



Lithuanian National
Non-Governmental
Development Cooperation
Organizations' Platform

**CSO SPACE AND THE ROLE
OF NATIONAL PLATFORMS
IN POLICY AND PRACTISE:
LITHUANIA
AND UGANDA**

2021

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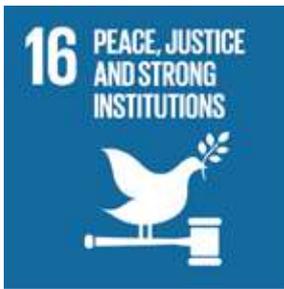
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2021



Lietuvos Respublikos
socialinės apsaugos
ir darbo ministerija





The SDG 16 Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

SDG 16 is one of the key factors that make the SDGs different from the MDGs. Many CSOs have been advocating for SDG 16 as one of the key goals included in the post-2015 development agenda. It is a cross-cutting as well as an enabling goal that is interdependent with other goals in the sense that they cannot be realized without it. SDG 16 also emphasizes the importance of people-centred institutions for sustainable and equitable progress.

The [2019 Sustainable Development Goals Report](#) states that “no substantial advances have been made toward ending violence, promoting the rule of law, strengthening institutions at all levels, or increasing access to justice.”



SDG 17 – Sustainable development through global partnerships Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

One important aspect of SDG 17 is that it binds the other goals together. For one, it is quite content heavy as compared to other goals and subdivided into five crucial components; finance, capacity building, systemic issues, technology, and trade.

If the reference to accountability and monitoring of data is taken seriously in SDG 17, this aspect could help in unlocking the full potential of all the SDGs to be a great influence for good. Creating people-centred strategies for gathering data, accompanied by strong citizen performance monitoring will be crucial to holding decision makers accountable.



¹ GCAP - <https://gcap.global/covid-19/>

INTRODUCTION

CSOs contribute to development programs in various ways and assist intergovernmental and state organisations in finding creative solutions to tough issues. In many cases, they even take the responsibility of delivering essential services as well as helping to make sure that every voice of the populace is heard by decision makers when formulating development policies, particularly the marginalised and disadvantaged. CSOs also function as watchdogs and ensure that the development benefits are reaching the intended people. To fulfil these important functions, CSOs too must do some level of introspection to look for better strategies of ensuring their important activist spirit stays alive and ensuring they always base their work on the people's voices.

There is a lot that must be done by all concerned parties to create the practical partnerships that will ensure the realisation of SDG 16 and SDG 17 and broader accomplishment of all SDGs.

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS TODAY: WHERE TO?

Civil society – a broad term to describe groups or organizations that work in the interest of the citizens but operate outside of the governmental and private (for-profit) sectors – has always faced multiple challenges, yet in the year 2020 it has become increasingly harder to conduct their activities due to the government-imposed restrictions – on free association and free movement among them – on top of the long-standing problems of access to funding. Yet, the wheel keeps on rolling.

Both the Uganda National NGO Forum and the Lithuanian NGDO Platform are members of [FORUS](#), a global network of 69 National NGO Platforms and 7 Regional Coalitions from 5 continents.

CSOs have played an extremely important role as a public watchdog in recent decades, holding governments to account for commitments they have made at national and international levels. One only has to think of the 2030 Agenda or the Paris Climate Agreement or various international human rights treaties to realise that without civil society pushing governments to account for the commitments they made, the agreements themselves wouldn't be worth the paper that they are written on. There is still a long way to go for governments to walk the talk. We need to see more binding commitments and find ways for people to also share their lived experiences about the way in which their governments put in place the enabling environment for the full realization of their promises. CSO networks play a particular role in this regard, as they can amplify people's voices and convene a diversity of constituencies that act in the public interest.

But CSOs are in many instances limited in terms of human resources, expertise, funding etc and cannot always perform the role of watchdog as effectively as they would like. There is also sometimes limited engagement of CSOs at the grassroots. CSOs must continue to improve in better reflecting the needs from the local and communities level into their advocacy and in channelling the voices and demands of people into the decision-making arenas.

A healthy relationship between a government and the NGO sector is one which is based on mutual respect and meaningful engagement. This is why regular and structured dialogue between CSOs and different parts of government are so important – so that there is space for constructive debate. There should be accountability on both sides – government should be accountable to civil society and the public at large for acting on commitments that it has made. CSOs need to be accountable to their constituency in order to be legitimate, effective and efficient in the use of its funds, act in line with their values and objectives.

However, it is very difficult for CSOs to hold governments to account in contexts where the government sees civil society as having little legitimacy and where it refuses to engage with them. The shift towards greater authoritarianism and the shrinking civic space in different regions of the world means that Forus members are increasingly finding it difficult to hold their governments to account. CSOs in countries such as Brazil, India, Chad, and Zambia, amongst others, report considerable difficulties to fulfil their missions because of a variety of challenges such as restrictions on fundamental freedoms, restrictive regulatory environments or intimidations or attacks of activists.

CSOs are working to expand civic space, through working in coalitions, including with other sectors and allies with which they share the same values. We also see innovative initiatives to mobilize against restrictions to civic freedoms, for example through online organizing or through partnerships with engaged media that are using storytelling approaches to share the stories of those affected.

But much more can and must be done. We need bolder and continuous commitments from progressive allies to support civil society and activists in places where civic space is under threat. Both through rapid response mechanisms in the case of immediate threats, as well as through long-term support to strengthen the networks, groups and mechanisms that exist on the ground to be able to push back against these trends, to organize, and to implement durable responses and solutions.

The general trend of decreasing funding is worrying, especially as we see some champion countries, such as the UK, further reduce their development aid budget. As part of this trend, the challenge of securing sustainable and predictable funding for CSOs is a major concern, which has prompted Forus to make this part of its core advocacy messages. The current Covid19 pandemic is only exacerbating this concern and risks to further affect CSOs' ability to operate. To some, the fragmentation of the CSO space is one explanation of the general trend; to others, the more political dimension (as opposed to service-delivery role) that some CSOs adopt is seen as a factor. A third reason is the hunt for ever-more "value for money" which many donors adopt. While the drive for strengthened accountability and effectiveness is welcome and important, the interpretation of the value for money concept sometimes poses problems. We need much more qualitative indicators to ensure that the coordination, capacity-development, alliance-building and community-engagement work of CSOs is adequately valued and supported.

In 2019, Forus published a study on "Innovative Approaches to CSO Funding" in which members were consulted about the kind of funding mechanisms that would best support the work of CSO platforms and networks, and showing the critical need to be able to better adapt to demands and particularities of the different contexts that CSOs operate in. In addition, a global financing system to ensure that CSOs have access to funds to support their strengthening is a key ask of the network in the context of the operationalization of SDG 17.

Civil society needs to embrace and socialize much more positive, evidence-based, solutions-oriented and hope-filled public narratives, better explaining the many roles it fills and the added public value it provides, and better amplifying voices from the ground. Civil society also needs to continue to strengthen its own transparency and accountability so that it makes itself more open to public scrutiny and lives up to the standards that it is demanding of other actors.

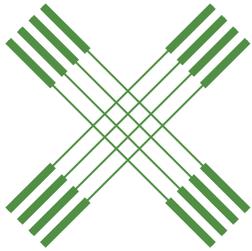
An environment enabling civil society to thrive is made up of many different elements. Some of the main elements are (i) the protection by government of the fundamental rights including the right to freedom of assembly, association and expression (ii) an enabling digital, legal and regulatory environment for CSOs (iii) inclusive governance including good access for CSOs to policy and decision-making spaces at every level (iv) a positive public narrative about civil society that is shared and promoted by government (v) adequate, sustainable and predictable funding for CSOs (vi) access to ongoing opportunities for CSOs' capacity-development.

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CIVIL SOCIETY IN UGANDA AND THE ROLE OF NGO PLATFORMS

Chris Nkwatsibwe¹

Summary

This paper explores the contribution, role, and function of an NGO platform in Uganda – The Uganda National NGO Forum. The paper locates this analysis in Uganda’s neo-patrimonial political context characterized by patronage and cases of state repression. The paper gives a snapshot of the NGO regulatory framework, civic space, and CSO financing and development context in Uganda.

Introduction

The Uganda National NGO Forum (UNNGOF) is an independent and inclusive national platform for NGOs in Uganda that was launched in 1997 to create space for NGOs to reflect strategize and take action on matters of mutual interest. UNNGOF is a membership organization with over 650 members across the country. UNNGOF’s primary constituency and owners are NGOs in their diversity and configurations but are however open to other interest groups within a broadly defined civil society and membership spans international, national, faith-based, networks, and district organizations. The UNNGOF Board is elected by the Annual General Meeting. Members of the UNNGOF Board serve for a three-year term, renewable once.

UNNGOF’s Vision is A coherent, respected, well-informed NGO sector in Uganda, actively contributing to citizens’ wellbeing and safeguarding their rights while its mission is to provide a sharing and reflection platform for NGOs to influence governance and development processes in Uganda and enhance their operating environment. UNNGOF aims to create solutions in two intervention areas – Civil society strengthening and Influencing development policies and practices. To do this, UNNGOF carries out interventions that span three distinct and complementary program components, i.e. (i) Civil Society Strengthening - to develop the capacity of Uganda’s civil society so that the CSO sector can deliver its core mandate and influence development policies; (ii) Civic Space and Governance Monitoring - to influence internal and external operating environment issues of CSOs and to ensure a positive environment for NGO operations and citizen engagement in governance processes; and (iii) Policy Advocacy and Engagement - to effectively coordinate collective policy engagements by NGOs on policies of interest to NGOs and relevant to Uganda’s development.

