscape. CSOs, coordinated by NANGO, lead the retreat as a strategic platform for reflection, renewal, and realignment among NGO leaders. Since its inception, the retreat has provided a structured space for CSOs, development partners, private sector actors, and government stakeholders to analyse emerging trends and co-create practical strategies that advance inclusive and sustainable development.

The 15th edition convened 186 high-level delegates, facilitating peer-to-peer learning, collaboration, and cross-sector engagement. The retreat responds directly to the growing need for CSOs to remain agile and future-fit amid tightening regulatory frameworks, economic volatility, and shifting funding modalities. It also recognises innovation and organisational excellence through the Annual NGO Awards, reinforcing a culture of learning and continuous improvement across the sector.

Building on the momentum and insights generated during the 14th NGO Directors' Summer Retreat, the 15th edition aimed to deepen collective reflection and catalyse strategic action in response to new and emerging complexities facing Zimbabwe's civil society sector. While the previous retreat emphasised collaborative engagement, innovative resource mobilisation, regulatory dialogue, and leadership renewal, the current operating environment demands more decisive and transformative responses.

Key developments—including the enactment of the PVO Amendment Act, reductions in United States Government (USG) funding, preparations for the FATF mutual evaluation, the formulation of the NDS2, and evolving donor priorities—have placed civil society at a critical inflection point. Against this backdrop, the 15th edition adopted a forward-looking orientation under the theme “**Navigating New Frontiers: Development Financing and Civic Space in Transition.**” The retreat underscored the imperative for CSOs not only to adapt, but to lead in reimagining partnerships, strengthening resource mobilisation, and redefining their contribution to national development.

Overall, the retreat served as a critical convergence point for strategy, solidarity, and sustainability at a time marked by transition, uncertainty, and opportunity.

Reach Analysis and Demographic Profiling of Participants

TOTAL PARTICIPANTS	FEMALES	MALES
208	87 (41.8%)	121 (58.2%)

Description Indicator	Males	Females	Youths	PWDs	Total
CSOs Representatives	94	72	27	10	166
Private Sector Representatives	14	6	5	-	20
Development Partners Representatives	7	6	2	1	13
Government Representatives	6	2	-	-	8
International Partners Representatives	-	1	-	-	1
Total	121	87	34	11	208



1 Kickstarting the Program

The 15th edition of the NGO Directors Summer Retreat commenced with a purposeful opening session designed to formally welcome participants, set the tone for the retreat, and establish a shared vision for the engagements ahead. The session outlined the overarching objectives of the retreat and clarified the expected outcomes, providing a clear framework to guide deliberations over the duration of the convening. From the outset, the retreat issued a deliberate challenge to the status quo within the civil society sector. Participants were invited to move beyond familiar narratives and routine affirmations, and instead engage in honest, critical reflection on the deeper structural, strategic, and operational issues confronting CSOs in Zimbabwe. The opening session emphasized that this convening was not about observing tradition for its own sake but about responding to a critical moment that calls for collective introspection, strategic recalibration, and bold redirection.

As noted by the Executive Director of NANGO, Mr. Ernest Nyimai, **“the retreat is not another checkpoint in our annual calendar; rather, it is a pause-and-reflect moment in the sector's rhythm; a moment that demands we face reality and shape the future accordingly.”** The retreat was therefore framed as a space where hard truths could be acknowledged, outdated approaches interrogated, and new pathways for civil society action imagined. A clear call was made for the retreat to serve as a starting point for re-envisioning the future of CSOs in Zimbabwe in a rapidly evolving political, economic, and civic landscape.

The session was officially inaugurated by a distinguished panel of leaders and partners drawn from Civil Society, Government, Development Partners, and Donor Agencies. Dr. Lamiel Phiri opened the proceedings with a theological reflection, grounding the retreat in values of ethical leadership and moral responsibility. Mrs. Pester Siraha, Chairperson of the NANGO National Board, set the pulse for the retreat, highlighting the strategic importance of unity, leadership, and accountability within the sector.

Perspectives from key partners were provided by Mrs. Tafadzwa Muvingi, representing the United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, who shared the UN's reflections on the retreat theme, and Ms. Maria Horno Comet, Head of Governance and Social Sectors at the European Union Delegation to Zimbabwe, who delivered the development partners' perspective. Mr. Charumbira, representing the Masvingo Rural District Council (MRDC), delivered official welcome remarks, reinforcing the importance of constructive engagement

between CSOs and local authorities. The official opening address was delivered by the Deputy Minister of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare, Honourable Advocate Mercy Dinha.

The opening session also featured reflections on continuity and foresight within the sector. Mr. Ernest Nyimai presented a progress update on the resolutions and action agenda arising from the 14th edition of the retreat, while Mr. Isaac Maposa provided key civil society headlines and foresight for 2026, situating the retreat discussions within emerging trends and anticipated challenges.

Overall, the atmosphere of the opening session was vibrant and forward-looking, characterised by the collective energy of sector leaders committed to exploring innovative strategies, strengthening partnerships, and confronting the pressing realities facing NGOs in Zimbabwe. This session effectively set the stage for a dynamic, reflective, and action-oriented retreat.



Theological Reflection and Prayer

The conference started with a theological reflection from Dr Lamiel Phiri. In his opening devotion, he read a verse from Genesis 31:1 that describes Jacob hearing Laban's sons complaining that Jacob had taken all their father's possessions and gained wealth from their father's property, leading to a shift in Laban's attitude towards Jacob and prompting Jacob's decision to flee back to his homeland. In navigating new frontiers, he pointed out that it is up to NGOs to realise potentials around them and look for solution. God promised to be with us and he will sustain us. He called the holy spirit to be with delegates for the two conference days.

Setting the Pulse for the Conference

In setting the pulse for the retreat, the NANGO Board Chairperson, Mrs. Pester Siraha, situated the convening within a moment of profound transition for both Zimbabwean civil society and the global civic landscape. Anchored on the theme “**Navigating New Frontiers: Development Financing and Civic Space in Transition,**” her remarks



underscored the reality of a rapidly changing environment shaped by shifting regulatory frameworks, evolving donor priorities, tightening civic space, geopolitical uncertainty, and growing demands on CSOs to remain relevant, innovative, and sustainable.

She highlighted the significant transformation underway in the development financing ecosystem, marked by abrupt funding disruptions, alongside broader budget contractions and strategic realignments by development partners. These developments, mirrored globally, have intensified competition for limited resources and heightened expectations on CSOs to demonstrate strong governance, financial resilience, local legitimacy, and measurable impact. The Chairperson emphasized that the retreat presents a timely platform for candid engagement with development partners, enabling CSOs to better understand emerging funding trends, priority areas, and collaboration opportunities, while collectively exploring strategies for resource diversification and institutional strengthening.

The Chairperson further contextualized these financing challenges within a broader pattern of democratic backsliding and the shrinking of civic space worldwide. She noted the increasing use of restrictive legislation, bureaucratic controls, digital surveillance, misinformation, and the securitization of civic work through anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism frameworks. In Zimbabwe, these pressures manifest through heightened scrutiny of NGOs, misapplication of compliance requirements at the local level, and persistent narratives that seek to delegitimize civil society. Despite these challenges, she reaffirmed the sector's role as a constructive development partner and a cornerstone of accountable governance, calling for continued advocacy for an enabling environment that allows CSOs to operate independently, participate meaningfully, and amplify community voices. Looking ahead, the Chairperson identified emerging “new frontiers” that demand a more agile, innovative, and united civil society sector. Below are the strategic imperatives that emerged from the remarks:

1. **Strengthening Institutional Resilience and Sustainability:** CSOs must invest in robust governance systems, financial accountability, risk management, and diversified resource mobilization strategies to withstand funding volatility and regulatory pressures.
2. **Defend and Expand Civic Space through Collective Action:** The sector must speak with a unified voice to advocate for an enabling operating environment, counter delegitimizing narratives, and engage constructively with the Regulators while safeguarding independence and autonomy.
3. **Embrace Innovation, Digital Readiness, and Genuine Localisation:** CSOs must adapt to emerging frontiers by strengthening digital governance and compliance, preparing for evolving global regulatory frameworks, and advancing meaningful localisation that shifts power and resources to local actors.

United Nations Perspective around the Conference Theme: Key Remarks

The United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, Mr. Edward Kallon, represented by Ms. Tafadzwa Muvingi, delivered the United Nations' perspective on the conference theme. In her remarks, she underscored three key priorities for strengthening the role and effectiveness of CSOs operating in Zimbabwe.

Recognizing the unique proximity of CSOs to communities, she emphasized the critical importance of building the institutional and technical capacities of local CSOs to enable them to drive sustainable, community-led development from the grassroots upward. She further called on the government to promote an enabling operating environment that guarantees the safety, independence, and effective functioning of CSOs within the communities they serve.

Ms. Muvingi also urged development partners to align their financing approaches in ways that meaningfully empower local CSOs, noting that effective development outcomes depend on direct, flexible, and accessible support to community-based organisations. To move the sector from intent to action, she indicated that UNDP would establish a Zimbabwe CSO–UN local platform to provide a structured space for dialogue on locally grounded priorities and shared solutions. She further highlighted the need to create a pooled, flexible funding mechanism accessible to local NGOs, alongside scaled-up capacity-building initiatives in financial management and grant administration to strengthen accountability and delivery.

To ensure that CSOs remain responsive to emerging trends and challenges, Ms. Muvingi stressed the importance of convening regular multi-stakeholder dialogues that bring together civil society, government, and development partners. In closing, she reaffirmed the United Nations' commitment to walking alongside CSOs as they navigate the new frontiers of development financing and civic space in Zimbabwe.



Development Partners' Perspective around the Conference Theme: Key Remarks

The Head of Governance and Social Sectors at the European Union (EU) Delegation to Zimbabwe, Ms. Maria Horno Comet, delivered the development partners' perspective in line with the theme of the retreat. In her remarks, she emphasized the centrality of safeguarding civic space as a prerequisite for inclusive, accountable, and sustainable development.



Ms. Horno Comet highlighted the importance of collective and forward-looking reflection on the operating environment for civil society, noting that such reflection is essential for understanding emerging risks, addressing structural constraints, and shaping a more inclusive and conducive environment for the future. She stressed that shrinking civic space not only undermines the work of CSOs but also weakens democratic governance, service delivery, and citizen participation, thereby affecting broader development outcomes.

The remarks further underscored the role of dialogue, partnership, and trust-building among CSOs, government, and development partners as key enablers of resilience in a changing global and national context. In this regard, she encouraged CSOs to remain adaptive, innovative, and collaborative in responding to evolving regulatory, financial, and social challenges, while maintaining their independence and accountability to the communities they serve.

In reaffirming the EU's long-standing partnership with civil society in Zimbabwe, Mrs. Horno Comet pledged the EU's continued commitment to supporting Zimbabwean CSOs to strengthen their institutional resilience, advance inclusive and sustainable development, and protect the civic space. She concluded by reiterating the EU's readiness to work alongside CSOs and other stakeholders in navigating the current transitions and in jointly shaping a future where civil society can thrive as a key development and governance actor.

Official Guests Welcome Remarks

Delegates were officially welcomed to Masvingo by the Masvingo Rural District Council (MRDC) Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Mr. Mabviro, who was represented by Mr. Charumbira. In his remarks, he emphasized the importance of strong and constructive partnerships between CSOs and local authorities as a critical driver of inclusive and sustainable development at the community level. He encouraged CSOs to continue complementing government efforts by bridging service delivery gaps, supporting community development initiatives, and strengthening local resilience. At the same time, he reaffirmed the legitimacy of civil society's watchdog role, highlighting the importance of transparency, accountability, and citizen oversight in improving local authority performance and enhancing service delivery outcomes.



Official Conference Opening and Officiation

Honourable Advocate Mercy Dinha, the Deputy Minister of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare, delivered the official opening remarks on behalf of the Guest of Honour, Honourable Minister Edgar Moyo. She acknowledged that the 2025 NGO Directors' Summer Retreat was taking place at a moment of significant transition, both within Zimbabwe and globally, where development financing, governance frameworks, and civic space are undergoing profound change. In this context, she noted that the retreat theme resonated strongly with the realities currently shaping Zimbabwe's development and governance landscape.



The Deputy Minister called on all stakeholders to come together to define a collective and forward-looking pathway, emphasizing that effective collaboration between Government and CSOs must be ambitious in vision, principled in values, and practical in implementation. She framed her address around three interlocking pillars; collaboration between government and CSOs, a disciplined culture of compliance, and steadfast transparency; which she described as essential operating principles for a resilient and impactful civil society sector.