For the last 20 years, UNNGOF has become an important institutional vehicle for the coordination of collective NGO actions on matters that transcend sector or thematic focus. Some of these initiatives include advocacy around the NGO Bill, 2015², and the campaign for meaningful electoral reforms – The Free and Fair Elections Campaign³, Citizen Manifesto Initiative⁴, Black Monday Campaign⁵, among others.

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² UNNGOF coordinated civil society organizations to make input into the draft NGO Bill, 2015 that resulted into the NGO Act, 2016.

³ The campaign was called the Free and Fair Elections Campaign was a joint civil society and political party campaign for electoral reforms coordinated by UNNGOF in 2014/2015.

⁴ The Citizens’ Manifesto Initiative is a collaborative initiative of several civil society agencies in Uganda. While the Citizens’ Manifesto is the brainchild of the Uganda Governance Monitoring Platform (UGMP) which is hosted by the UNNGOF, several important collaborating partners at national and regional levels are at the forefront of the its roll-out.

⁵ BMM is a social movement against theft of public funds by government officials and leaders that is symbolized by wearing black every Monday. It is a campaign of action around Uganda by citizens from many backgrounds including NGO activists, students, youth, women, religious and politicians to get rid of theft of public funds and other resources by public leaders

The organization has gained much agency and recognition amongst both state and non-state actors as a representative and convener of NGOs in Uganda. Some of the government spaces in which UNNGOF engages include; the National Bureau for NGOs where UNNGOF engages on issues of the NGO operating space; the National Planning Authority where we engage on the Uganda Vision 2040 and the National Development Frameworks, among other. UNNGOF also represents Ugandan civil society on various boards and committees. Internationally, we are affiliated with CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness (CPDE); FORUS, Task Team on CSO Development Effectiveness and Enabling Environment, AGNA-CIVICUS, among others.

Role of civil society in development

In the past six decades, civil society has rapidly gained recognition for its role in development policy and practice. Following the re-emergence of the New Policy Agenda in the early 1990s, and the consolidation of neoliberal and democratic governance reforms, mainstream development organizations such as the World Bank quickly identified CSOs as vehicles for advancing ideas about good governance⁶. They were viewed simultaneously as public actors that could support the democratic process in political spheres, and private market-based actors that could support service delivery where the state failed⁷. Many CSOs took on a service delivery role. It is no wonder that civil society organizations, especially NGOs, have now become part of the global governance and development system.

More so, the imposition of structural adjustment policies on many developing countries, especially in Africa, led to drastic cuts in the provision of social services. Some of the reforms required states to reduce economic interventions and emphasized a stronger role of the market, yet there existed very few indigenous private enterprises⁸. This left a huge gap in service delivery that non-state organizations attempted to fill. CSOs thus provided vehicles for people to participate in development and social change in ways that would not be possible through conventional government programs. In being 'not governmental', they constituted a 'space' in which it was possible to think about development and social change in ways that would not be likely through government programs⁹.

In Uganda, civil society has mutated from predominantly service-delivery to advocacy on human rights and governance issues. The independence struggle for example was in many respects led by various citizens' formations in Uganda. Citizens' groups were rooted in Uganda's social, economic, and political struggles. Post-independence, civil society groups in form of churches and missionary societies were the principal providers of basic social services in Uganda. To date, NGOs continue to deliver social services¹⁰ to the majority of citizens in Uganda and provide humanitarian aid to victims of instability in some parts of the country, especially the North and northeastern regions. Until recently, it was estimated that CSOs, and mainly Faith-Based Organizations, provided up to 40% of health services in the country.

Since the mid-1990s however, there has been an emergence of advocacy organizations working on governance and accountability. This was following a realization that the way NGOs had been approaching development achieved limited results¹¹. Their work was likened to patching up wounds without addressing the root causes of the problem. This realization precipitated a shift in the focus of many CSOs to governance, accountability, and advocacy work. As such, NGOs

⁶ Mohanty, R. (2002). Civil society and NGOs JSTOR

⁷ Edwards, M., & Hulme, D. (1992). Scaling-up the developmental impact of NGOs: Concepts and experiences London: Earthscan

⁸ Bratton, M. (1989a). The politics of government-NGO relations in africa Elsevier

⁹ Mitlin, D., Hickey, S., & Bebbington, A. (2007). Reclaiming development? NGOs and the challenge of alternatives Elsevier

¹⁰ Barr, A., Fafchamps, M., & Owens, T. (2005). The governance of non-governmental organizations in uganda Elsevier.

¹¹ Nkwatsibwe, C (2018) Winning and Sustaining Space for Civil Society in Semi-Authoritarian Settings: What Works, What Doesn't Work – The Case of Uganda

in Uganda shifted from being loose associations during the pre-independence and immediate post-independence period, to aid organizations, providing humanitarian support to victims of war and disaster in the early 1980s and 1990s, and now the emergence of advocacy and accountability organizations engaging in activities to balance the power between citizens and the state.

In terms of numbers, official government figures indicate an exponential growth in the number of NGOs operating in the country. In 1988, Uganda had 94 registered NGOs; 7,000 by the end of 2007; 10,000 by 2010, and 13,000 in 2016¹². It is imperative to underscore that several attempts have been made to document the contribution of NGOs to Uganda's development. In 1998 alone NGOs accounted for about \$89 million in expenditures, an amount equivalent to 1.4% of GDP that year¹³. The sector employs over 230,000 workers representing 2.3% of the country's economically active population and 10.9% of its non-agricultural employment. A 2018 UNNGOF study commissioned by Oxfam estimated that the NGO sector in Uganda in 2017 alone contributed approximately UGX 4.7 Trillion to the national economy in terms of additional funding mobilized from external and internal sources. NGOs create employment and pay significant amounts in taxes such as import duty, PAYE, VAT, and many other taxes, contributing to the growth of the economy.

Context in which civil society in Uganda operates and relationship between CSOs and the Uganda state

In terms of the relationship between NGOs and the Government, as the character, form, and function of civil society has been evolving, so has the relationship between civil society and the state. The shift in focus of NGOs from service delivery to advocacy had a significant effect on the nature of the relationship between NGOs and the State. It is imperative to note that Service Delivery NGOs in Uganda augment government service delivery efforts and fill the gaps where Government cannot reach. For their complementary role, the Government is supportive and welcoming to their interventions. However, the threat of political mobilization and empowerment from providing social services to the population has sometimes threatened the Government's grip on power and yielded conflict between the state and civil society actors. On the other hand, advocacy NGOs in Uganda provide a counterweight to the power of the political elite and balance the power between citizens and the state. These organizations check state excesses and challenge its inefficiencies. It is unsurprising therefore that in Uganda's neo-patrimonial contexts where the state works towards maintaining political control, it is suspicious of advocacy and governance organizations, which often yields conflictual relationships.

The emergency of the neo-patrimonial state in Uganda

The National Resistance Movement (NRM)¹⁴ under the leadership of Gen. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni took over power following a protracted guerrilla war that lasted a period of five years from 1981 to 1986. This was preceded by almost two decades of political turmoil from the mid-1960s¹⁵. These political conflicts had led to dysfunctional state institutions and mistrust of

¹² Based on the Draft 2018 National Bureau for NGOs' Database

¹³ Dr. Nyangabyaki writing for the John Hopkins Comparative Non Profit Sector Project

¹⁴ The National Resistance is the Political Party in Power in Uganda, Its Chairperson, Gen. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni has been at the helm of the country's political leadership from January 1986 to date.

¹⁵ Sejjaka, S. (2004). A political and economic history of Uganda, 1962–2002 Springer.

the state by the citizens. When Gen. Museveni took over, his government instituted significant governance reforms. The most prominent of these reforms include the introduction of the Movement System of Government¹⁶. The system was officially all-inclusive of persons from all political shades in Uganda¹⁷. The other reform was the abolition of political party activities and the introduction of 'individual merit' as a criterion for selecting political leaders. The early years registered significant improvement in development indicators with an increase in economic growth, restoration of political stability, and constitutional order.

In spite of this progress, registered during the early years of Gen. Museveni's rule, the movement system facilitated the informal power of presidentialism¹⁸, unaccountability, and patronage¹⁹. Institutions of service delivery became ineffective. The focus on individuals rather than institutions fueled both political patronage and individualization of public institutions and programs. With no official opposition in the political arena, the Movement system continuously encountered the criticism of being a system without political accountability.

In spite of the restoration of multiparty political dispensation, clientelism remained a domineering feature of Uganda's polity. There are growing sentiments that Museveni surrounds himself with people along the same tribal line. He has continuously recruited from Western Uganda, which is his tribal area. This has created high levels of mistrust between some of the tribes of Uganda, and tribalism is becoming a major factor in Uganda's political life.

What this demonstrates is the elusive promise and narrative of the democratic state in Uganda. It should be noted that while Uganda may have established democratic institutions and organized regular elections since the promulgation of the 1995 constitution, the rules governing elections, political and economic activities are personalized, and associational life is severely constrained. Because of the overarching intent of President Museveni and the NRM government to maintain political control, regressive actions are often taken to constrain any civic actions that threaten the fundamental power of the NRM, while maintaining the institutional illusion of democracy. This is the context in which Ugandan civil society in Uganda operates.

Nature of the civic space and the role of UNNGOF

This political context described in the previous section has in many respects shaped the civic space in Uganda. The continued retrogression of the state in terms of its democratic credentials has also impacted CSOs variously. While there has been a growth of organizations, the operating environment, and the restrictive NGO laws has meant that NGOs have to navigate a thin line between survival and implementing their activities.

Different actors and reports continue to indicate that the Government of Uganda has grown increasingly less tolerant of criticism over the past decade. In the past, retrogressive laws and guidelines have been enacted and state institutions have adopted a more ruthless response to civic activists that challenge the power of the incumbent. The most recent of these is the Uganda Communications Commission Guidelines for bloggers and online news platforms. NGOs that engage in monitoring the conduct of the state and advocate for human rights, in anti-corruption and accountability and democratic governance have experienced growing restrictions on the space available for them to carry out their activities. Resident District Commissioners (RDCs)²⁰

¹⁶ Brett F (1993 & 1998); Langseth P et al., Uganda: Landmarks in rebuilding a nation, Kampala: Fountain Press, 1995

¹⁷ Golooba-Mutebi F and Hickey S (2013) Investigating the Links between Political Settlement and Inclusive Development: Towards Research Agenda, ESID Working Paper No.20, Manchester University, Manchester

¹⁸ Kjaer, M. (1999). Fundamental change or no change? the process of constitutionalizing uganda Taylor & Francis Group. doi:10.1080/13510349908403634

¹⁹ Carbone, G. M. (2003). Political parties in a 'No-party democracy' hegemony and opposition under 'Movement democracy' in uganda Sage Publications.

²⁰ RDCs are representatives of the president at district level and heads of security in the districts. They have variously been reported to act in a partisan manner.

arbitrarily interfere with NGO activities. State agencies and agents have also recently stepped up their efforts demonizing legitimate NGO work with negative narratives against civil society being purveyed by state actors. Civil society activists in Uganda feel that the spirit of the NGO Act, 2016, the spate of attacks on the offices of some vocal NGOs, the violent crackdown on activities of opposition politicians and their supporters by the Uganda Police Force, are among the many signs that civic space is imperiled.

Despite these restrictions, there are available spaces and opportunities for CSO operations that civil society in Uganda and UNNGOF in particular has taken advantage of to expand space for civil society operations. Firstly, UNNGOF established a collaborative relationship with the National Bureau of NGOs to address some of the major infractions to civic space. The most prominent of these include the quarterly dialogues with the minister of internal affairs – the minister in charge of NGOs and the National Bureau for NGOs and the joint training of the District NGO Monitoring Committees across the country on the NGO regulatory frameworks. These spaces have provided much-needed opportunities for dialogue and to address some of the major issues affecting the sector.

Additionally, citizens of Uganda and increasingly most government actors recognize the important role that civil society plays in the socio-economic development trajectory of Uganda. As indicated earlier, civil society groups are at the center of filling the service delivery gap and the provision of basic social services in Uganda. The NGO Policy also recognizes the important role that NGOs play in Uganda's development. This recognition gives NGOs the much-needed agency amongst the citizens to continue pushing for space for their operations.

UNNGOF continues efforts to engage with the government of Uganda through the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the National Bureau for NGOs to reform the NGO laws that make it difficult for NGOs to easily operate. By regularly documenting civic space violations, UNNGOF contributes to the available body of evidence that is instructive in engaging with the relevant state and non-state institutions on civic space and human rights violations. UNNGOF will continue producing the periodic state of civil society reports to inform discussions for reform in these spaces.

Lastly, UNNGOF has been central to documenting cases that demonstrate the value of civil society in Uganda. On an annual basis, UNNGOF produces reports that quantify and provide qualitative analysis of the civil society contributions to the socio-economic and political development of Uganda. This has been important to change the negative attitudes about the NGO sector amongst some stakeholders.

Legal framework governing NGO operations

The success of the Civil Society is largely dependent on the nature and substance of the operating environment. The NGO legislative framework contains provisions that can be characterized as restrictive. A 2018 state of civil society report revealed that the legal environment is generally improving and that there have been visible improvements in CSO-Government relationships over the past few years. As underscored earlier, it should be acknowledged that there are existing platforms to express the sector's agenda, and the CSOs' involvement in some government working committees provides an opportunity for regular CSO-Government interactions.

For example, the NGO Act, 2016 provides for CSO representation on the Board of Directors of the National Bureau for NGOs and the District and Sub-county NGO Monitoring Committees. These platforms have been instructive in pushing for the much needed structural reforms that will improve the space for CSO operations at both national and sub-national levels. Relatedly, UNNGOF, and other CSO platforms are represented in various Ministry and Sector working groups. For example, the Budget Working Groups, African Peer Review Mechanisms, and the

National Planning processes, Ministry of Finance Planning and Economic Development working committees, Sustainable Development Goal's Secretariat under the Office of the Prime Minister, among others. These spaces present a formal avenue to push the civil society development agenda from within government institutions.

On the other hand, a close analysis of the legal framework that regulates civil society in Uganda reveals that the legal requirements for the registration and operation of NGOs reflect a deep distrust of their activities and discounts their vital role in socio-political development. Key provisions regarding the registration of NGOs creates a web of bureaucratic red tape, which constitute a significant hurdle for individuals wishing to form an NGO. Ideally, the process of registration should be quick, simple, inexpensive, in line with the law, and consistently applied. However, a lengthy and elaborate procedure is prescribed for the registration of domestic NGOs, which serves to obstruct rather than enable the freedom of association.

For example, applications by indigenous NGOs must be accompanied by written recommendations from the District NGO Monitoring Committees in the districts of the area where the organization intends to operate, recommendation by a government ministry or department. No criteria are prescribed on how to acquire a recommendation, leaving ample scope for the exercise of discretion by government officials. By prescribing multiple authorities from whom recommendations or endorsements are required, the procedure is made complicated and time-consuming, which can be daunting for people who wish to form an NGO but do not ordinarily have access to the bureaucracy or political representatives.

Moreover, the Non-Governmental Organisations Act, 2016 (NGO Act, 2016) poses a threat to the right to freedom of association. Section 44 prohibits NGOs from carrying out activities in any part of the country unless they have approval from the District Non-Governmental Monitoring Committee (DNMC) and the local government and have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to that effect. NGOs may not extend their operations to new areas unless they have received a recommendation from the National Bureau for NGOs through the DNMC of that area.

Lastly, the National Bureau for NGOs which is mandated to oversee NGO activity has an excessively bureaucratic composition. Notably, the Ministry for Internal Affairs as opposed to the Ministry for Gender, Labor and Social Development and or any other development ministry is charged with the overall regulation of the NGO sector. In addition, Section 5 establishes a National Bureau for NGOs that is granted broad powers, which includes the power to revoke an NGO's operational permit. This power is susceptible to abuse by the bureau and can easily be used to which hunt organizations that are perceived to be at odds with the state.

NGO financing in Uganda

Uganda's pre and immediate post-colonial civil society associations were organized around organic citizens' interests. Consequently, their financing was largely drawn from member contributions. This was the case with trade unions and other similar citizens' associations. As indicated earlier, however, with the global recognition of the role of civil society in the development realm, the Global Financial Institutions and Development Partners worked through NGOs to deliver social services while investing in building state capabilities of African governments. This also necessitated the professionalization of the civil society space with the growth of professional NGOs.

As such, the financing situation for NGOs in the late 1980 and 90s was favorable as Global Development Organizations channeled development aid through NGOs in Uganda. Consistent with President Museveni's movement politics at the time – consensus politics and desire to put Uganda in good light internationally as a country that is liberal and ready to work with all partners, the flow of development aid in form of grants to NGOs was unabated²¹ and with less

scrutiny from the state. As such, the financing of civil society expanded exponentially during this period with many NGOs being formed and getting funding for their programs.

More recently, however, development assistance to CSOs in Uganda is reducing. Studies show that while there was an upward trend in external funding to CSOs between 2009 and 2015, the volume began dipping in 2016 and the downward trend has continued since. This turn can be attributed to several factors, but two major developments in the sector have contributed the most: on one hand, souring relations between the sector and the government have triggered state action to squeeze development partners into scaling back support²². On the other hand, the growing gravitation among development partners towards basket funding platforms like the Democratic Governance Facility²³ has given rise to stringent conditionalities. Secondly, a shift from core funding to project-based support has left more organizations with limited resources to invest in their sustainability.

Beyond domestic financing challenges for Ugandan NGOs, it is also imperative to note that global financing for NGOs is generally reducing. The most significant driver behind this reduction stems from political changes in the global west. The last two election cycles in Europe and America precipitated a rise of far-right political groups in government. Their nationalist agenda has had effects on spending in the world's biggest donors.

The United States of America (USA) – the world's biggest spender in development aid is reducing foreign spending to stimulate its economy under President Trump. Despite development assistance making up no more than 1% of its national budget, the far-right has created the impression that the USA spends 30% of taxpayer dollars on development assistance. Such rhetoric reduces public support for development financing. As a result, USAID is shifting its policy focus to self-sustenance in all the countries it has been supporting. Britain's exit from the European Union has bound both DFID and EU spending in developing countries. In the bid to strengthen commercial ties with its former colonies, British interests are shifting to trade. DFID's new imperative is to promote trade and investment over social justice because of Brexit, therefore, its approach to financing is shifting away from civil society support to private sector support.