She underscored that these pillars serve as critical enablers for unlocking development financing, extending social protection, improving public service delivery, and safeguarding civic space, ultimately contributing to sustainable and accountable governance. Acknowledging the complexity of contemporary development challenges, she reiterated that such challenges cannot be addressed by the Government alone and require strong partnerships with civil society and other stakeholders.

In reaffirming the government's position, the Deputy Minister pledged the Ministry's commitment to protecting civic space by ensuring that engagement platforms remain accessible, inclusive, and free from harassment or intimidation. She emphasized that a thriving civic space is a public good that strengthens democratic legitimacy and enhances development outcomes. To support compliance and accountability within the sector, she called upon the Registrar of PVOs, the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU), and NANGO to collaborate in providing targeted training for CSOs on financial stewardship, auditing, grant compliance, and reporting, with the aim of reducing non-compliance and strengthening institutional integrity. She further encouraged CSOs to uphold high standards of transparency and compliance while remaining meaningfully engaged in national policy-making processes. In closing, she urged CSOs to align their programmes and interventions with national development blueprints and priority programmes to maximise development impact and coherence.

Key Provocations Emerging from the Remarks



CAN CSOS BALANCE COMPLIANCE AND INDEPENDENCE WITHOUT COMPROMISING THEIR ADVOCACY ROLE?

The emphasis on disciplined compliance and transparency challenges CSOs to strengthen accountability systems while safeguarding their autonomy and critical voice.

IS COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND CSOS SUFFICIENTLY INSTITUTIONALISED TO ADDRESS COMPLEX DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES?

The call for principled and practical collaboration raises questions about how existing engagement platforms can be strengthened to move beyond ad hoc cooperation toward sustained partnership.



HOW CAN ALIGNMENT WITH NATIONAL PRIORITIES COEXIST WITH COMMUNITY-DRIVEN AGENDAS?

The call for alignment with national blueprints invites reflection on how CSOs can harmonize government priorities with grassroots needs and locally defined development pathways.

Revisiting the Troutbeck Resolution and Action Agenda: Where Are We?

In presenting the progress update, the Executive Director of NANGO, Mr. Ernest Nyimai, reflected on the profound and unforeseen shifts that have reshaped the civil society landscape since the 14th NGO Directors' Summer Retreat held in Nyanga in 2024. He noted that the sector now finds itself at a critical juncture, having experienced significant upheavals that have altered the operating environment in ways few had anticipated, most notably the abrupt withdrawal of major development financing, including the cessation of USAID-supported programming.

These developments, he observed, serve as a stark reminder that volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity have become defining features of the civic space and development financing environment. Against this backdrop, he challenged CSO leaders to critically reassess long-held assumptions, strategies, and operational models, many of which are no longer fit for purpose in the current context. He further noted that civic space is not only shrinking but also shifting, requiring greater collaboration, ecosystem thinking, and the abandonment of siloed

approaches.

Enabling Environment

The enactment and partial operationalization of the PVO Amendment Act of 2025 marked a major regulatory shift for CSOs. In response, NANGO sustained high-level advocacy across national, regional, and global platforms, including the 4th round of monitoring under Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC), the Structured Dialogue on Arrears Clearance and Debt Resolution, and engagements with the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). A key outcome of the 14th Retreat was the call for strengthened self-regulation. Progress registered includes the integration of self-regulatory measures into draft Standard Operating Procedures under the PVO Act and the roll-out of the Quality Assurance and Accountability Mechanism (QuAAM), which now serves as a cornerstone for institutional learning, accountability, and sector-led compliance.

Strengthening CSO–State Relations and Trust

To address long-standing tensions and compliance challenges, NANGO institutionalized structured engagement through the Talk to Your Regulator (T2R) initiative. Since the retreat, targeted dialogues have been convened with the PVO Registrar, ZIMRA, NSSA, National Employment Council, Urban Councils, and the Financial Intelligence Unit, with planned engagements underway with POTRAZ. CSOs have also increased participation in Financial Action Task Force (FATF) processes, including the National Risk Assessment and the NPO Sector Risk Assessments.

Rethinking Resource Mobilisation for Sector Resilience

Recognizing growing financial fragility across the sector, the retreat called for diversified and innovative fundraising approaches. NANGO responded by introducing targeted Masterclasses for small to medium CSOs, focusing on leadership, fundraising, and resource mobilisation. These interventions are informed by QuAAM-generated capacity insights, enabling more tailored, equitable, and impact-driven support to organizations most affected by shrinking funding spaces.

Advancing a Contextualised Localisation Agenda

Localisation emerged as a strategic priority for enhancing ownership and sustainability within the civil society ecosystem. Since the retreat, NANGO has partnered with the Zimbabwe Alliance for Humanitarian Action (ZAHA) to deepen dialogue with International NGOs. A major milestone was the inaugural Localization Symposium, which brought together local NGOs and INGOs to begin shaping a Zimbabwe-specific localisation framework. The outcomes of this process now inform the next phase of engagement and implementation

Conference Foresight: What this Moment Requires – Navigating New Frontiers

In delivering the conference foresight, Mr. Isaac Maposa underscored the continued relevance of CSOs as critical stakeholders in Zimbabwe's development discourse. He observed a notable shift in CSO engagement with government; from historically adversarial “them-and-us” dynamics toward more deliberate dialogue, engagement, and collaboration. This transition, he noted, aligns with the government's increasing adoption of a whole-of-society approach to development.

Mr. Maposa emphasised that for this approach to be effective, CSOs must be engaged meaningfully and consistently, not symbolically. He stressed the importance of civil society being present in decision-making spaces where dialogue occurs, and of ensuring that CSO inputs are substantively considered and reflected in policy processes and outcomes. He cited existing engagement platforms, such as the Thematic Working Group on Debt and Arrears, which operates across multiple pillars and includes indicators related to the CSO operating environment, as examples of constructive engagement that should be strengthened and replicated.

Looking ahead to 2026, Mr. Maposa clarified that CSOs are not opposed to regulation in principle. Rather, the sector's concern remains centred on how regulations are designed and implemented. He noted that many of the concerns previously raised around the PVO Amendment Bill persist within the enacted PVO Amendment Act and will continue to be highlighted as subsidiary regulations and implementation frameworks are developed. He concluded by emphasizing that sustained dialogue, transparency, and mutual accountability will be essential to ensuring that regulatory processes protect civic space while enabling CSOs to contribute effectively to national development priorities.



2 Reflection on the State of CSOs Operating Environment – Key Headlines For 2025

State of Civic Space in Zimbabwe 2025 - Headline Findings from the Civic Space Watch Report.

The session sought to provide a platform for collective reflection on the evolving state of the civil society operating environment in Zimbabwe, drawing insights from the Civic Space Watch Report 2025. The presentation and interventions made by discussants highlighted key trends, challenges, and opportunities shaping civic space, including legislative, policy, and any other developments that affected the operations of CSOs in 2025. The session aimed to stimulate a frank and forward-looking dialogue that strengthens sectoral collaboration and collective strategies to safeguard civic space, promote inclusion, and enhance CSOs' contribution to national development.

Moderated by Valerie Zviuya, Executive Director of the Legal Resources Foundation (LRF), the discussion brought together sector leaders to unpack how legislative, economic, and political developments have shaped civic space throughout 2025. The main presentation made by Advocate Wilbert Mandinde, Acting Executive Director of the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, provided a comprehensive analysis of the state of civic space, highlighting how increased securitisation, heightened political pressure, and expanded regulatory control continue to influence CSO operations across the country. The presentation cited that enactment of the PVO Act and the ongoing application of the Patriotic Act have intensified fear within organisations with CSOs working on governance, democracy, elections, and human rights related work disproportionately affected.

The year 2025 was further characterised by stagnant economic conditions, widening social disparities, and deepening political mistrust, all of which have contributed to an increased dependence on CSOs for essential services. Advocate Mandinde's presentation revealed that across provinces, organisations continue to experience various forms of suppression such as surveillance, intimidation, disrupted activities, and restrictions imposed by local authorities and security and law enforcement officials on community meetings. CSOs are also navigating bureaucratic inconsistencies in PVO registration process, delays in feedback on the status of their applications, and inconsistent application of administrative rules.

The presentation further underscored a range of institutional and sector-wide operational deficiencies that continue to undermine the effectiveness, credibility, and sustainability of CSOs. Weak governance structures were identified as a major concern, particularly limited board oversight, unclear roles and responsibilities, and inadequate accountability mechanisms, which expose organisations to both internal mismanagement and external regulatory risk. Inadequate financial controls, including weak financial management systems, limited compliance capacity, and over-reliance on a narrow pool of donors, were noted as factors that heighten organisational vulnerability in an increasingly restrictive and scrutinised environment. The presentation also highlighted limited innovation, with many CSOs struggling to adapt programming models, fundraising approaches, and advocacy strategies to rapidly changing political, economic, and technological contexts. These structural challenges are compounded by widespread staff burnout and leadership fatigue, driven by prolonged exposure to uncertainty, shrinking resources, increased workloads, and persistent surveillance and harassment. Together, these weaknesses constrain organisational resilience, reduce strategic agility, and threaten the long-term sustainability of the civil society sector at a time when communities' reliance on CSOs continues to grow.

Nevertheless, despite the difficult context, some positive developments were noted. These include increased digital innovation, stronger youth organising and resilience, and growing regional solidarity among organisations. The civic space remains highly differentiated, with certain organisations operating in more tolerated environments such as those working on disability rights, child protection, and humanitarian support while others, including women's rights groups, youth organisations, faith-based groups, residents' associations, and CBOs, operate under controlled and closely monitored conditions. Meanwhile, governance, human rights, media, and environmental justice organisations continue to face targeted repression in the form of arrests, surveillance, and interference.

Input from the panellists further enriched the discussion. From the gender perspective, Mercy Jaravani, WCoZ National Coordinator, highlighted the global resurgence of right-wing politics, which has contributed to the rollback of gains in gender equality and feminist policy frameworks. She noted that women's rights organisations have been heavily affected by funding cuts, donor shifts, and a regulatory context that fosters fear and uncertainty. NAYO MERL Manager, McDonald Munyoro's youth perspective revealed the shrinking civic space for young people, evidenced by a worrying youth civic participation index score of 46 out of 100. He pointed out that young people are facing increased harassment, reduced opportunities for participation, and declining investment in accountability and democracy-related initiatives. Leonard Marange, the National Director of FODPZ, commended the passage of the Persons with Disabilities Bill but raised concerns about the absence of strong legal remedies to protect the rights of persons with disabilities. He emphasised that Organisations of Persons with Disabilities continue to face

capacity limitations, stigma, discrimination, and difficulties in meeting PVO registration requirements. Kudakwashe Munemo, the Coordinator of the Alliance for Community-Based Organisations (ACBOs), described the volatile and uncertain environment in which CBOs operate, highlighting bureaucratic delays, financial constraints, inconsistent regulatory enforcement, and knowledge gaps among officials.

The panellists shared sector-specific realities that brought the picture into sharper relief. Women's rights groups confront cultural pushback and political suspicion but are leveraging digital mobilisation and strategic litigation. Youth organisations remain under surveillance yet are among the most innovative actors in the space. CBOs enjoy strong community trust but face political interference, particularly during elections. Disability groups contend with chronic underfunding and tokenistic inclusion, while humanitarian organizations navigate heavily controlled environments linked to politicized aid. Despite the obstacles, opportunities and signs of resilience emerged. CSOs are increasingly organizing digitally, youth demonstrate remarkable resilience, regional solidarity is growing, and there are small but meaningful openings for constructive engagement as government officials acknowledge the importance of civil society.

The plenary also highlighted concerns about the shrinking of media freedom, especially for organisations working on civil and political rights. Discussions further revealed donor shifts in priority areas such as humanitarian assistance, the Ukraine war, and disaster risk reduction, which have contributed to reduced funding for gender-specific programming. Participants also underscored the critical importance of prioritizing staff wellness within CSO programming, given the stress, uncertainty, and difficult decisions many organisations face. Finally, the deliberations underscored the need to explore and embrace alternative funding models, greater innovation, domestic resource mobilisation, and sustained advocacy for progressive allocation of resources towards gender and social development institutions from the national budget.

Key Recommendations and Strategic Insights from the Session

a) Safeguarding Civic Space and Regulatory Practice

Insight: The enactment of the PVO Amendment Act and continued application of the Patriotic Act have intensified fear, surveillance, and operational constraints, particularly for governance, democracy, human rights, media, and environmental justice organisations. The challenge is not regulation per se, but how it is implemented.

Recommendations:

- The PVO Regulator must ensure proportional, predictable, and non-discriminatory implementation of the PVO Amendment Act and related laws.

- The PVO Registrar must clarify compliance requirements and halt the securitised application of legislation against CSOs, as well as establish clear administrative timelines and feedback mechanisms for PVO registration and renewals.
- NANGO, in collaboration with other CSOs, must continue coordinated advocacy on subsidiary regulations under the PVO Amendment Act and document implementation gaps through Civic Space Watch.
- Further, NANGO must consider expanding structured engagement platforms leveraging on its Talk to Your Regulator #T2R to address misapplication of the laws and regulations at local authority and law enforcement agencies.
- Local Authorities and law enforcement agencies must improve their understanding of CSO legal frameworks to reduce arbitrary restrictions, meeting disruptions, and surveillance.

b) Addressing Shrinking and Differentiated Civic Space

Insight: Civic space in Zimbabwe is highly uneven. While humanitarian, disability, and child protection organisations operate in relatively tolerated environments, women's rights, youth, governance, and human rights organisations face targeted repression.

Recommendations:

- Donors and development partners are implored to avoid “safe-sector bias” and ensure funding reaches organisations operating in high-risk thematic areas such as governance, women's rights, youth participation, and accountability.
- Further, grant makers are encouraged to consider introducing flexible and risk-aware funding instruments that recognise contextual realities.
- NANGO, as the coordinating body, should promote cross-sector solidarity and protection mechanisms for organisations operating in high-risk spaces, at the same time, strengthen rapid response and documentation of violations against targeted CSOs.
- Media-focused organisations should amplify visibility of civic space restrictions and protect freedom of expression and association.

c) Gender, Youth, Disability, and CBO Inclusion

Insight: Women's rights, youth-led organisations, disability groups, and CBOs face compounded challenges such as funding cuts, restrictive regulation, stigma, and limited participation in policy processes; despite being critical to community resilience and inclusion.

Recommendations:

- Government must institutionalise meaningful participation of women, youth, persons with disabilities, and CBOs in policy formulation and local governance processes.
- Government should also strengthen legal remedies and enforcement mechanisms under the Persons with Disabilities Act.

- Donors should reconsider their priorities to reverse declining investment in gender equality, feminist movements, youth civic participation, and disability inclusion.
- NANGO, working with other CSOs, should sustain advocacy for inclusive compliance pathways that do not exclude smaller, community-based, and disability-focused organisations.
- NANGO should also continue to explore targeted capacity development support for OPDs and CBOs to meet regulatory and funding requirements.

d) Institutional Weaknesses and Sector Sustainability

Insight: Weak governance systems, inadequate financial controls, limited innovation, staff burnout, and leadership fatigue are undermining CSO effectiveness and sustainability in an increasingly hostile environment.

Recommendations:

- NANGO should strengthen and scale up the capacity development and sector accountability models as part of its CSOs institutional strengthening initiatives, leveraging the QuAAM program.
- NANGO should also promote staff wellness, safeguarding, and organisational care as core components of sector resilience.
- CSOs should prioritise internal governance reforms, leadership renewal, and staff wellbeing to sustain long-term impact.
- Donors and development partners should consider funding organisational development, wellness, and leadership transition, not only project outputs.

e) Resource Constraints and Donor Shifts

Insight: Global donor reprioritisation toward humanitarian crises, geopolitical conflicts, and disaster risk reduction has reduced funding for gender, youth, democracy, and governance-focused programming, deepening sector vulnerability.

Recommendations:

- Donors are implored to consider supporting alternative financing models, including pooled funds, flexible grants, and localisation-aligned financing.
- NANGO should facilitate and lead sector dialogue on alternative funding models, domestic resource mobilisation discussions, and private sector engagement.



3 Meet and Talk to your Regulator (#T2R)

230 Days After the Enactment of the PVO Amendment Bill: Progress Status.

This interactive session provided an opportunity for CSOs leaders to interface with the PVO Registrar and addressing issues pertaining to the PVO Amendment Act. The session offered an opportunity to take stock of progress made in operationalizing the new Act, clarify registration and compliance processes, and address questions or concerns emerging from the sector. The session ultimately aimed to foster a spirit of cooperation and partnership in navigating the new regulatory landscape, ensuring that CSOs continue to operate effectively while upholding accountability, legality, and good governance principles.

During the session, a range of key deliberations took place as CSOs and the PVO Registrar, Mr. Tirivavi Totamirepi, deliberated on experiences since the promulgation of the new law. The Registrar emphasized the positive momentum in registrations and compliance, highlighting the need for greater input from CSOs in shaping the draft regulations that will accompany the new Act. It emerged during the deliberations that the Registrar should recognize the different sizes of PVOs, with suggestions for tailored board member requirements for smaller organizations, including CBOs. The collaborative and co-creation approach was widely supported, with a consensus that involving CSOs in the design, drafting, and validation of the regulatory framework will foster a more inclusive environment and stronger buy-in.

Further discussions included the need to streamline the application process in pursuit of a smooth and seamless registration process. A commitment was made by the PVO Registrar that the Ministry aims to clear at least 250 submitted applications by the end of February 2026. CSOs raised a range of concerns, highlighting both systemic gaps and operational difficulties that continue to affect their work.

- **Administrative and Procedural Gaps:** CSOs reported the absence of clear registration procedures and guidelines, resulting in inconsistent registration requirements across districts and provinces. Missing or lost files due to poor handover systems, excessive paperwork, unclear documentation requirements, and lengthy processing and vetting periods were cited as persistent barriers to timely registration and compliance. These

administrative inefficiencies were highlighted as a source of frustration and uncertainty for organisations seeking to operate legally.

- **Knowledge and Capacity Limitations:** Delegates expressed concern over the limited capacity of some of the Department of Social Development (DSD) officers, particularly at the district level. Many frontline officers reportedly have insufficient training and a limited understanding of the new PVO Amendment Act, leading to inconsistent or inaccurate responses to enquiries from CSOs. This knowledge gap not only delays the registration process but also undermines trust between regulators and civil society actors.
- **Attitudinal and Conduct-Related Challenges:** CSOs highlighted negative attitudes and unprofessional conduct from some officials, including discouragement against using terms such as advocacy, governance, human rights, elections, and intimidating interview practices. Such behaviours were noted to create an environment of fear and reluctance, deterring open engagement and undermining the principles of a supportive regulatory framework.
- **Dual Regulation and Local Authority Hurdles:** The interface revealed challenges arising from overlapping requirements between the DSD and local authorities. CSOs cited arbitrary MoU fees, inconsistent demands for levies such as the 1% administrative fee, and arbitrary directives from local authorities demanding that compelling organisations secure clearance letters. A lack of harmonisation between DSD processes and local council requirements was reported to complicate compliance and restrict operational flexibility.
- **Transparency and Communication Weaknesses:** Limited feedback on submitted requirements, unclear application status, and the absence of effective tracking or follow-up mechanisms were highlighted as major impediments. CSOs emphasised that these communication gaps prolong uncertainty, impede planning, and increase the risk of project delays or donor withdrawal.

Key Recommendations and Strategic Insights from the Session

a) Streamlining Administrative and Procedural Processes

Insight: CSOs reported inconsistent registration procedures across districts and provinces, missing or lost files, excessive paperwork, and prolonged vetting periods, creating uncertainty and delays in operationalisation.

Recommendations:

- The MoPSLSW expeditiously finalise and disseminate clear regulations to harmonise registration processes across all provinces and districts.
- The PVO Regulator should consider introducing an efficient, digitised tracking system for applications to reduce delays, ease follow-up, and mitigate against cases of lost documentation.

- The PVO Registrar should regularly provide progress updates and predictable timelines for registration and compliance processes.
- NANGO should continue to support CSOs in understanding and navigating procedural requirements through targeted guidance, toolkits, and awareness campaigns.

b) Strengthening Knowledge and Capacity of Frontline Officers

Insight: Limited understanding of the PVO Amendment Act among DSD officers, especially at the district level, leads to inconsistent guidance and undermines trust between CSOs and regulators.

Recommendations:

- The MoPSLSW should expeditiously conduct structured capacity-building and refresher training for officers on the PVO Amendment Act, compliance obligations, and engagement protocols.
- The PVO Registrar should consider developing a manual aimed at standardizing officer responses to CSO enquiries and providing accessible guidance documents for frontline staff.
- NANGO should collaborate with MoPSLSW in facilitating training sessions and co-create learning resources with DSD to ensure knowledge consistency.

c) Improving Attitudes, Conduct, and Professionalism

Insight: CSOs highlighted unprofessional conduct, negative attitudes, and discouragement of terms such as “advocacy” and “human rights,” which create fear and restrict open dialogue.

Recommendations:

- MoPSLSW should promote a code of conduct for all officers engaging with CSOs, emphasising professionalism, respect, and facilitative approaches.
- The PVO Registrar should sensitise staff on the importance of neutral, non-intimidating engagement, especially during interviews and site visits.
- NANGO should consider developing a feedback mechanism where CSOs can report unprofessional conduct without fear of reprisal in real time.

d) Harmonising Dual Regulation and Local Authority Requirements

Insight: Overlapping mandates between the DSD and local authorities, such as arbitrary MoU fees and clearance letter requirements, complicate compliance and restrict operational flexibility.

Recommendations:

- The Government should harmonise DSD and local council requirements, including clearances, documentation, and operational directives.
- The laws and policies in place should clarify roles and responsibilities to avoid duplication or contradictory instructions.

e) Fostering Co-Creation and Inclusive Regulatory Design

Insight: CSOs expressed strong support for collaborative drafting of subsidiary regulations, with recognition that smaller organisations and CBOs require tailored requirements.

Recommendations:

- The PVO Registrar should maintain the current practice of ensuring that CSOs are meaningfully involved in co-creating, drafting, and validating instruments that seek to regulate them.
- The Registrar should consider having tailored registration and board requirements to reflect the size and capacity of different PVOs, including small and CBOs.
- NANGO should continue to coordinate and facilitate inclusive consultations and provide technical input to ensure practical, contextually relevant regulatory frameworks.



4 The Future of Development Financing – From Aid Cuts to Adaptive Sustainability

The Current Funding Landscape: Key Highlights

This session examined the rapidly evolving global development financing landscape and its implications for CSOs in Zimbabwe. With traditional aid flows declining, donor priorities shifting, and increased pressure for locally led development models, organisations are being pushed to adopt new approaches to resource mobilisation and long-term sustainability. The discussion explored how aid reductions, global economic pressures, and reorganised donor strategies are reshaping the funding environment, while also reflecting on experiences of organisations navigating this transition. The session highlighted the need for CSOs to diversify income sources, build stronger partnerships, and deepen financial resilience through planning, accountability, and transparency to strengthen trust with donors, communities, and government. The keynote presentation on “The Current Funding Landscape: Key Highlights” was delivered by Ms. Melanie Assauer, Resource Development and Donor Engagement Director at World Vision Zimbabwe, under the moderation of Mr. Tafadzwa Chikumbu, Executive Director of Transparency International Zimbabwe (TI Z). Panel contributions came from Ms. Ennie Chipembere from EC Learning and Careers (ECLC), Mr. Gcinekile Masiye the Secretary General of Young Men Christian Association (YMCA), Dr. Donald Tobaiwa the Executive Director of Jointed Hands Welfare Organisation (JHWO), and Mrs. Muchanyara Mukamuri the Executive Director of Self-Help Development Foundation (SHDF).

In her presentation, Ms Assauer provided a comprehensive analysis of how current global financing trends are affecting civil society. She noted that foreign assistance has been steadily shrinking, with some major donors withdrawing or reducing funding, and cited the Global Fund's 11% reduction as an example of the growing funding gap. She stressed the need for CSOs to conduct continuous self-analysis to understand their sustainability strengths and vulnerabilities. Her discussion emphasized four critical pillars for resilience: diversification of income, improved fundraising strategies, organisational restructuring, and institutional agility. Melanie implored Civil Society leaders to proactively engage in donor mapping, develop clear engagement plans, and build strong trust-based relationships with partners. She also encouraged organisations to remain focused on their core competencies, forecast funding trends through cost-driver analysis, invest deliberately in resource mobilisation, streamline operations, and adopt

collaborative rather than siloed approaches. She further emphasized that collaboration with the private sector and government can provide new avenues for learning, resource sharing, and innovative partnership models.

The panel discussion further illuminated how funding shifts have influenced programming, partnerships, and organisational sustainability across the sector. Ms. Chipembere described the current funding climate as a “painful opportunity,” explaining that organisations typically respond with either flight, freeze, or fight. She stressed that many institutions remain stuck in the ‘freeze’ mode, yet survival requires intentional action and strategic adaptation. Ennie outlined essential steps for navigating transition, including revisiting organisational missions, rethinking programming models and theories of change, ensuring governance and leadership structures are fit for purpose, assessing whether systems and technologies are efficient, diversifying funding models, and prioritizing the human resource component, which ultimately drives impact.