Lastly, the discourse on the 'war on terror' and anti-money laundering efforts has led to deeper scrutiny of NGOs' finances in Uganda. The Government of Uganda through the Financial Intelligence Authority has in recent times disproportionately evoked the Anti-Money Laundering Act, 2013 to tighten financing channels for NGOs carrying out political advocacy. Consequently, NGOs find themselves caught between the constant threat of government clamp-down and a downward funding trend. This has raised significant concerns about the future of NGO work in Uganda²⁴ given the fact that the majority of NGOs in Uganda depend on donor support and have insufficient capacity to generate their funding.²⁵

²¹ Richard Ssewakiryanga, 'No Romance without Finance' Civil Society Sustainability and Funding in Uganda – Contours and Contestations; Unpublished

²² Based on discussions at the Quarterly Scenario Building Session on CSO Operating Environment organized by the Uganda National NGO Forum on 7th February 2020

²³ The Democratic Governance Facility (DGF) was initially established in July 2011 by eight Development Partners (DPs): Austria, Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the European Union.

²⁴ Based on discussions at the Quarterly Scenario Building Session on CSO Operating Environment organized by the Uganda National NGO Forum on 7th February 2020

²⁵ 2019 Comprehensive Assessment of Uganda National NGO Forum

THE VALUE OF AN NGO PLATFORM – THE CASE OF UNNGOF

This section underscores the role and value of an NGO platform in building the sustainability of NGOs through the lens of UNNGOF's member organizations. The section draws on three case studies from the Uganda National NGO Forum Members. The stories span two broad areas, i.e. Capacity building and opportunities for financing.

As part of UNNGOF's programming, the focus is on building capacities of organizations both her members and other affiliate organizations to be able to navigate the complex operating environment but also strengthen their internal capacities to be able to deliver on their mandate.

The First African Bicycles Initiative Organization (FABIO)²⁶ cherishes a learning culture and therefore appreciates that UNNGOF has made it possible for the FABIO to learn through the different capacity-building opportunities. One of the key outstanding opportunities for FABIO has been the training in local resource mobilization strategies which added so much value to FABIO. At the moment FABIO is currently growing its bicycle center to increase the income it generates locally. Today, FABIO is complying with all the legal requirements set by the state, and this is partly attributed to the various training and information received from the UNNGOF.

“FABIO cherishes a learning culture and therefore appreciates that UNNGOF has made it possible for us to learn through the different capacity building opportunities for example the training in local resource mobilization strategies added so much value to FABIO and as we speak FABIO is currently growing its bicycle center to increase the income it generates locally”. Katasi Najjiba, Executive Director, FABIO.

Secondly, the Mid-Western Region Centre for Democracy and Human Rights (MICOD)²⁷ was desirous of becoming a member of the UNNGOF following its formations. Following this, MICOD became part of the implementing partners of the Citizens' Manifesto Initiative which UNNGOF was implementing in different regions of the country. During the implementation, several trainings were conducted as a way of improving the capacity of the implementing partners. There were a number of joint planning, sharing sessions, and partner to partner exchange visit events. This improved MICOD's planning processes, its exposure, and the staff's capacity in managing organizational programs. UNNGOF was also supportive in improving MICOD's internal systems, like Financial controls, improving governing policies, fundraising, and writing of good project proposals for funding.

“Because of the long-time capacity building MICOD was able to win its 1st direct grant from USAID/UKAID GAAP program in 2018 which also opened up for others in 2019 which were also from USAID. All the above were achieved because MICOD choose to be a member of the right platform” Lawrence Kangula, Regional Programme Manager – MICOD.

For Kitara Civil Society Organizations' Network (KCSO)²⁸, UNNGOF has contributed to KCSO Institutional growth. UNNGOF provided capacity building opportunities in different areas of institutional development such as governance, resource mobilization, program, and financial management. This has been through different approaches under different programs such as

²⁶ FABIO is a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) that seeks to promote the use of sustainable transport solutions with major emphasis on active transport and mass public transport. It uses the bicycle as a tool for improving the livelihoods of the vulnerable communities through enhancing the community access to basic services,

²⁷ MICOD is a Uganda National Organisation aims at promoting a culture of dialogue and peaceful co-existence through citizen's participation in decision making processes, ensure that services reach the intended population particularly the poor (women, youth, elderly and children) who have less access and less influence to demand for services.

²⁸ Kitara Civil Society Organizations' Network (KCSO) is a registered NGO network operating in mid-Western Uganda and started in 2003. KCSO seeks to coordinate civil society organizations and groupings in the mid-western region to interface with other actors and participate in the development processes. Currently KCSO is running different activities in districts of Kibaale, Kagadi, Kakumiro, Kyenjojo, Kikuube, Hoima, Masindi, Ibanda and Buliisa and with established field offices.

the Support Program for Advocacy Networks (SPAN) in which KCSO has participated since 2007. These programs have had a significant impact on the organization's capacity through strengthening its internal policy framework, strategic planning as well as providing knowledge and skills to the governance and management structures.

"When KCSO first accessed support through UNNGOF in 2007, its annual budget was about USD 50,000 with 80% of it coming from UNNGOF and a significant part of it was for overhead costs including 100% office space and operational costs, and staff salaries for the Coordinator, the Accounts Assistant and Office Secretary who were the only staff members of KCSO. Steadily, because of the stimulus impact of UNNGOF support, KCSO established strong internal systems and slowly but steadily became attractive to other donors. The Budget for the Organisation had grown to \$150,000 by 2010, to \$250,000 by 2016, and \$450,000 in 2019. From a management/ staff team of 3 members in 2007 to 45 members in 2020. The growth in the budget directly represents the growth in programs and benefits to the network and the community that is served through KCSO. This growth also informed KCSO's change of name from Kibaale District Civil Society Organisations' Network to Kitara Civil Society Organisations Network in 2017 to effectively accommodate the operational geographical areas. KCSO now coordinates civil society actions in the Kitara region (mid-Western Uganda)." Paul Mulindwa, Executive Director – KCSO.

One of the key areas for a platform organization is bridging the information gap for its members. UNNGOF has over the past years building a dynamic resource hub and base from which information is regularly shared with members. In doing this, UNNGOF continues to remain relevant amongst her constituents. For FABIO, this is one of the key areas that the organization has benefited from. FABIO appreciates access to up-to-date information on issues such as the state of civil society, international and local funding calls, among others. Because of the information, UNNGOF passes over to its members, FABIO was able to acquire her biggest partner (donor) which has been instrumental in the fulfillment of the organization's mandate.

FABIO also argues that association with UNNGOF has increased Networking opportunities for the organization. Since FABIO became partners of UNNGOF, the organization has widened its contact base. Today the organization has contacts in all regions of Uganda. The organization has participated in a number of joint programs and campaigns such as the Citizen Manifesto Amplified, the electoral reform campaigns, among others. This has enabled the organization to gain more experience in organizing and mobilizing citizens. This is consistent with what KCSO reports. For KCSO, partnership with UNNGOF has enabled the organization to strengthen partnerships with local governments and also support its members to comply with the NGO regulatory framework. This has particularly been through direct funding under the Civil Society Resilience Health and Health project provided by the UNNGOF. This support has led to the formation and inauguration of District NGO monitoring committees and mobilizing other CSOs in the region for awareness on the new NGO act, regulations, and what CSOs ought to fulfill for a better operating environment.

Similarly, MICOD reports that UNNGOF has provided financial support from 2012 to 2019 and has been key in recommending MICOD to potential funders. Due to the exposure events organized by UNNGOF for her members, MICOD was able to attract like-minded partners who provide financial support to the organization.

CONCLUSION/ RECOMMENDATION/ PLATFORM'S POSITION

In the final analysis, the nature and character of the Ugandan state leave NGOs, especially those engaged in advocacy to inevitably be at odds with the state as they attempt to balance the power between the citizens and the state. Invariably the state, through its agents searches for means through which to constrain space for NGO operations. The law is just one facet of the means at government disposal. The government often uses other extrajudicial means to constrain NGO operations.

As such, the ingredients of the NGO operating environment go beyond the nature and substance of the law. State agents and agencies often work outside the provisions of the law to constrain space for civic operations. The nature of the Government-CSO relationship depends on both the political context, nature of political settlements, the laws regulating the sectors. As such, over the past five years, the amount of space allowed for civil society operations in Uganda has been dependent on political risk, the threat posed by the NGO.

There is significant progress that has been made to improve the NGO Law. The created and invited spaces for CSO-State interaction have also provided formidable platforms for discussing some of the major challenges to NGO Operations. This makes an NGO platform, like the Uganda National NGO Forum an important link between the state and the NGO sectors.

Additionally, the health of the NGO sector also heavily depends on the internal capacities of the NGOs themselves. Over the years, UNNGOF has invested significant resources to build the capacities of her members through direct support, training, exposure, among others. By promoting self-regulation through the Quality Assurance Mechanism (QuAM) – a self-regulatory mechanism for NGOs in Uganda, UNNGOF has contributed to the CSO adherence to generally accepted ethical standards and operational norms. QuAM sets principles and standards of behavior for responsible practice, to protect the credibility and integrity of certified NGOs and their networks in Uganda.

Lastly, recent literature suggests that the notion of sustainability for the NGO sector ought to be looked at broadly beyond financing. NGOs and NGO Platforms in Uganda need to connect more deeply with the citizens' aspirations and root the NGO programs in citizens' agendas to survive in Uganda's political context.