Mr. Masiye reflected on practical mechanisms for resilience, highlighting the revenue-generating potential of restructured institutional assets, engagement with private sector actors through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) opportunities, and the importance of donor and partner mapping. She underscored the value of collaboration over competition and encouraged organisations to enhance their visibility by consistently sharing success stories and strengthening their brand identity.

From a sustainability perspective, Ms. Mukamuri offered insights from SHDF's six decades of existence, noting that long-term survival requires clear visioning, investment in organisational assets, and building community systems that can continue functioning even without the organisation's direct support. She emphasized that resilience is strengthened through locally driven development, proactive engagement with private sector partners, collaborative approaches, and creative fundraising initiatives such as sporting events, galas, and community-based income-generating activities.

Dr. Tobaiwa reinforced the need for innovation and adaptive thinking, urging organisations to shift their mindsets and embrace technologies, particularly given the lessons from COVID-19. He emphasized the importance of creating strong investment cases, sharpening organisational value propositions, prioritizing high-impact interventions, and participating in consortia and partnerships that align with institutional strengths. He noted that organisational worth is increasingly determined by measurable impact, value for money, relevance, and effective community engagement.

The plenary discussion broadened the conversation by examining what practical steps the sector must take to remain viable. Participants underscored the importance of unrestricted co-funding, reserve income building, and strategic progression toward social enterprise models. There was strong interest in establishing fundraising committees, exploring mergers and acquisitions where appropriate, and introducing consistent capacity-building sessions to equip organisations with modern financing skills. Participants also raised questions about the viability of new revenue models, the need for improved branding to remain “**findable and fundable**,” and possible tax reforms to support CSO operations.

The discussion emphasized that co-funding offers significant opportunities for partnerships with the private sector and can support the creation of business units designed to generate income. The session closed with a reflection on government–CSO collaboration, noting that historically, CSOs have complemented government efforts during major crises such as the HIV/AIDS epidemic, food insecurity, and refugee support. Participants reaffirmed the importance of collaborative approaches, with the government providing enabling policy frameworks while CSOs support service delivery, social protection, and development interventions.

Key Recommendations and Strategic Insights from the Session

a) Declining Aid and Structural Funding Shifts

Insight: Traditional donor funding is steadily shrinking due to global economic pressures, geopolitical conflicts, and shifting donor priorities. These reductions are structural rather than temporary, leaving CSOs highly exposed if they continue to rely on single-donor or grant-dependent models.

Recommendations:

- The donors are encouraged to consider providing longer-term, predictable, and flexible funding that supports institutional sustainability, not just project delivery.
- Donors may also support transition financing, co-funding arrangements, and unrestricted or semi-flexible grants.

b) Overdependence on Single Funding Streams

Insight: Many CSOs remain overly dependent on a narrow range of donors and thematic funding areas, increasing institutional fragility and limiting strategic autonomy.

Recommendations:

- CSOs are encouraged to diversify income sources through social enterprise models, private sector partnerships, asset utilisation, and community-based fundraising.
- CSOs should regularly conduct donor and partner mapping to identify new and non-traditional funding opportunities.

- NANGO should facilitate and provide guidance, learning platforms, and peer exchange on diversified funding models and income generation.
- Donors should consider incentivising diversification by supporting pilot income-generation initiatives and blended financing approaches.

c) Need for Stronger Resource Mobilisation Capacity

Insight: Weak internal fundraising capacity, limited donor engagement strategies, and underinvestment in resource mobilisation functions are undermining CSO sustainability.

Recommendations:

- CSOs should establish dedicated fundraising or resource mobilisation structures that are institutionalised.
- CSOs should also invest in staff skills, systems, and tools for fundraising, proposal development, and donor stewardship.
- NANGO should continue to facilitate targeted capacity-building on fundraising, donor engagement, branding, and financial forecasting.
- Donors should also consider funding organisational development and fundraising capacity as a legitimate programmatic cost.

d) Governance, Leadership, and Human Capital as Sustainability Drivers

Insight: Organisational survival is increasingly shaped by leadership quality, governance effectiveness, staff wellbeing, and institutional culture. Leadership fatigue and weak governance undermine adaptability.

Recommendations:

- CSOs should reassess governance and leadership structures to ensure they are fit for purpose in a constrained funding environment.
- CSOs leaders should prioritise staff wellness, retention, and performance management as core sustainability investments.
- NANGO should promote leadership development, board effectiveness training, and peer learning among CSO leaders.
- Donors should recognise governance strengthening and staff wellbeing as critical components of impact and sustainability.

e) Collaboration Over Competition

Insight: Siloed operations and competition for shrinking resources weaken sector resilience, while collaboration, consortia, and shared services improve efficiency, scale, and fundability.

Recommendations:

- CSOs should pursue consortium models, shared services, and joint programming aligned to comparative strengths.
- Donors should design funding instruments that reward collaboration rather than competition.

f) Accountability, Impact, and Value for Money

Insight: Fundability is increasingly determined by measurable impact, transparency, relevance, and value for money. Organisations without strong evidence of impact are at risk of exclusion.

Recommendations:

- CSOs should strengthen monitoring, evaluation, learning, and reporting systems as well as clearly articulate organisational value propositions and impact narratives.
- NANGO should support sector-wide learning on impact measurement and results-based reporting.
- Donors should apply accountability standards proportionately and support systems strengthening to meet them.

g) Alternative Financing and Social Enterprise Models

Insight: There is growing interest in social enterprises, reserve income building, and co-funding with the private sector, but many CSOs lack the technical capacity and policy support to operationalise these models.

Recommendations:

- CSOs should pilot social enterprise and income-generating initiatives aligned with organisational missions.
- NANGO should lead in research, learning, and advocacy on alternative financing and social enterprise within the CSO sector.
- Government should consider reviewing tax, registration, and regulatory frameworks to support CSO income-generating activities without punitive restrictions.



5 Work Stream Side Sessions - Towards a Resilient and Vibrant Civic Ecosystem in Zimbabwe

Session 5 comprised three thematic work stream side sessions designed to deepen sectoral reflection and practical learning around accountability, transparency, civic participation, and resilience within Zimbabwe's evolving civic ecosystem. The side sessions provided delegates with an opportunity to engage in focused, issue-specific dialogues that complemented the main plenary discussions, while enabling more nuanced exploration of complex challenges and emerging opportunities facing civil society.

Anchored on the shared objective of strengthening a resilient, responsive, and accountable civic space, the three work streams brought together government actors, civil society leaders, researchers, and development partners to exchange perspectives, share evidence, and identify actionable pathways for reform and collaboration. Collectively, the sessions underscored the interdependence between effective governance, sustainable resourcing, citizen engagement, and the protection of rights in advancing inclusive and sustainable development.

Work Stream 1, Co-Creating Accountability: The Role of Government, Civil Society, and Citizens in Promoting Accountability and Transparency | Sponsored by the Zimbabwe Institute (ZI)

The work stream examined multi-stakeholder approaches to accountability, emphasizing the importance of constructive state–civil society relations and active citizen participation in strengthening transparency and public trust.

Hosted by ZI, this side session convened participants largely drawn from the human rights, governance, and accountability sectors to reflect on practical pathways for strengthening accountability and transparency in Zimbabwe. The discussion underscored that accountability is a shared responsibility that requires deliberate and coordinated action by civil society, government, and citizens.

Participants emphasized that for civil society to credibly demand accountability from the state, CSOs must first demonstrate strong internal governance, financial integrity, and ethical

leadership. This includes robust internal controls, compliance with statutory and donor requirements, adherence to existing laws, timely delivery on commitments, and transparent reporting to both funders and communities. The session highlighted the importance of CSOs “walking the talk,” particularly for organisations working on human rights, by modelling accountability, safeguarding beneficiaries, and reporting financial or ethical violations.

From a citizen perspective, the session stressed meaningful participation as a cornerstone of accountability. Participants highlighted the need for citizens to be actively involved at all stages of public decision-making and development programming, with deliberate inclusion of women, youth, and persons with disabilities. The protection of basic civic freedoms, including the right to petition, demonstrate, and access information, was seen as essential for enabling citizens to hold duty bearers to account.

The role of government was framed around creating an enabling environment for accountability to thrive. Key expectations included the appointment of competent and responsive public officials, effective implementation of devolution to bring services closer to communities, respect for human rights, protection of media freedom, and adherence to the principle of separation of powers. Participants stressed that transparent feedback and follow-up mechanisms on investigations, commissions, and public processes are critical for restoring public trust and strengthening democratic governance.

Key Recommendations and Strategic Insights from the Session

a) Accountability Begins with Credible and Ethical Civil Society Practice

Insight: CSOs' ability to hold government and other actors to account is directly linked to their own governance standards, transparency, and accountability to communities.

Recommendations:

- CSOs to strengthen internal controls, publish audit reports, comply with statutory and labour requirements, and ensure regular feedback to beneficiaries and constituencies.
- NANGO to continue work around sector-wide standards on self-regulation, ethical practice, safeguarding, and accountability.
- Donors to consider supporting governance, compliance, and institutional strengthening initiatives within CSOs.

b) Citizen Participation Is Central to Effective Accountability

Insight: Accountability mechanisms are weakened when citizens are excluded from decision-making processes or denied basic civic freedoms.

Recommendations:

- Government to guarantee inclusive participation in public processes and protect fundamental freedoms such as expression, assembly, and petition.
- CSOs to design programmes that embed citizen and beneficiary participation across the full project cycle, with deliberate inclusion of women, youth, and persons with disabilities.

c) Enabling Governance Systems Are Essential for Sustainable Accountability

Insight: Accountability cannot be sustained without responsive state institutions, functional devolution, media freedom, and respect for the separation of powers.

Recommendations:

- Government to appoint competent public officials, strengthen feedback mechanisms, implement devolution effectively, uphold human rights, and protect media independence.
- CSOs to strategically combine watchdog functions with constructive policy recommendations and engagement with duty bearers.
- CSOs to facilitate structured platforms for government–CSO–citizen, tripartite, dialogue to rebuild trust and improve accountability outcomes.

Work Stream 2: Dialogue on Resource and Accountability Issues in Public Health I

Sponsored by TI Z.

This work stream focused on the intersection between shrinking development financing, corruption risks, and service delivery in the health sector. The session highlighted the implications of donor withdrawal, weaknesses in domestic accountability systems, and the critical role of civic oversight in safeguarding equitable access to health services.

Hosted by TI Z, the work stream provided a critical examination of the systemic challenges facing Zimbabwe's health sector amid declining donor support, entrenched corruption risks, and a shrinking civic space. Moderated by John Maketo, the session brought together technical, governance, and research perspectives from Lewis Kajawu (Crown Agency), Dakarai Matanga (TI Z), and Retlaw Matorwa (Harare Institute of Public Health).

The discussion revealed that Zimbabwe's health system remains heavily dependent on external financing, with approximately 80% of essential medicines and nearly all HIV-related commodities funded by development partners. The temporary suspension of US Government support for HIV programmes in early 2025 significantly disrupted medicine supply chains, weakened donor-backed oversight mechanisms, and exposed vulnerabilities in domestic procurement, logistics, and accountability systems. Participants highlighted that medicine shortages, coupled with weak transparency in domestic funding mechanisms such as the AIDS Levy, have intensified risks of corruption, black-market diversion, informal payments, and

inequitable access to care.

The session further underscored that donor withdrawal not only reduces financial resources but also dismantles monitoring and accountability structures, leaving domestic systems susceptible to political interference and rent-seeking. At the same time, shrinking civic space and reduced funding for civil society oversight constrain independent monitoring, data analysis, and evidence-based advocacy. From a public health and research perspective, corruption within procurement and service delivery was shown to have direct and disproportionate impacts on vulnerable populations, contributing to widening health inequalities and persistently poor outcomes, including high maternal mortality linked to drug stockouts. Overall, the session emphasised the urgent need to strengthen domestic accountability systems, restore supply chain transparency, protect civic space, and invest in sustainable, locally driven health financing and production models.

Key Recommendations and Strategic Insights from the Session

a) Donor Withdrawal Has Exposed Fragile Accountability and Supply Chain Systems

Insight: The reduction and suspension of donor funding have not only created financing gaps but also dismantled critical oversight and logistics systems, increasing risks of medicine stockouts, diversion, and corruption across the health supply chain.

Recommendations:

- Government to restore end-to-end supply chain visibility by fully deploying and sustaining systems such as Electronic Logistics Management Information System (ELMIS) and ensuring regular audits from procurement to service delivery points.
- Donors should consider supporting transitional financing and technical assistance to prevent the collapse of accountability and monitoring systems during funding exits.
- CSOs to strengthen independent monitoring of medicine availability and procurement processes, using evidence to inform advocacy and public accountability.

b) Weak Transparency in Domestic Health Financing Undermines Trust and Equity

Insight: Domestic financing mechanisms, including the AIDS Levy, lack sufficient transparency, ring-fencing, and public reporting, limiting their effectiveness and eroding confidence among stakeholders and beneficiaries.

Recommendations:

- Government to improve transparency and public reporting on domestic health funds, including clear ring-fencing, expenditure tracking, and timely disclosure of disbursements.
- NANGO and CSOs to strengthen and intensify advocacy for open budget processes and support social accountability initiatives that track health financing and expenditure.

c) Corruption in Health Systems Disproportionately Harms Vulnerable Populations

Insight: Corruption within procurement, stock management, and service delivery has direct consequences on health outcomes, particularly for women, persons with disabilities, adolescents, and low-income communities, widening existing inequalities.

Recommendations:

- Government to strengthen regulatory frameworks to reduce political interference in health procurement and enforce accountability across all levels of the system.
- CSOs and Media to work towards protecting and expanding civic space and media freedoms to enable whistleblowing, investigative reporting, and citizen oversight in the health sector.
- Donors and the private sector should consider supporting investments in local pharmaceutical manufacturing and African-led health innovations to reduce dependency on external supply chains and enhance long-term resilience.

Work Stream 3: Engaging CSOs Leaders to End Digital Violence Against Women and Girls | Sponsored by the Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe (WCoZ)

The work stream explored the growing threat of technology-facilitated Gender-Based Violence (GBV). The discussion centred on strengthening CSO leadership, advocacy, and collective action to promote digital safety, protect women's rights online, and advance gender justice in an increasingly digital civic space.

The WCoZ workstream focused on the growing threat of Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV) against women and girls, aligning with the 16 Days of Activism theme, “**Unite to End Digital Violence Against All Women and Girls.**” The session provided a platform for CSO leaders to reflect on emerging trends, share evidence, and identify practical actions to address digital violence in an increasingly technology-driven society.

Discussions highlighted the alarming prevalence of TFGBV globally and in Zimbabwe, with evidence showing that two in three women worldwide have experienced some form of digital violence, and that women journalists and young women in Zimbabwe are particularly affected. Participants examined the diverse and evolving forms of TFGBV, including online sexual harassment, cyberstalking, hate speech, cyberbullying, revenge pornography, and online grooming, noting that children, adolescents, and women in public spaces are especially vulnerable.

The session emphasized the critical role of CSO leadership in driving collective action, advocating for stronger policy and legal frameworks, and adopting survivor-centred approaches to prevention, response, and support. Participants stressed the importance of leveraging

existing legal instruments such as the Cyber and Data Protection Act, while also addressing emerging risks linked to artificial intelligence and rapidly evolving digital platforms. Capacity gaps among law enforcement, commissions, and duty bearers, as well as limited public awareness of TFGBV, were identified as key barriers to effective prevention and accountability.

The workstream concluded with a call for sustained collaboration between civil society, government, and other stakeholders to strengthen policy responses, promote cultural and community-based approaches, and ensure inclusive strategies that respond to the specific vulnerabilities of marginalized groups, including persons with disabilities.

Key Recommendations and Strategic Insights from the Session

a) TFGBV is Widespread and Escalating

Insight: TFGBV has reached alarming levels, disproportionately affecting women and girls, particularly those in public, professional, and digital spaces, with new technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) intensifying both the scale and invisibility of abuse.

Recommendations:

- Government to strengthen and enforce laws and policies addressing TFGBV, including effective implementation of the Cyber and Data Protection Act.
- CSOs to intensify evidence-based advocacy, documentation, and survivor support services, with a focus on prevention and accountability.
- Tech companies and Regulators to be held accountable for safeguarding users and addressing platform-enabled abuse.

b) Survivor-Centred and Inclusive Approaches are Essential

Insight: Effective responses to TFGBV must prioritise the voices, safety, and needs of survivors, while recognising the heightened vulnerabilities faced by groups such as persons with disabilities, children, and young women.

Recommendations:

- Donors to consider funding survivor-centred programming, including psychosocial support, legal aid, and digital safety initiatives.
- CSOs to design inclusive interventions that address the specific needs of women and girls with disabilities and other marginalised groups.
- Government and independent commission(s) to strengthen referral pathways and protection mechanisms for survivors of digital violence.

c) Collective Action, Awareness, and Capacity Building are Critical to Prevention

Insight: Weak awareness, limited technical capacity among duty bearers, and fragmented

responses undermine efforts to prevent and respond to TFGBV.

Recommendations:

- Coalition like WCoZ to continue convening platforms for dialogue, coordination, and joint advocacy on digital violence.
- Law enforcement agencies and independent commission(s) to invest in capacity-building on TFGBV, digital evidence handling, and survivor-sensitive approaches.
- CSOs and community leaders to leverage cultural and community-based approaches to raise awareness and promote safer digital environments.



6 Preparations for the FATF Mutual Evaluation 2026 – CSOs Readiness and Civic Safeguards

Knowledge Bridging on FATF Mutual Evaluation Exercise

Session six focused on strengthening the understanding and preparedness of CSOs ahead of Zimbabwe's forthcoming FATF Mutual Evaluation scheduled for 2026–2027. The session was moderated by Mr. Ernest Nyimai, Executive Director of NANGO, and featured a keynote presentation by Mr. Tichafa Chigaba, Deputy Director at the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) Zimbabwe. The discussion was enriched by a multi-stakeholder panel comprising Mr. Totamirepi Tirivavi, PVO Registrar, Ms. Hilder Achiro, Head of Programmes at Civic Advisory Hub, and Advocate Wilbert Mandinde, Acting Director of the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, representing civil society perspectives.

The session provided a knowledge-bridging platform between regulators and civil society, situating the FATF Mutual Evaluation within Zimbabwe's broader civic space and regulatory environment. It was noted that Zimbabwe was removed from the FATF grey list in 2022 and is now preparing for the third round Mutual Evaluation cycle having been assessed last in 2016. Moving forward, the Mutual Evaluation cycle has shifted from a ten-year to a six-year interval meaning Zimbabwe will be due for its fourth assessment in 2032. While Zimbabwe is not considered to be at high risk of terrorism financing, the country remains vulnerable to being used as a conduit due to contextual factors such as its geographic proximity to conflict-affected regions, the use of multiple currencies, and the rapid expansion of the religious sector.

Mr. Chigaba outlined that under the Mutual Evaluation process, Non-Profit Organisations (NPOs) are assessed primarily in relation to Terrorism Financing risks under FATF Recommendation 8, with Zimbabwe currently rated as partially compliant on this recommendation. This rating was cited as one of the drivers behind the amendment of the PVO Act. Findings from the FIU-led NPO risk assessment were shared, noting that Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs) were assessed as relatively higher risk compared to other NPO categories, although the overall terrorism financing risk typology was assessed as medium-low. The assessment also extends to evaluating the effectiveness of regulatory frameworks in addressing proliferation financing risks.

The session further explored the broader civic space implications of FATF processes. Regulators encouraged CSOs to strengthen compliance to avoid unintended consequences. However, discussants cautioned against the securitisation and weaponisation of AML/CFT/CPF measures, particularly in contexts where FATF pressure leads to regulatory overreach. Research done by Civic Advisory Hub highlighted comparative experiences, including Uganda, where grey-listing triggered the enactment of multiple laws with limited sector understanding, some of which were later used to constrain civil society despite being framed as compliance measures.

Participants reflected on the historical exclusion of Zimbabwean civil society from previous Mutual Evaluation exercises and broader AML/CFT/CPF processes. The discussion revealed persistent knowledge gaps within the sector, particularly regarding evaluation procedures, compliance expectations, documentation requirements, and navigating inconsistent regulatory practices. The session underscored the importance of CSOs fully and effectively participating in the upcoming Mutual Evaluation process, including planned sector-specific consultations with assessors covering NPOs, Faith-Based Organisations, and other designated non-financial entities.

Overall, the session reaffirmed that the FATF Mutual Evaluation is both a risk and an opportunity for civic space. Without proactive and informed engagement, there is a danger that international compliance obligations could be used to justify disproportionate restrictions on civil society. At the same time, the process presents an opportunity for CSOs to influence national risk assessments and policy responses to ensure that AML/CFT/CPF measures are risk-based, proportionate, and respectful of legitimate civic activity. Particular emphasis was placed on Immediate Outcome 10, which assesses whether countries apply focused and proportionate mitigation measures to NPOs without disrupting or discouraging their legitimate work.

Key Recommendations and Strategic Insights from the Session

a) FATF Mutual Evaluation Presents Both a Civic Space Risk and Strategic Opportunity

Insight: Zimbabwe's upcoming FATF Mutual Evaluation poses a dual reality for civil society. While the process risks entrenching restrictive regulatory measures under the guise of international compliance, it also presents a critical opportunity for CSOs to influence national risk assessments and policy responses to ensure that AML/CFT/CPF measures are proportionate, evidence-based, and do not undermine legitimate civic activity.

Recommendations:

- Government and Regulators to ensure that FATF compliance measures, particularly those relating to NPOs, are grounded in credible risk assessments and implemented in line with a risk-based approach that avoids blanket or disproportionate restrictions.

- CSOs to engage proactively and collectively in the Mutual Evaluation process, including direct engagement with assessors, to articulate sector realities and safeguard civic space.
- Donors and Development Partners to recognise the Mutual Evaluation as a civic space issue and support civil society preparedness and coordinated engagement.

b) Misinterpretation of FATF Recommendation 8 Continues to Drive Disproportionate Regulation of NPOs

Insight: The session reaffirmed that FATF Recommendation 8 remains widely misunderstood and misapplied, with counter-terrorism financing obligations often being extended to NPOs in ways that exceed FATF requirements.

Recommendations:

- Government and Regulators to align the implementation of Recommendation 8 with FATF guidance by applying focused, proportionate, and risk-based measures that are mindful of the impact on legitimate NPO activities.
- CSOs to strengthen knowledge and understanding of Recommendation 8 to enable informed engagement and compliance without compromising operational independence.

c) Limited Civil Society Participation in FATF Processes Heightens the Risk of Regulatory Overreach

Insight: Historically limited participation of CSOs in FATF Mutual Evaluations and in-country AML/CFT/CPF processes has resulted in AML/CFT/CPF measures that do not adequately reflect civil society realities.

Recommendations:

- Government and Regulators to institutionalise structured and transparent consultation with CSOs throughout the Mutual Evaluation cycle.
- NANGO to establish and operationalise the Zimbabwe NPO FATF Technical Working Group as a coordination and engagement platform.
- CSOs to actively participate in sector coordination mechanisms to present coherent and evidence-based positions during the Mutual Evaluation.

d) Knowledge Gaps Within the NPO Sector Undermine Effective Engagement in the Mutual Evaluation

Insight: While CSOs are now aware of the broader FATF agenda, significant knowledge gaps persist regarding Mutual Evaluation process, compliance expectations, documentation requirements, and assessor focus areas. These gaps limit the sector's ability to engage meaningfully and expose organisations to regulatory risk.

Recommendations:

- NANGO in collaboration with FIU to lead sector-wide sensitisation and capacity-building initiatives on FATF processes, Recommendation 8, and Immediate Outcome 10.
- CSOs to invest in strengthening governance, record-keeping, and internal risk management systems in preparation for the evaluation.
- Donors to provide targeted support for technical capacity building and knowledge dissemination within the NPO sector.

e) Risk of Securitisation and Weaponisation of AML/CFT Frameworks Against Civic Space

Insight: Comparative experiences from other jurisdictions demonstrate that FATF pressure can trigger regulatory panic, leading to the enactment of multiple laws with good intentions but harmful consequences for civic space. Without safeguards, AML/CFT/CPF frameworks risk being weaponised to control or restrict civil society.

Recommendations:

- Government to avoid legislative overreach and ensure that new or revised laws are subjected to inclusive consultation and human rights impact assessments.
- CSOs to document and challenge instances where AML/CFT/CPF measures are applied in a manner inconsistent with FATF standards or constitutional freedoms.
- Donors consider supporting civic space monitoring and advocacy aimed at preventing the securitisation of civil society regulation.

f) Direct Engagement with FATF Assessors Is a Critical Entry Point for Civil Society

Insight: The Mutual Evaluation process provides a strategic opportunity for NPOs to engage directly with FATF assessors, particularly in relation to Recommendation 8 and Immediate Outcome 10. Effective engagement will require coordinated messaging, technical preparedness, and credible evidence from the sector.