CIVIL SOCIETY IN LITHUANIA AND THE ROLE OF LITHUANIAN NGDO PLATFORM AND NGOS

Justina Kaluinaite²⁹

Introduction

Lithuanian National Platform of Non-Governmental Development Cooperation Organizations (hereinafter referred to as Lithuanian NGDO Platform) is an association uniting organizations working in the field of development cooperation (DC) from Lithuania. Currently the Lithuanian NGDO Platform has 21 members. The Lithuanian NGDO Platform was established in 2007. The Lithuanian NGDO Platform is working to strengthen intercultural, civic and democratic societies in Lithuania, to expand opportunities for Lithuanian NGOs to participate in international development cooperation activities and to help develop their skills. We represent non-governmental development cooperation organizations in Lithuania, the European Union (EU) and other international organisations, and we strengthen NGO networking, transnational partnerships, perform monitoring and advocacy, contribute to policy development, exchange of good practice and cross-sectoral activities.

Competences and expertise of our member organizations: democracy, NGO law, education, social policy, equal opportunities, gender, health care, economics, human rights, mental health, civil society and inclusion, minorities, groups in social risk, migration, development cooperation, security, global education, youth, women rights, humanitarian action, humanitarian education, international relationship, children rights, social work, communication, nutrition, community development, the inclusion of older people.

Our main areas of activities: advocacy, policy, monitoring, research, analysis, events and short term / long term programs, training, actions.

The Lithuanian NGDO Platform is a representative of Lithuania in these international networks and organisations: [FORUS](#), [CIVICUS](#), associate member at the [CIVICUS AGNA](#), [SDG Watch Europe](#), [GCAP](#) (Global Call to Action Against Poverty), [EURODAD](#). The Lithuanian NGDO Platform is active at the national level and we are the members at the [National NGO coalition](#), [Anna Lindh Foundation in Lithuania](#).

Lithuanian NGDO Platform also represents civil society voice in committees and working groups within the various ministries. We cooperate and partner with [NOHA](#) (Network of Humanitarian Action) and [Vilnius University](#) in organizing the [NOHA Humanitarian Action Spring School Program](#) in Vilnius, Lithuania. The Lithuanian NGDO Platform coordinates the national network of [SDGs Ambassadors](#) in Lithuania. We are co-founders, members and current facilitators of the [Sustainable Development Goals Expert Network](#) in Lithuania.

²⁹ Justina Kaluinaite is the Policy, Advocacy and the Partnership Officer at the Lithuanian NGDO Platform, The Global Council member at the Global Call to Action Against Poverty, Development projects' coordinator at the global level. Justina holds Master's International Relationship and Humanitarian Action and Advanced Master in Humanitarian Education.

CIVIL SOCIETY: DEFINITION, OPERATIONAL CONTEXT AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CSOS AND THE LITHUANIAN STATE AND THE CASE STUDIES

NGO Law and civic space

Lithuanian Parliament adopted a law on NGO development³⁰ and cross-sectoral cooperation that came into effect in 2014 with the last adopted version in 2020. The Law provides the definition of NGOs and makes a distinction between public and mutual benefit NGOs, national umbrella organizations. The Law outlines the principles of cooperation with the governmental bodies in the sectors of NGOs development policy, inclusion and awareness about the funding mechanisms for NGOs, outlines the key guiding principles for NGO Council. The NGO Council acts as a key advisory body for the related NGO development policies and strategies and is directly related to the Government (coordinated by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour). The Council is formed by representatives from ministries, municipalities, and national CSO umbrella organizations. The Law also defines the definition and operational status of the local level NGO Council - the Municipal NGO Councils. The Law was modified in 2020 when the new instrument - The establishment of NGO Fund was included. The law does not define the operational and technical requirements or regulations for the NGOs as founding, annual documentation or closure.

There is currently no data on how much Lithuania spends to finance NGOs. According to a 2015 Transparency International Lithuania survey, 34 percent of Lithuanian NGOs say that national-and municipality-level institutions do not have clear criteria to finance NGO projects, and that the selection process is not transparent³¹.

According to the current public service delivery model, practically all public services are provided by state or municipal institutions or bodies. This is often not what the users want as they are often inefficient and uneconomical, and the users are often devoid of the possibility to impact the quality of services provided. Such a public service model does not contribute to the promotion of civic awareness and the strengthening of communities, i.e. citizens are not involved in decision-making as regards services and their better quality, despite the fact that these decisions have a significant impact on the quality of their own life and the environment. Currently, only a small number of municipalities have transferred to NGOs and communities a small proportion of public services, although the National Progress Programme provides for 15 per cent share of services to be transferred by municipalities to NGOs and communities by 2020³².

NGO Database and NGO Fund

For many years, NGO projects have been funded from the state budget. The new instrument – NGO Fund – places a focus on strengthening civic society through the development of non-governmental organizations databases and funding schemes. The development of the NGO database and more specific regulations defining the “non-for-profit” may help to create a clearer way to provide the information on whether the legal established body is an NGO aiming to

³⁰ Source: Legal Acts Database, NGO development Law. Retrieved <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/b68eb4b11bf311ea4a-5fa76770768ee?jfwid=i3h7whklg>

³¹ Source: Transparency International Lithuania, 2015. 'NGOs Survey on NGO transparency', Transparency International Lithuania, 2015, <http://www.transparency.lt/nvo-atstovu-apklausa-apie-nvo-skaidruma/>.

³² Source: https://www.opengovpartnership.org/members/lithuania/commitments/LT0027/#_ftn22

address the social needs or just a registered as NGO but could be oriented to business actions or the government-organized non-governmental organizations (GONGOs). The Database took its first steps on October³³ 2020 inviting the NGOs to register their status at the National Register center defining that their main aims and activities relate to the goals as civic society organizations. This improvement of understanding of the legal entities as NGOs and which are not as a tool for clarification and recognition of the NGO funding as current situation sometimes the financing for NGOs end up in public authorities, business associations and so on. This focus on the sustainable development of the civil society sector.

There is currently a lack of sustainable mechanisms in place to help strengthen the capacity of NGOs to participate in decision-making, advocacy and policy processes. The example could be a capacity building project program from the Ministry of Social Security and Labour³⁴ which focus on the umbrella and national organizations and their technical and capacity building. The creation of an NGO fund will provide a mechanism that will enable strengthening of such capacities; as a sustainable entity, the NGO fund will carry out the regular monitoring (as to the developments regarding the public participation in public policy and decision-making processes) and, in the light of the results, will accordingly improve the fund's strategy and activities. The Fund is also aiming to strengthen the capacity of NGOs to participate in decision-making processes linked to the value of civic engagement. The COVID-19 crisis postponed the establishment of the National NGO Fund but the establishment of the Board of the National NGO Fund³⁵ took place and the board members were elected. The Fund's board consists of seven members, including three government representatives, three representatives from national NGOs and a scientist researching civil society and NGO development.

While the projected NGO Fund is expected to have a specific annual budget (approx. 2 million EUR), the information does not yet provide criteria how the NGOs will receive funding and which public services will be transferred to NGOs as the annual funding compared to the NGOs registered in Lithuania still could be defined as low or medium.

Trust level of CSOs

NGO Information and Support Centre contracted the independent institution of public opinion and market "Vilmorus" to conduct a representative survey in 2018³⁶ of Lithuanian residents aiming to understand the level of trust and perceptions towards the NGOs including the thematic questions on trusting the NGOs, donating or participating as volunteers, and the other relevant support.

Similar representative survey was conducted in 2012³⁷ So, comparing the results of surveys conducted in 2012 and 2018 we could see the tendencies and changes in how the residents at the national scale trust the NGOs in Lithuania: as comparison of the data from 2012 (32%) to 2018 (52%) we see the rise of 20% of the trust level in NGOs. This could be seen as the NGO sector itself is growing, having more visible results, more reach out to communities and implementing their aims effectively while contributing, representing the interests of civil society and / or providing needed services and reacting to the needs of the society.

³³ Source: Vilnius municipality, statement 2020. Retrieved <https://www.vilnieciam.lt/2020/10/30/neyvriausybinės-organizacijos-kvieciamos-registruoti-nvo-statusa-registru-centre/>

³⁴ Source: Register of Legal Acts of Lithuania. 2020. Retrieved <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/56d10bb0d47a11e98c12b3138b15576c/asr>

³⁵ Source: Government of the Republic of Lithuania, announcement. Retrieved <https://epilietis.lrv.lt/lt/naujienos/vyriausybe-patvirtino-kaip-veiks-nvo-fondas>

³⁶ Source: NGO Information and Support Centre, 2018. Available in Lithuanian language at www.3sektorius.lt/docs/Visuomenės_pasitikėjimas_NVO_2018_2019-01-16_21:53:51.pdf

³⁷ Source: NGO Information and Support Centre, 2018. Available in Lithuanian language at www.3sektorius.lt/docs/Ataskaita_NVO_zinomumas_santrauka_2013-01-17_16_00_05.pdf

CSOs and the partnership with political parties

On 29th of January, 2019 as stated in public announcement “LITHUANIA: Civil Society Organizations Managed to Sign the Cooperation Agreement with all the Main Political Parties in the Country”³⁸ by the NGO Information and Support Centre that the debate and the negotiation with all the political parties to sign an agreement–memorandum for cooperation aiming to strengthen civic activism and active citizenship and participation. The Memorandum³⁹ outlines constant efforts to strengthen the citizenship and participation of Lithuanian residents in 10 key goals are linked to (1) transparent elections and partnership with civil society during and after the elections; (2) citizens’ and NGOs participation and inclusion in formation and implementation of municipality level financing programs and provision of public services; (3) continuous monitoring of the implementation of public services and municipal NGO Council’s members and other NGO representatives included in the development of the public service system; (4) profit driven organizations controlled by the municipality would be elected and appointed publicly; (5) implementation of an open data system including the publicly of municipal budget available online in accessible digital format; (6) information about public services provided in diverse formats (audio, video) and adopted to the needs of people with disability (visual, hearing, perceptual); (7) focus on improvement of access for people with disabilities and development of the physical and information environments, infrastructure, public transport, public buildings; (8) development of disability friendly social services in the community; (9) equal opportunities for women and men (10) inclusion of citizens into decision – making process. Later in the same year in March the Memorandum was signed with all the main political parties. Ability to gather all political parties at one table is an important milestone for the Lithuanian Civil Society. After the agreement the monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of The Memorandum have not been placed.