Recommendation(s):

- CSOs to prepare for engagement with assessors by consolidating evidence on NPO operations, safeguards, and risk profiles.



7 Localisation in Action – Making a Shift from Rhetoric to Reality

Progress Status in Advancing Localisation Agenda in Zimbabwe

Sponsored by Bulawayo Vendors and Traders Association

The session provided a thorough examination of the localisation agenda in Zimbabwe, facilitated by Mvuselelo Huni, the Executive Director for ORAP. Gideon Mikwishu, the Coordinator for Zimbabwe Alliance for Humanitarian Action (ZAHA), gave the main presentation with a focus on identifying persistent barriers and exploring promising practices. During the panel discussion, Rosewita Katsande – Executive Director, Youth Empowerment and Transformation Trust (YETT), and Langton Moyo, representing the Executive Director for BVTA, participated as panelists. It was emphasized that while more International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) are shifting towards locally led initiatives, significant challenges remain. Key barriers identified included funding gaps, power imbalances in partnerships where INGOs dominate decision-making, and a regulatory environment that requires extensive engagement with gatekeepers. Additionally, misconceptions about the definition of localisation hinder progress, necessitating a unified understanding among development partners.

The panel discussion also raised crucial points about the lack of awareness regarding the term localisation among local actors and the absence of a comprehensive Zimbabwean localisation strategic plan that aligns with local policies. The need for inclusive participation, ensuring marginalized communities have representation to voice their experiences was emphasised. There was also a call for systematic transformations that require resource mobilisation outside traditional donor aid, advocating for the establishment of a domestic development agency to address local priorities. By pursuing unrestricted funding options and strengthening local capacities, stakeholders can foster more sustainable and self-reliant development practices in Zimbabwe.

Key Recommendations and Strategic Insights from the Session

a) Leadership and Coordination Imbalances Persist

Insight: Coordination and decision-making spaces remain dominated by INGOs with local organisations often underrepresented. This limits genuine localisation, reinforces tokenistic participation, and weakens local ownership across the project cycle.

Recommendations:

- Donors and INGOs to restructure coordination and governance spaces to ensure local actors play meaningful agenda-setting and leadership roles.
- INGOs to prioritise the leadership of local organisations in project design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation, moving beyond symbolic inclusion.

b) Accountability Remains Skewed Upwards Rather Than Community-Centred

Insight: Accountability mechanisms development programming remain disproportionately focused on donor compliance, with insufficient emphasis on downward accountability to affected communities. Existing feedback mechanisms are often project-based and not institutionalised.

Recommendations:

- INGOs and Donors to institutionalise downward accountability frameworks that centre community feedback and participation beyond individual project cycles.
- Local CSOs and CBOs to strengthen community accountability practices and ensure community voices inform programme design and implementation.

c) Compliance and Risk Are Disproportionately Shifted to Local Organisations

Insight: Duplicative due diligence and risk-averse compliance frameworks often result in risks being transferred to Local NGOs rather than shared. Many local organisations lack the institutional systems required to meet these demands, reinforcing dependency and limiting autonomy.

Recommendation(s):

Donors and INGOs to adopt shared-risk and proportionate due diligence approaches that recognise local contexts and capacities.

d) Funding Quality and Localisation Commitments Remain Weak Despite Emerging Opportunities

Insight: Direct, flexible, and multi-year funding for local organisations remains limited, reflecting persistent gaps in localisation commitments, including under the Grand Bargain. At the same time, Zimbabwe's devolution agenda and evolving donor priorities present emerging opportunities for more locally led cooperation.

Recommendations:

- Donors to increase the volume and quality of direct, flexible, and multi-year funding to local actors and strengthen their influence in coordination and decision-making spaces.

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- Local CSOs and CBOs to diversify funding sources by engaging the private sector, philanthropy, and individual giving, supported by clear value propositions and partnership strategies.
- NANGO to facilitate dialogue and partnerships that leverage devolution reforms and promote sustainable, locally led development cooperation.



8 Knowledge Bridging – Cyber and Data Protection Act and Its Regulations

The Legal Implications of the Act and its Regulations on the NGO Sector

The session on the Cyber and Data Protection Act (CDPA) aimed to bridge the knowledge gap through unpacking the key provisions of the Act, highlighting the emerging compliance risks, and explaining how CSOs can comply with this new law. The session was facilitated by an independent consultant, Ms. Tsungai Kokerai from Solika Consultancy.

During her presentation, the consultant highlighted that due to the rapid digital transformation, there are notable complex legal and ethical challenges affecting CSOs, especially regarding data privacy, cybersecurity, and digital rights. She unpacked the key provisions of the Act while highlighting emerging compliance risks and provided guidance on how CSOs can align their internal systems with the law.

To that effect, the CDPA and its accompanying regulations establish a new framework for how organisations collect, process, store, and share data in Zimbabwe, with direct implications for CSOs. She underscored that the CSOs should comply with the Act and possibly advocate to repeal of some sections of it while being compliant.

During the session, Tsungai underscored that compliance with the CDPA is not optional- it is a legal obligation that carries significant consequences for non-compliant organisations. Therefore, non-compliance may attract avoidable sanctions imposed on the Data Controller (Organisation), including penalties and restrictions that can disrupt operations. The act also introduces criminal liability, placing accountability not only on institutions but also on individuals responsible for data handling and governance.

Participants were reminded of the registration and licensing deadline of 12 March 2025, by which all relevant entities must be formally registered with the Postal & Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (POTRAZ). Importantly, the authority will be shifting from awareness-raise phase to a full enforcement phase in 2026, signalling increased scrutiny, inspections, and stricter adherence to the law. Therefore, participants were urged to adopt a proactive approach to compliance-strengthening internal systems, training staff, updating

policies, and ensuring that organisational practices align fully with the regulatory framework.

Key Recommendations and Strategic Insights from the Session

a) Cyber and Data Protection Act Compliance

Insight: Compliance with the CDPA is not optional; it is a legal obligation that carries significant consequences for non-compliant organisations.

Recommendations:

- Organisations need to adopt a proactive approach to compliance-strengthening internal systems, training staff, updating policies, and ensuring that organisational practices align fully with the regulatory framework.
- Organisations need to appoint a Data Protection Officer (DPO) at the appropriate level to oversee compliance and guide data governance. Due to the limited funding, a Data Protection Officer can be hired on part time basis.
- Organisations need to implement an automated Data Subject Access Rights management system to ensure timely and accurate responses to data requests.

b) Registration and licensing timelines

Insight: The registration and licensing deadline was 12 March 2025, by which all relevant entities must be formally registered with the Data Protection Authority; the authority will be shifting from awareness-raising phase to a full enforcement phase in 2026.

Recommendation(s)

- Organisations need to comply with the law and begin the registration and licensing process to avoid penalties and restrictions that can disrupt operations.



9 Thematic Deep Dive – Work Streams

Work stream 1: Empowering Inclusion: Advancing the Rights of Women with Disabilities through the African Disability Protocol in Zimbabwe.

Sponsored by Sightsavers

Convened by Sightsavers Zimbabwe, this session provided a compelling and evidence-driven reflection on the state of inclusion for women and girls with disabilities in Zimbabwe. The discussion was anchored in the African Disability Protocol (ADP) and its potential to advance rights, equality, and inclusive development. The panel brought together Lilian Gwanyanya from the Centre for Children with Disabilities, Gamuchirai from Disability Youth Advocacy Network Zimbabwe, and Samantha Sibanda representing the National Association of Societies for the Care of the Handicapped (NASCOH). Collectively, the panellists blended lived experience, policy insight, and rights-based advocacy to interrogate both the opportunities and persistent gaps emerging from Zimbabwe's ratification of the ADP.

Panellists reaffirmed that the inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) is a fundamental human right grounded in equality, non-discrimination, and accessibility. While acknowledging the foundational role of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), the session underscored the added value of the ADP, adopted in 2018, in addressing Africa-specific social, cultural, economic, and legal realities. These include harmful traditional practices and the compounded vulnerabilities faced by women and girls with disabilities. Zimbabwe's ratification of the ADP was widely recognised as a positive milestone and a signal of political commitment. However, the discussion stressed that this commitment has yet to translate into consistent and comprehensive implementation across key sectors.

Despite the policy progress, the panel highlighted significant gaps between commitment and practice. Rights enshrined in the ADP such as access to education, health services, reproductive and mental health care, political participation, inclusive governance, and economic opportunities remain unevenly implemented. The session reinforced that the principle of “nothing without us” must move beyond rhetoric, calling for the systematic mainstreaming of disability inclusion across institutions, policies, and national budgets.

The discussion placed strong emphasis on intersectionality, noting that women and girls with disabilities face heightened risks of discrimination, violence, exclusion, and poverty due to the

convergence of gender and disability. Specific concerns included increased vulnerability to abuse in institutional settings, the persistence of forced sterilisation practices supported by outdated laws, and severely limited access to assistive devices illustrated by the 2023 national budget allocation of only 150 wheelchairs, far below national demand. Deep-seated attitudinal barriers were also identified as undermining agency, autonomy, and dignity.

Panellists raised concern over misaligned national legislation, particularly the Disability Act and the Mental Health Act, which still contains provisions that may enable the sterilisation of women with mental disabilities. While regional accountability mechanisms such as the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights exist, their effective use remains constrained by limited awareness and capacity. The importance of economic empowerment, entrepreneurship, and access to finance for PWDs was strongly emphasised, with the ongoing shift from a charity-based approach to a rights-based empowerment model recognised as a critical and positive transition.

The session concluded with a strong call to action, stressing that ratification of the ADP is only the first step toward meaningful change. Domestication and implementation must be driven by the active participation of PWDs at all levels of decision-making. Every institution and organisation was urged to ensure representation of PWDs to enable genuine inclusion. Persistent gaps in budgetary inclusion, inaccessible education systems, particularly for girls with disabilities and limited digital literacy were highlighted as urgent priorities. The panel further called for stronger partnerships between institutions of higher learning and organisations of PWDs to improve accessibility, support, and long-term inclusion outcomes.

Key Recommendations and Strategic Insights from the Session

a) Ratification Without Domestication Limits Impact

Insight: While Zimbabwe's ratification of the African Disability Protocol (ADP) signals political commitment, the absence of domestication and alignment of national laws has resulted in limited practical impact for women and girls with disabilities.

Recommendation:

- The Government of Zimbabwe, through Parliament and relevant line ministries, should urgently domesticate the ADP and harmonise key legislation with the Protocol to eliminate discriminatory provisions and ensure enforceable rights.

b) Women and Girls with Disabilities Face Compounded and Systemic Exclusion

Insight: Intersectional discrimination exposes women and girls with disabilities to heightened risks of violence, forced sterilisation, exclusion from education, and persistent poverty, often reinforced by outdated laws, weak protection systems, and harmful social norms.

Recommendation:

- The Ministry of Women Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprises Development, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Child Care and law enforcement agencies, should strengthen gender- and disability-responsive protection mechanisms, including safeguarding frameworks, survivor support services, and public awareness campaigns.

c) Budgetary and Economic Exclusion Undermines Inclusion Commitments

Insight: Inadequate budget allocations and limited access to economic opportunities such as assistive devices, entrepreneurship support, and finance continue to marginalise Persons with Disabilities despite stated policy commitments.

Recommendation:

- The Ministry of Finance, Economic Development and Investment Promotion should introduce disability-responsive budgeting, significantly increase allocations for assistive devices, and expand inclusive financing and entrepreneurship programmes targeting women and youth with disabilities.

d) Exclusion of PWDs from Decision-Making Weakens Policy Outcomes

Insight: Limited representation of Persons with Disabilities in decision-making processes perpetuates tokenism and undermines the effectiveness of policies and programmes intended to advance inclusion.

Recommendation:

- Public institutions, CSOs, and institutions of higher learning should institutionalise meaningful participation of PWDs by ensuring representation in governance structures, policy processes, and programme design, while partnering with Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) to strengthen accessibility, digital literacy, and inclusive education systems.

Work Stream 2: Reimagining Human Rights, Peace and Reconciliation in Zimbabwe: Understanding the New Institutional Architecture Post National Peace and Reconciliation Commission | Sponsored by 4-H Zimbabwe

This session critically examined the evolving landscape of human rights, peace, and reconciliation in Zimbabwe following the lapse of the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission's (NPRC) constitutional mandate. Discussions were framed against widespread public concern that, despite its establishment under Sections 251–253 of the 2013 Constitution, the NPRC exited without delivering tangible outcomes on its core mandate particularly the resolution of historical injustices such as Gukurahundi and other post-independence conflicts.