Peaceful Assembly: Human chain for Belarus

Peaceful assembly is protected in Lithuania however organisers of gatherings of more than 10 persons must notify the police in advance. Article 36 of the Lithuanian constitution⁴⁰ states that “citizens may not be prohibited or hindered from assembling unarmed in peaceful meetings.” The law regulating assemblies is in line with the international standards. The organisers of protests of more than 10 people ought to notify the authorities in advance. The right to freedom of peaceful assembly can be limited when the security of the state or the rights of other persons are at stake. There are two somewhat nonstandard limitations put on the freedom of assembly: the protesters are prohibited from violating the “morals with their appearance or things they possess or demonstrate” and they are not to demonstrate soviet/communist/Nazi symbols.



³⁸ Source: Civic Space Watch, 2019. Available at <http://civicspacewatch.eu/lithuania-civil-society-organizations-managed-to-sign-the-cooperation-agreement-with-all-the-main-political-parties-in-the-country/>

³⁹ Ibid. Link to The Memorandum text in English provided at the end of the announcement.

⁴⁰ Source: The Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, 1992. Retrieved Legislationline

August 23rd 2020 marks the 31st anniversary of the [Baltic Way](#). The Baltic Way was a very important movement in the region, where million citizens formed a live human chain of 600 kilometers through Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, calling for independence and freedom. On this occasion on 2020 the Baltic states formed a [mass human chain](#) to support and show solidarity for civic peaceful protesters in Belarus.

Thousands formed a live human chain from the capital Vilnius up to the border with Belarus. Belarusian opposition leader Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, who fled to Lithuania just right after the elections in Belarus initiated the mass scale protests calling for long-time president Alexander Lukashenko to step down, expressed support for this symbolic action.

Inclusive society

The second [Roma Civil Monitor](#) (RCM) report on Lithuania has found that employment initiatives targeting Roma community integration into the labor market seems to move towards a positive change. The challenges still remain with the country's biggest Roma settlement in Vilnius and its residents often face forced displacement. Roma access to health care slightly less compared to other members of society. Better designed measures are necessary to ensure Roma children access quality education in Lithuania.

The Government of Lithuania has added the Roma Genocide Remembrance Day to the national list of commemorative days on 2019 marking it as 2nd of August. This was a long advocacy process for activists to make it happen. The director of the PI Roma Community Centre, Svetlana Novopolskaja, states that "This decision is a significant event for the entire Roma community in Lithuania. We hope that it will encourage the public to pay attention to the painful facts of our national history and will contribute to reconciliation between communities, to intercultural dialogue, and to the reduction of stereotypes" as stated at the Central European University⁴¹ report.

COVID-19 virus and the CSOs

The 2020 is linked to a global challenge - a global pandemic of Covid-19. Needless to say, Lithuania was and still is one of the countries strongly affected, and a few times had to adopt the strict measures of quarantine and self-isolation as the rest of the world.

According to Eurostat, in 2015 only about 16.3%⁴² of the population in Lithuania was involved in formal and informal voluntary activities in the society which compared to neighboring countries as Poland, Latvia or Estonia was significantly lower. Today we can share some of the numerous examples, which show that the activism and civil society in Lithuania rose to a challenge as pandemic.

As soon as Lithuania noticed that coronavirus was endangering the elderly part of the society, a volunteer initiative called [Strong Together](#) was born. In the ageing society, with the demographic pyramid strongly dented by the international migration of the youth the involvement of young volunteers was crucial. In three weeks, more than 3000 volunteers joined the initiative - important to note that 3000 volunteers are equivalent to 0.1% of the society which makes it very significant. And this includes just one initiative not counting the numerous local actions when people posted the papers on billboards at the houses or elderly houses with their numbers and warmly invitations to call if needed the support in shopping as grocery, medications or any assistance.

⁴¹ Source: Central European University, 2020. Retrieved <https://cps.ceu.edu/article/2020-03-19/roma-civil-society-lithuania-should-keep-progressing-roma-inclusion>

⁴² Source: Eurostat statistics, 2015. Retrieved https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Social_participation_and_integration_statistics#Formal_and_informal_voluntary_activities

More than 1000 individuals participated in the virtual hackathon [Hack the Crisis](#). The key challenges addressed during the online event were restorations of the supply chain, information verification, assistance to businesses in competing in digital economy, e-education, services for civil society during the pandemic. Solutions proposed during the hackathon have been included in '[There Is No Quarantine on the Internet](#)', a governmental program seeking to assist the country's SMEs in improving the development of their businesses to e-commerce. Another result of the hackathon is an initiative '[Learning Does Not Stop During Quarantine](#)', aimed at encouraging businesses and individuals to donate their computers to the people in need for educational purposes – the ongoing distant education.

There are many more inspiring civic activism actions across Lithuania: health professionals provide health consultations online on [MEDO](#) platform, public libraries employ their 3D printers to produce over 12 000 face shields, local restaurants providing free giveaway food to medical staff. Moreover the inventors and scientists are working on a simple 3D respiratory assistance device that does not need electricity. This is particularly relevant for the developing world with extremely large populations and electricity outages still an occurrence. If the prototype succeeds, P. Lideikis, the co-founder of Under Pressure, wants to make it freely available to those in need.

The joint civil society action and the involvement to create a common benefit for the society is outstanding and we can only hope that the involvement of the civil society will stay the same after the pandemic as well. The Lithuanian government provided support for NGOs in a few ways. The direct support came as the grants as NGOs with an annual budget below 30,000 Euros were able to receive 1,000 Euros and those with a higher budget were able to receive 5,000 Euros. In July 2020, the government started to collect applications and began distributing the NGO aid as promised; the application process was closed just recently in November 2020.

Sustainability Index and CSOs

USAID's Civil Society Organization (CSO) Sustainability Index for Central and Eastern Europe & Eurasia reports on the strength and overall viability of the NGO sector in these regions' countries. The Index measures the sustainability of each country's CSO sector based on the CSOSI's seven dimensions: legal environment, organizational capacity, financial viability, advocacy, service provision, infrastructure, and public image. The Sustainability Index for Lithuania⁴³ states that overall CSO sustainability improved slightly in 2019, with improvements recorded in the legal environment, financial viability, advocacy, and service provision dimensions. A highlight of the year was the passage of the new Law on the Development of Non-governmental Organizations⁴⁴ (NGOs), which clarifies the concept of an NGO and establishes the National NGO Fund. CSOs defended their legal interests and advocated with more confidence. There was some progress in the transfer of public services to the CSO sector, and CSOs diversified their funding sources. There are approximately 35,000 registered nonprofits in Lithuania, including public institutions established by the government. About half of registered organizations are estimated to be active.

⁴³ Source: USA Embassy in Lithuania, Sustainability Index. Retrieved <https://lt.usembassy.gov/latest-csos-index-on-lithuania-2019/>

⁴⁴ Source: Register of Legal Acts of Lithuania. 2020. Retrieved <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.463439/asr>

DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AND CSOS: POLICIES AND CONTEXT

Lithuania officially became the 36th member of the OECD in 2018. For CSOs umbrellas as Lithuanian NGDO Platform to be able and to proceed with policy and advocacy actions, researches, evidence based development practices specific funding for umbrella organizations' focusing on capacity development should be entitled in the national funding – state funding programs. So far the only Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour is launching this type of calls. Although the development cooperation policy implementation and CSOs funding for development cooperation projects are mainly led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) the all funding schemes provided focus on direct project actions and implementation not the capacity building. This brings the gap for CSOs development or especially the strengthening of the Lithuanian NGDO Platform as an umbrella organization to be able to conduct the training for members, or researchers. Lithuanian NGDO Platform continuously lead projects related to SDGs awareness raising and Expert volunteers – the short term expert exchange program within Lithuania and the developing partner – countries.

The Law of Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid

The Law of Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid⁴⁵ regulate public relations of development cooperation activities and delivery of humanitarian aid, define objectives and principles of the Lithuanian development cooperation policy, methods of implementation, coordination and funding.