Participants reflected on the original promise of the NPRC as a national mechanism to promote healing, truth-telling, justice, and reconciliation. However, the Commission's effectiveness was severely constrained by persistent underfunding, political interference, weak institutional independence, high levels of national polarisation, uncertainty surrounding the interpretation of its tenure, and limited follow-through on reported cases. These challenges collectively undermined public confidence and restricted the Commission's ability to deliver meaningful redress.

Despite these constraints, it was acknowledged that some goodwill and cooperation from stakeholders at national and sub-national levels existed, demonstrating that the demand for peace and reconciliation processes remains strong. Against this backdrop, the session shifted focus toward identifying alternative and complementary pathways through which citizens, institutions, and civil society can advance human rights protection, peace-building, and reconciliation in the post-NPRC era.

Key Recommendations and Strategic Insights from the Session

a) Institutional Gaps Following the Expiry of the NPRC

Insight: The lapse of the NPRC's mandate has created a significant institutional vacuum in addressing past conflicts, leaving unresolved grievances and limited formal avenues for truth, accountability, and reconciliation.

Recommendations:

- The Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC) should be strategically strengthened and utilised as a primary institution for documenting violations, receiving complaints, and facilitating redress, with citizens and CSOs actively reporting cases.
- Civil society organisations (CSOs) should intensify public education on existing human rights institutions and available remedies to mitigate the institutional gap left by the NPRC.

b) Community-Based Peacebuilding as a Viable Entry Point

Insight: National-level mechanisms alone are insufficient to address deep-rooted conflicts; sustainable peace requires locally owned, culturally grounded solutions anchored at community level.

Recommendations:

- The Government of Zimbabwe, through relevant ministries, should formally capacitate and support traditional leaders to facilitate community dialogue and restorative justice processes, particularly on historical injustices such as Gukurahundi.
- CSOs and faith-based organisations should support community-led peace initiatives that prioritise local ownership, inclusivity, and sustainability over externally driven interventions.

c) Prevention and Early Warning Remain Weak

Insight: Limited coordination among key institutions and inadequate preventative dialogue mechanisms have contributed to reactive, rather than preventive, responses to conflict and human rights violations.

Recommendations:

- State institutions, including the ZRP, NPA, ZEC, ZHRC, and ZGC, should institutionalise regular preventative dialogue platforms with communities and traditional leaders to address emerging tensions before escalation.
- CSOs should facilitate multi-stakeholder peace programmes that strengthen early warning systems and promote non-violent conflict resolution.

d) Limited Public Confidence in Formal Justice Systems

Insight: Low levels of trust in courts and law enforcement have led to under-reporting of violations, retaliatory violence, and cycles of impunity, undermining peace and reconciliation efforts.

Recommendations:

- The Judicial Services Commission and Ministry of Justice and Parliamentary Affairs should strengthen civic education on legal processes, appeal mechanisms, and access to justice.
- CSOs should encourage timely reporting of violations to police stations and legal institutions to support evidence-based accountability and prevent escalation of violence.



10 Fostering Strategic Partnerships – Exploring New Funding Mechanisms, Donor Priorities, and Emerging Opportunities For CSOs

Grant Makers Roundtable Discussion

In a development context shaped by shifting global priorities, declining traditional aid flows, and an increased emphasis on localisation, sustainability, and accountability, this session provided a critical interface between CSOs and development partners. Moderated by Andy Hodges, the Grant Makers Roundtable created a valuable space for open dialogue, allowing CSOs to directly engage with grant makers and gain insight into current funding realities, emerging priorities, and partnership modalities. The discussion aimed to enhance mutual understanding, align expectations, and equip CSOs with practical guidance on how to strategically position themselves for funding in a rapidly evolving environment. Representatives from six development partners participated in the session, including Ville Aro from the Delegation of the EU to Zimbabwe, Liliane Tarnutzer from Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), Pepukai Muchazondida Svinurai from Christian Aid in Zimbabwe, Tafadzwa Muvingi from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Zimbabwe, Robert Nyakuwa from Co-operation for the Development of Emerging Countries (COSPE), and Merciful Machuwe from Oak Foundation Zimbabwe.

The EU outlined its continued commitment to Zimbabwe through the “Team Europe” approach, which brings together EU institutions, member states, and European financial institutions. While acknowledging that the EU is nearing the end of a multi-year funding cycle and has experienced annual reductions of approximately twenty million due to global shifts, the delegation reaffirmed its support for CSOs, governance, and local development. Current priority areas include agriculture, women's empowerment, governance, resilience, education, youth, and culture, aligned with the EU's Global Gateway strategy. The EU also highlighted an increasing shift toward private sector-driven infrastructure investments, particularly in climate-smart agriculture, renewable energy, horticulture, and access to finance. Importantly for CSOs, upcoming funding opportunities were announced, including calls on access to justice, transparency, accountability, governance, and gender monitoring linked to international commitments and GBV prevention. The delegation emphasized that shrinking civic space is a global trend and called for a mindset shift toward autonomy, sustainability, and accountability-driven programming, while encouraging CSOs to explore regional funding windows.

Oak Foundation Zimbabwe presented its grant-making framework and collaboration model, anchored on building prosperous, inclusive, and resilient communities. Its work in Zimbabwe is structured around four strategic pillars: community health and wellbeing (including mental health and post-HIV response), support for adults and children with special needs, youth skills development and entrepreneurship, and opportunistic funding for marginalised groups often excluded from mainstream programming. Oak Foundation Zimbabwe emphasized that access to funding is relationship-based, relying on collaboration, networking, and referrals rather than open calls only. Beyond financial support, the institution prioritises organisational capacity strengthening to enhance sustainability and resilience. With the adoption of Zimbabwe's CDPA, Merciful underscored the importance of compliance, including licensing requirements. The foundation also expressed interest in supporting digital marketing capacity for communities and promoting intermediary models where larger organisations support smaller CSOs, including through social enterprise development.

Christian Aid in Zimbabwe reflected on its long-standing presence in the country since 1980, and its partnership-based model focused on ending hunger and poverty. Operating through a locally driven approach, the institution works with eighteen diverse partners and deliberately avoids competition with them. With an annual partner budget ranging between USD 3-5 million, support is tailored to the size and capacity of each partner, including risk mitigation and administrative support. Zimbabwe now falls under the East and Southern Africa regional cluster, with Harare hosting the Southern Africa hub. The organisation emphasized flexible, locally led fundraising models that prioritise partner presence, contextual responsiveness, and sustainability.

COSPE shared its experience supporting local CSOs since commencing operations in Zimbabwe in 2019, with a strong focus on capacity strengthening rather than competition. Working in collaboration with the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum and with EU support, COSPE launched a capacity-strengthening call that attracted wide sectoral interest. Seventy-one organisations were selected, comprising 40 CBOs (mostly in marginalised areas), 25 CSOs, and six coalitions. This initiative responds directly to EU priorities to increase support for grassroots and marginalised actors. COSPE announced that in 2026 it will roll out financial support to third parties, alongside peer learning, technical assistance, and consultancy support to address capacity gaps, reinforcing long-term organisational effectiveness.

The SDC highlighted its thematic focus on food security, health, human rights, climate resilience, clean energy, and civil society governance, using a regional Southern Africa lens. SDC reaffirmed its commitment to localisation and equal partnerships, noting plans to establish a CSO grant instrument by the end of 2026. The agency also expressed interest in supporting CSOs in social enterprise development and reviewing funding modalities to better serve local

organisations. SDC underscored the importance of reducing vulnerability, strengthening livelihoods, and promoting sustainable development outcomes through inclusive and adaptive partnerships.

UNDP Zimbabwe outlined its broad mandate as a resident UN agency working through co-financing and non-core funding mechanisms. Its programming focuses on human development and wellbeing, health (including Global Fund-supported HIV, TB, and Malaria interventions), environmental protection, climate resilience, natural resource management, and transformative governance. Between 2022 and 2026, UNDP targets a resource envelope of approximately USD 1 billion, with USD 965 million already mobilised. UNDP highlighted multiple partnership pathways, including calls for proposals, implementing partnerships, community mobilisation initiatives, and technical expertise collaborations. Emphasis was placed on strong financial management, procurement compliance, safeguarding, and trust-building. The agency also encouraged CSOs to invest in community-generated data, engage in multi-stakeholder platforms, and explore new financing models such as domestic resource mobilisation.

The discussion further surfaced practical guidance from donors on common pitfalls and success factors in grant applications. Grant makers stressed that many organisations fail not due to lack of relevance, but because they overlook basic compliance requirements, particularly around inclusion, governance, internal reflection, and institutional capacity. Donors observed that CSOs often document external challenges well but struggle to critically assess internal weaknesses within their control. The session also highlighted duplication of programming across organisations and encouraged CSOs to better align proposals with donor priorities and national commitments. Donors reiterated that most institutions maintain open-door policies and encouraged early engagement, background research, and scheduled consultations prior to proposal submission. Local fundraising, philanthropy engagement, and networking among CSOs were identified as underutilised opportunities, alongside emerging thematic areas such as drug and substance abuse, disaster preparedness, youth innovation, and the application of artificial intelligence to enhance CSO effectiveness.

Key Recommendations and Strategic Insights from the Session

a) Grant Requirements

Insight: Many organisations fail to access funding not due to lack of relevance, but because they overlook basic compliance requirements, particularly around inclusion, governance, internal reflection, and institutional capacity.

Recommendations

- CSOs leaders have a responsibility to pay close attention to donor requirements, including small but critical details.

- Organisations need to conduct self-assessments and be honest about internal gaps.
- Organisations need to invest in financial management, procurement compliance, safeguarding, and trust-building.
- CSOs need to research donors thoroughly, including reviewing their websites, strategies, and priorities, and to clearly position their programmes in ways that contribute to national, regional, and global commitments. CSOs must proactively align their strategies with evolving donor priorities, national commitments, and global development trends.

b) Diversification of funding streams

Insight: CSOs rely mostly on donor funding, thereby limiting their potential to receive adequate funding for their interventions.

Recommendation:

- Organisations should consider local fundraising, philanthropy engagement, and networking among CSOs. There are some of the underutilised opportunities.

c) Collaboration and Consortium Approaches

Insight: There is duplication of programming across organisations

Recommendations:

- Organisations need to adopt collaboration and consortium approaches; these are more preferred to isolated and duplicated interventions.
- CSOs are encouraged to form “networks of networks” to attract and organise local philanthropic support more effectively.

d) Digital Innovation

Insight: There is growing relevance of digital innovation, especially with the emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Recommendation:

- There is a need for dedicated capacity-building sessions on how artificial intelligence and digital tools can be used to improve CSO efficiency, programme design, monitoring, and overall organisational performance.

11 Looking Ahead: Sustaining Momentum Beyond the Retreat

Way Forward, Appreciation Note, and Vote of Thanks

This closing session focused on consolidating key reflections from the retreat and translating them into actionable commitments for sustained collective action beyond the convening. Emphasis was placed on the importance of maintaining momentum through coordinated follow-up, strategic partnerships, and continued dialogue among civil society actors, government institutions, development partners, and other stakeholders.

The closing session provided an opportunity to reflect on key lessons, chart the path forward, and acknowledge the contributions of participants, partners, and facilitators. Reflections were shared by Sandra Mazunga, National Coordinator of ZACRAS and NANGO Board Member, representing CSO leadership; Mr. Joy Mabenge, Southern Africa Director for HIVOS, offering development partners' perspectives; Mr. Totamirepi Tirivavi, representing Government; and the Retreat's closing remarks were delivered by NANGO Board Vice Chairperson, Mr. Charles Mazorodze.

Sandra underscored the importance of reflection, honesty, and strategic foresight, emphasizing the value of shared experiences and collective learning among participants. She highlighted that NGOs continue to serve as critical pillars of hope, accountability, and social justice, especially in a rapidly evolving operating environment. CSOs were encouraged to embrace innovation, champion community resilience, and affirm their agency despite funding constraints and other challenges. Participants were reminded of the urgent need to defend and expand civic space through sustained advocacy, collaboration, and engagement with both communities and regulators.

Development partners, represented by Mr. Mabenge, reflected on the importance of supporting CSOs to navigate change, strengthen accountability, and explore strategic alliances to maintain impact and relevance. The discussion also emphasized understanding and contextualizing transitions both within organisations and the broader sector to better adapt to emerging challenges and opportunities. Participants were reminded of the sector-wide risks posed by shrinking funding, the importance of resilience building, and the need to avoid fostering

dependency, focusing instead on empowerment and sustainable community-led initiatives.

Government perspectives, shared by Mr. Tirivavi, highlighted the value of constructive engagement between CSOs and regulators. The Ministry encouraged compliance with existing laws and regulatory frameworks, collaboration in addressing societal challenges, and the use of dialogue platforms such as “Talk to Your Regulator” to resolve issues without disrupting NGO effectiveness. Mr. Tirivavi reaffirmed the Government's commitment to fulfilling promises, welcomed CSOs' support in implementing solutions, and stressed that conflicts negatively impact vulnerable communities.