2020 also marked important changes in the development cooperation policy – the change in the Law of Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid⁴⁶ was improved by enlisting the creation of the Development Cooperation Fund. Although the legal approved change and establishment of development cooperation fund could be seen as a positive development the need for more detailed discussions of development cooperation architecture was outlined from CSOs actors. The changes in law was approved by The Seimas on 15th of December⁴⁷ stating the key changes as the Fund will not be tight to annual strict budget circles and will allow more flexibility, will include co-funding opportunities, should outline the strengthening and capacity building of all the actors (business, public, GONGOS) and the NGOs working in the development cooperation field. The Fund will be managed by the Board which will include 4 representatives from ministries, 1 representative from the municipality body, 1 from NGO and 1 from business entities. The Lithuanian NGDO Platform was actively involved in the advocacy and policy actions (statements and positions listed on the website⁴⁸) and the positive results of inclusion of CSOs capacity building in line with public organizations capacity building was achieved, the co funding of international programs although the suggestion seeking the equal representation of sectors and inclusion of representatives from academia was not confirmed. The ongoing preparation process for the more crucial step – the provision of the Fund is upcoming the Lithuanian NGDO Platform in line with the members are actively preparing the CSO Development cooperation strategy and the crucial points for advocacy and policy to ensure the Fund will operate in efficient and effective way including also the civil society as an equal actor in the development cooperation architecture.

⁴⁵ Source: Legal Acts register, 2020. Retrieved: DĖL LIETUVOS RESPUBLIKOS VYSTOMOJO BENDRADARBIAVIMO IR HUMANITARINĖS PAGALBOS ĮSTATYMO NR. XII-31... (lrs.lt)

⁴⁶ Source: Legal Acts register, 2020. Retrieved: DĖL LIETUVOS RESPUBLIKOS VYSTOMOJO BENDRADARBIAVIMO IR HUMANITARINĖS PAGALBOS ĮSTATYMO NR. XII-31... (lrs.lt)

⁴⁷ Source: MFA, accouchement. Retrieved <https://orangeprojects.lt/lt/naujienos/seime-priimtas-vystomojo-bendradarbiavimo-ir-humanitarines-pagalbos-istatymo-pakeitimas>

⁴⁸ Source: Lithuanian NGDO Platform, policy and position statements. Retrieved http://www.vbplatforma.org/LT/projektai/visuomene_ir_nvo_vystomasis_bendradarbiavimas_ir_humanitarine_pagalba/750

Inter-Institutional Action Plan

The development cooperation policy guidelines set out in the Inter-Institutional Action Plan on Development Cooperation, adopted by Resolution No. 937 of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania in 2016 (Consolidated in 2019)⁴⁹.

The Action Plan also notes that Lithuania will seek to contribute to implementation of all Sustainable Development Goals in the partner countries, giving priority to: end poverty in all its forms everywhere (Goal 1); ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (Goal 4); achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (Goal 5) take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts (Goal 13); promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels (Goal 16); strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development (Goal 17).

Although the Action plan notes the DC policy actors as national and municipal authorities and bodies, non-governmental organisations and business associations, the definition and the clarification inclusion are not defined. The policy of funding and allocation of funding reminds more of “giving little to everyone” so everyone has its share (although the minimum) rather than define, diversify and coordinate the funding schemes as for public, NGO or private entities. This mixture of all the actors together brings the confusion and the frustration for CSOs - the perfect example of it could be seen reviewing the list of 2019 applications⁵⁰ for funding and for example the Concept No. 16. “Public education on the UN Sustainable Development Goals and promotion of volunteering” we could see the NGOs as Lithuanian NGDO Platform and Association Litdea “competing” for funding with public bodies as Lithuanian Department of Statistics, Lithuanian Children and Youth Center (governmental institution) or Vilnius Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Crafts. This competition not only places CSOs in very dangerous and risky position while competing with such a different scale public and business entities just are not comparable but also (intentionally or unintentionally) creates not the cooperation feeling but the tension among the various DC actors (again keeping in mind that DC is relatively narrow field in Lithuania also comparing the budget - the call is 580 000 Eur for all the programs and the awareness raising activities normally only lasts 8 months). The unnecessary tension, the small scale funding for DC or SDG awareness (approx. 15 000 - 25 000 Eur), the duration of the projects (normally 7 months) and the unnecessary competition amongst the actors place a challenges for CSOs to participate in MFA funding or just time / quality and possibilities are not worth the effort - so the majority of CSOs are focused on European Union and other large calls and instruments to ensure the partnership in development cooperation and the implementation of sustainable actions.

Financing the development assistance

Official development assistance (ODA) means assistance and humanitarian aid provided by state and municipal institutions and agencies for developing countries included into a list of ODA recipients drawn by Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Lithuania has pledged to devote 0,33% of its Gross National Income (GNI) to ODA by 2030 as part of its EU commitment. The priority geographical areas of Lithuania’s development cooperation are the region of Eastern Europe⁵¹ as well as countries of migration origin and transit. Bilateral

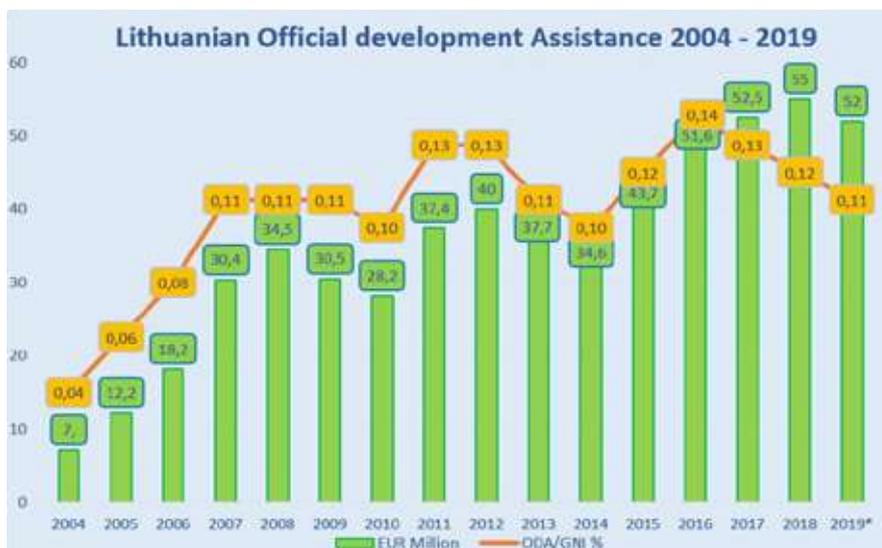
⁴⁹ Source: MFA, related legal documents. Retrieved <https://orangeprojects.lt/en/legal-information>

⁵⁰ Source: CPMA, 2020. Retrieved <https://www.cpva.lt/en/development-cooperation-and-democracy-promotion-programme/calls-for-proposals/660/k46>

⁵¹ Source: MFA, 2020. Retrieved <https://orangeprojects.lt/en/statistics>

assistance primarily goes to the EU Eastern Partnership states Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova that have signed association agreements with the EU.

In 2019, official development assistance (ODA) by member countries of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) totaled USD 152.8 billion, representing 0.30%⁵² of their combined GNI. The Lithuanian preliminary data shows the decrease in ODA (-7.6%) mainly due to a decrease in its contribution to the EU. Keeping in mind that Lithuanian commitment to reach the 0,33% of GNI ODA is going backwards and decreasing rather than stability increasing the Fund could be the missing link to place the effective strategy in place for ODA.



Keeping in mind that Lithuania's ODA is one of the lowest compared with other European Union members the focus on Development cooperation which came in line with changes as the Fund and the new Government could lead to the shift from political will to political actions. The Central Project Management Agency (CPMA) administers the majority of DC programs and its role and position in the DC is being strengthened further on.

The Governmental elections took place in 2020 and brought an intensive period for Lithuanian NGDO Platform. The various advocacy actions including the analyses of the leading political parties' programs had been reviewed, analyzed and the recommendations were provided for the development cooperation, humanitarian action, global education, partnership with LDCs and development cooperation further architecture in total for 6 political parties⁵³, the political debates were initiated by the Platform and the other policy actions. As the positive note for the end of the year was that the leading coalition formed included 3 parties which had the development cooperation in their political programs and on the 11th of December the approval of the XVIII Government Program⁵⁴ brought the above mentioned ground not only for political will but also the political actions. The XVIII Government Program includes the aspects as strengthening of the circular economy, sustainable environmental and urban programs, development cooperation including the focus on Eastern Partnership region and active Democracy Participation in other developing partner – countries, the effective preparation for extreme situations and risk reduction. Noting the development cooperation listed in the program gives a valid ground believing in actions not only in promises for CSOs to strengthen the dialogue with the decision makers reflecting the needs and priorities.

⁵² Source: OECD, ODA preliminary data 2020. Retrieved <http://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-standards/official-development-assistance.htm>

⁵³ Source: Lithuanian NGDO Platform, online library Issuu account. Retrieved <https://issuu.com/vbadmin>

⁵⁴ Source: Legal Acts Register, 2020. Retrieved <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/ed22bb703bc311eb8d9fe110e148>

Global Education

Global education is another challenge in Lithuania. As the Global Education concept was prepared in 2015 but never came into effect. The Ministry of Education, Science and Sport coordinates the Global Education with the governmental entity Lithuanian Children and Youth center coordinating the implementation at the national level. The procedure and regulations for the national coordinator remains unknown and raises a lot of questions while the dialogue with CSOs working on Global Education and the National coordinator is defined as low by the Lithuanian NGDO Platform.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF LITHUANIAN NGDO PLATFORM: CASE STUDIES OF ACTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

SDGs Ambassadors

Worldwide SDG Week kicks off on September 20th with a strike for climate change mitigation. Four years in a row the NGDO Platform has been organizing various activities to encourage citizens to become better acquainted with and involved in the implementation of the SDGs and aim to actualize these global goals and problems in the Lithuanian context, to show that we can each contribute to the implementation of these goals.