The session concluded with a collective call for CSOs to embrace innovation, accountability, and solidarity, while continuing to listen to and learn from the communities they serve. The session reaffirmed the role of NANGO as a convenor and connector for the sector, underscoring the need for collective responsibility in advancing civic space, development financing, and institutional resilience. It also highlighted the value of solidarity, shared learning, and accountability in navigating an increasingly complex operating environment. The session concluded with expressions of appreciation to speakers, sponsors, partners, and participants for their contributions, reaffirming a shared commitment to sustaining engagement, strengthening coordination, and driving impact beyond the retreat.



11 13th NANGO Annual NGO Awards Presentation Ceremony

Celebrating Innovation, Excellence and Impact

The 13th NANGO Annual NGO Awards Presentation Ceremony was held on 28 November 2025 at the Urban Lifestyles Hotel in Masvingo, bringing together civil society leaders, development partners, corporate actors, and other stakeholders to celebrate excellence, resilience, and impact within Zimbabwe's civil society sector. The ceremony recognised outstanding organisations, leaders, and partners that demonstrated commitment to human rights, gender equality, community development, disability rights, accountability, youth empowerment, and sustainable development.

Andy Hodges hosted the ceremony and provided professional facilitation throughout the event, while Bernard Betera entertained guests through a vibrant live band performance that enhanced the celebratory atmosphere. As part of the opening proceedings, Dr. McDonald Lewanika, South & East Africa Director, Accountability Lab, delivered an inspirational address, highlighting the increasingly challenging operating environment faced by civil society leaders during the year. He emphasised the effects of funding cuts, new compliance requirements, and the continued shrinking of civic space on CSO leadership and operations.

Drawing from research conducted by Accountability Lab on organisational sustainability, Dr. Lewanika noted that 54 percent of surveyed organisations indicated that they would not be able to continue operating in 2026, while 44 percent reported uncertainty about their future, resulting in the suspension of community programmes and the loss of jobs for some NGO staff members. Despite these challenges, he underscored that difficult times often give rise to transformative leadership, reminding participants that life is defined by seasons and that although the sector is currently experiencing a “winter season” that arrived earlier than expected, it will ultimately come to an end.

During the awards segment, NANGO recognised excellence across several thematic areas. The Human Rights Defender of the Year Award was won by Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR), with Zimbabwe Human Rights Association (ZimRights) receiving the first runner-up position. The Gender Equality Award was awarded to Women's Academy for

Leadership and Political Excellence (WALPE), while Women in Communities emerged as the first runner-up. The Community Development Award went to Family AIDS Caring Trust (FACT) Zimbabwe, with Hope for Kids Zimbabwe named first runner-up. The Disability Rights Award was won by the National Association of Societies for the Care of the Handicapped (NASCOH), and the Federation of Organisations of Disabled People in Zimbabwe (FODPZ) received the first runner-up award. Under the EmpowerYouth Excellence Award, sponsored by WELEAD Africa, the Students and Youth Working on reproductive Health Action Team (SAYWHAT) emerged as the winner, with Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) Zimbabwe as the first runner-up. The NGO Communicator of the Year Award was awarded to Transparency International Zimbabwe (TI ZW), while the Zimbabwe Association of Community Radio Stations (ZACRAS) was recognised as first runner-up. For the NGO Director of the Year Award, Muchanyara Cynthia Mukamuri, Executive Director of the Self-Help Development Foundation, emerged as the winner, followed by John Muchenje, Executive Director of the 4-H Zimbabwe Foundation, as first runner-up, and Dr. Donald Tobaiwa, Executive Director of Jointed Hands Welfare Organisation, as second runner-up. The Donor/Development Partner of the Year Award was won by the Delegation of the European Union to Zimbabwe, with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and Christian Aid in Zimbabwe recognised as first and second runners-up, respectively. The Outstanding NGO Reporting Award was awarded to Community Podium, with Magamba Network as the first runner-up, while the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Excellence Award was won by the Nyaradzo Group, with the Old Mutual Foundation receiving the first runner-up award.

The ceremony successfully reaffirmed the importance of recognising excellence, accountability, and resilience within the civil society sector, while reinforcing NANGO's commitment to promoting impactful leadership, strong partnerships, and sustainable development in Zimbabwe.



12 Acknowledgement of Partners and Sponsors

NANGO extends its sincere gratitude to our esteemed partners and sponsors for their invaluable support in making the 15th NGO Directors Summer Retreat a success. Your commitment and generosity were instrumental in enabling the delivery of a meaningful and impactful experience for all participants. Through your support, the Summer Retreat fostered knowledge sharing, strengthened networks, and enhanced collaboration across the civil society sector in Zimbabwe and beyond. Your partnership continues to empower CSOs to navigate evolving challenges, promote inclusion, and contribute effectively to national development. We deeply appreciate your dedication to advancing a vibrant and resilient civil society.



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13 We Are NANGO

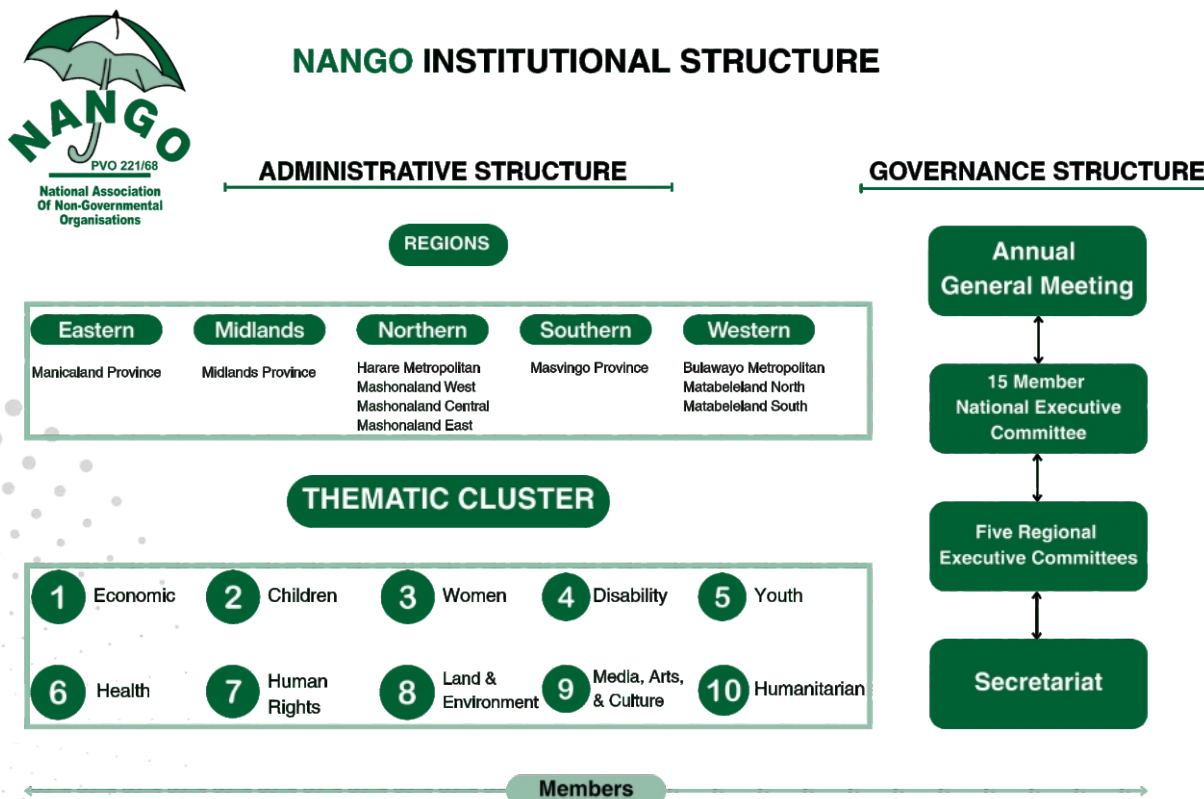
Overview

The National Association of Non-Governmental Organisations ([NANGO](#)) is the official voluntary coordinating body of registered Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in their diversity operating in Zimbabwe. NANGO is registered as a Private Voluntary Organisation (PVO) under the PVO Act Chapter [17:05]. It is a non-partisan, non-profit-making, and non-denominational organisation mandated to strengthen the voice of NGOs for the betterment of the people in Zimbabwe.

NANGO was founded in 1962 as a welfare organisation under the name of the Southern Rhodesia Council of Social Services (SRCSS), predominantly for social welfare organisations. NANGO was formally registered in 1968 following the promulgation of the Welfare Organisations Act in 1967, later transformed into the PVO Act in 2001. Post-independence in 1980, there was a gradual increase in the number of NGOs operating in Zimbabwe, particularly in the rural areas, and thus the organisation was renamed Voluntary Organisations in Community Enterprise (VOICE). The organisation was renamed, 10 years later, to the National Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (NANGO) due to geographical expansion and a wider membership base. Now with 62 years of existence and having learnt vast experience in NGO coordination, NANGO continues to be ambitious as well as to broaden its value proposition to its membership going into the future. As of December 2024, NANGO has a total membership base of 1,260 NGOs across Zimbabwe, with membership drawn from PVOs, Trusts, and Common Law Universitas. Of these, 877 were active in 2024.

NANGO's operations are guided by its constitution, which is the supreme operational document that governs the conduct of the NANGO secretariat, board, and members. The board holds the oversight role over the functions and activities of NANGO. The board members are elected every three years during an elective Annual General Meeting (AGM). Administratively, NANGO is decentralised into five regional offices that coordinate the activities of the NGOs in all ten provinces of Zimbabwe. Cognisant of the diversity of membership, members are clustered into 10 thematic sectors in line with their programmatic focus: Media, Arts and Culture, Children,

Disability, Economic, Health, Human Rights, Humanitarian, Land and Environment, Women, and Youth. NANGO is responsible for unifying these various sectors by creating spaces for collaboration, networking, knowledge exchange, mutual support, and the development of common best practices. The NANGO Institutional Structure is as given below:



What Drives Our Ambition

Our Mission: To strengthen, represent, and coordinate the work of NGOs in Zimbabwe through creating space and promoting networking, dialogue, and engagement to enable the fulfilment of members' visions and missions.

Our Vision: A proactive community of NGOs responsive and committed to the sustainable development needs of all people in Zimbabwe and the full realisation of human rights, democracy, good governance, and poverty alleviation.



Our Organisational Objectives

- 1 To promote, coordinate and organise the participation and contribution of NGOs in Zimbabwe in the development discourse of Zimbabwe.
- 2 To promote and facilitate the collective agenda-setting, interaction, consultation, and exchange of information and experience with and among NGOs operating in Zimbabwe.
- 3 To create an enabling and conducive operating environment for NGOs necessary in ensuring sector independence, improved accountability, and fulfilment of institutional mandates.
- 4 To create and identify opportunities for NGOs to pursue their visions and missions at the same time building members' capacities, resources, and synergies.



Our Organisational Values

1. **LEADERSHIP:** We practice what we preach. We model our work to empower NGOs in Zimbabwe by setting exemplary leadership and standards of organisational management and governance.
2. **MEMBER-CENTRICITY:** Without the members, there is no NANGO, hence, we value every member organisation we have and their participation as the backbone of all our programming, believing that it is through them that development reaches the communities in Zimbabwe.
3. **INTEGRITY:** We are firm believers in integrity by abiding by the highest ethical standards of transparency, accountability, and mutual respect.
4. **NON-DISCRIMINATION:** We believe in and respect the principles of equity, inclusion, and non-discrimination. We are committed to working with all persons, without discrimination, to promote an open, democratic, and developed Zimbabwean society.
5. **COLLABORATION AND CO-CREATION:** Our strategic partnership approach is one of our key assets. We value and foster partnerships, networks, and strategic mutual relationships with relevant development stakeholders, member organisations, and grassroots communities.
6. **ENGAGEMENT:** We believe engagement is a critical enabler of critical conversations, policy influencing, building common ground, and finding consensus as we seek to co-create the developed Zimbabwean society, we all aspire for.
7. **DIVERSITY:** Our wide membership reflects our sustained belief in a development sector that embraces and converges the country's rich socio-cultural diversity.
8. **INNOVATION:** We constantly explore creative ways to strengthen NGOs operating in Zimbabwe. We are agile and responsive to the changing needs of our stakeholders.



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Communication, Information, and Visibility Desk
2 McGowan Road, Milton Park
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info@nangozim.org
www.nangozim.org

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