The main activities of SDG ambassadors take place in the form of various sessions and quizzes, where participants answer various questions related to sustainable development, play various games of non-formal education. The main themes of the activities may include all 17 Sustainable Development Goals or any other theme related to global citizenship (cross-continental themes, fair trade, global education challenges, etc.). We count that we call for action about 1500 citizens annually for SDGs.



Kaleidoskopo apdovanojimai / Kaleidoscope Awards

These are awards for complimented and criticized articles published in the Lithuanian media about countries and regions facing certain challenges. In some countries, historical, political, economic, social, environmental problems and / or challenges are greater than elsewhere. However, poverty, military conflicts, natural disasters and other phenomena are not self-evident, but have very specific and clearly identifiable causes, often due to the current world we have created on the basis of exploitation and inequality. There is not much attention giving to talk about other cultures in Lithuania, so what we choose to talk about must reflect high quality. Unfortunately, unethical and inaccurate communication about individual countries or even continents in the media and other public spaces has become commonplace for us. This is often due to a lack of critical thinking, a lack of appropriate information, racism, incitement to discrimination, or simply ignorance and unwillingness to take a deeper interest. Articles based on false stereotypes, drawing negative, deplorable images, or humiliating, unethical talk about states and their people are one of the main sources of misconceptions about society and create attitudes that we often unquestionably adopt as our own. Poor communication dictates the wrong discourse in society and at the same time creates a flawed, unequal relationship between 'us' and 'they', encouraging stereotypical, narrow thinking.

More information



Rytų Europos studijų centras / The Eastern Europe Studies Centre

Discussion cycle - "Questions about Belarus"

The events of recent months in Belarus have become clear evidence of the need to take a holistic approach and to look at the situation from different angles in an attempt to understand the socio-political processes taking place in the neighboring country. In October, the Center for Eastern European Studies organized a 3-part discussion cycle to draw public attention to the need for a comprehensive approach. The aim of the events was to better understand the processes taking place in the neighboring country and their impact on Lithuania by examining the situation in Belarus from three different but complementary sides.

During the first part of the cycle, "Belarusian Identity and Relationship to History" (watched by about 30,000 viewers), participants discussed the fact that present-day Belarus has not yet formed its own political identity, but has a clear ethnic identity. The reason for this is the still ongoing process of transformation in the sense of identity formation. Belarus has not renounced Soviet, but has not formed a national identity. After regaining its independence, Belarus is trying to shape its identity through traditional canons.



Full discussion

Research and newsletters
on events in Belarus



Maltos ordino pagalbos tarnyba / Maltesers (the Order of Malta Relief Organization)

“Emergency Assistance from the Order of Malta volunteers during the COVID-19 pandemic”

The activities of the Maltese organization did not stop during the quarantine both in Vilnius and throughout Lithuania. According to Robert Svidinskas, Civil Protection Coordinator of the Order of Malta’s Relief Service, he continues to take active care of the people in need, bringing food and other essentials. “Over 50 of our people work in Vilnius during quarantine. Some are staff, others are volunteers, and others have already blurred the line between work and volunteering. The announcement of quarantine has resulted in a large number of people and businesses who want to contribute their resources to the Maltese and work together to take care of the weaker ones. Our organization is the volunteers, their skills and their time. The current situation shows that it is volunteering and people’s awareness of the need to act, because no one else will, is the real strength of all of us,” said a Maltese spokesman.

The Order of Malta in Lithuania has launched the annual elderly support campaign “Maltesers’ Soup”, a successful and well-known initiative that over the years has succeeded in attracting donors and supporters. This 15th edition is more relevant than ever, as the Covid-19 pandemic is hitting the elderly hardest. Thus, the aim of the campaign is to raise funds for poor lonely elderly, especially those who live alone in remote areas. The pandemic has imprisoned them at home and has caused anxiety and uncertainty. It has left the elderlies the only option – to rely on the kindness of those around them. Malteser volunteers with food thermoses and baskets of food products go to the most remote farmsteads, where lonely elderlies are waiting not only for a bowl of soup, but also a comfort in word and somebody to listen to them.

Please find full article
and photos



Žaliosios politikos institutas / Institute of Green Policy

Project “Development of Renewable Energy Sources in the Republic of Moldova”

Lithuanian company UAB Biokaitra together with Public Institution Green Policy Institute is implementing a project financed by the Ministry of Environment of the Republic of Lithuania from the Climate Change Special Program, which aims to promote the use of renewable energy sources by replacing polluting fuels in heat production, thus contributing to climate change mitigation goals in Moldova. Energy technologies developed in Lithuania, which allow to switch from natural gas-fired boilers to biofuels, are currently being implemented in kindergartens in Moldova. By sharing its experience on the use of renewable energy sources, Lithuania contributes to climate change mitigation, sustainable development and the promotion of social well-being.



[More information](#)



Afriko / Afrikos tyrimai ir konsultacijos

Digital Explorers

2019-2021 / Lithuania - Nigeria

Nigeria is the largest African economy whose booming ICT ecosystem attracted \$114 million in venture capital in 2017. For Lithuanian ICT sector, already curious about attracting global talents and discovering emerging markets, these developments create a unique chance to connect with a vibrant and ever-growing Nigerian economy. Connecting ICT markets through individual journeys Digital Explorers is a career advancement program for Nigerian ICT specialists tailored to also fit the needs of Lithuanian ICT companies and facilitate their access to Nigerian market. Program consists of work placements in Lithuanian ICT companies and skills enhancement in emerging technologies. The Digital Explorers is built on and supported by an ongoing collaboration between public, private and non-profit organizations in Lithuania and Nigeria.

Digital Explorers program makes sure that career acceleration of Nigerian ICT talents in Lithuania is hassle-free and no bureaucratic hurdles get in the way. The program takes care of recruitment, travelling and individual support for each participant, consulting and accompanying Lithuanian ICT companies and Nigerian ICT talents on the way. In addition, Digital Explorers programme invites ICT companies to participate in business missions to Nigeria and opportunities to benefit from extensive international coverage, helping to discover and connect with Nigeria and other booming African markets, at the same time.

[More information about the project](#)

[Digital Explorers Youtube podcasts](#)



Pasaulio piliečių akademija / Global Citizens Academy

Project “GloLab-2: Six Steps to Global Citizenship “

The project aims to improve the quality of youth work and join efforts of youth and educational bodies towards making young people promoters of global citizenship. The GloLab-2 project will be a laboratory for young people, where they will have an opportunity to think of the issues they face every day from the global perspective. It will allow them to find their own role in the global society, as well as stimulate their behavioural change in order to contribute to sustainable development both locally and globally. The project will also allow its participants to identify the effects of the global issues to their own lives and make them become more active and responsible by changing their own views, attitudes and daily habits.

The project will develop a number of outputs aimed to create, pilot and share good global citizenship education practices. They will include publications, joint educational frameworks, learning/teaching resources, ICT-based learning tools, interactive resources summarizing good global citizenship practices in partner countries.



[More information about the project](#)



Diversity Development Group

The InterCap project

Developing capacities together: European CSO-university networks for global learning on migration, security and sustainable development in an interdependent world (The InterCap). The InterCap project envisages to address the emerging concern on the way in which shifting public perceptions of (in)security and risk influence understanding of migration, sustainable development, responsibilities and lifestyles of EU citizens in an interdependent world. The Action’s primary aim is to establish European CSOs-university networks, to build the capacities of the education actors, to promote global learning on migration, security and sustainable development in an interdependent world.

Within this project „The National Network on promoting Policy Coherence for Development (PCD) of Lithuania “was created where Lithuanian education actors are welcomed to share their knowledge and experience. Collective expertise will be shared with focus on migration and development interdependencies. Every national network in 12 EU countries consists of 30 members who regularly share their knowledge and information on virtual platforms and face-to-face meetings. The platform also allows using virtual library where documents and other related resources are available.



[More information about the project](#)



Lietuvos Raudonojo Kryžiaus draugija \ Lithuanian Red Cross Society

Emergency aid in Greece after the fire at the Moria refugee camp

The Red Cross called for action and solidarity with other EU Member States in resolving the crisis following the fire at the Moria asylum camp in Lesbos, Greece. “We therefore see that solidarity with Greece is needed now more than ever. Evacuation and relocation to other EU countries is no longer an option but a humanitarian necessity. Refugees and their children must be immediately transferred to a safe environment for them” says Eglė Samuchovaitė, Head of the Lithuanian Red Cross Refugee and Migrant Program. All persecuted people fleeing health or life risks have equal rights to asylum and a safe environment, and we believe that solidarity and assistance should not be selective.

[More information about the situation](#)

“Forces of Kindness Against the Virus - Lithuanian Red Cross and Aviva”

In response to the spread and quarantine of COVID-19 in our country Lithuanian Red Cross volunteers made a strong contribution to helping single, quarantined people. To facilitate this period for the elderly, the Lithuanian Red Cross is implementing the project “Forces of Kindness against the Virus - Lithuanian Red Cross and Aviva”. Existing volunteers pay even more attention than usual to grandparents at risk. Although it is especially important for seniors to get food and medicine safely during quarantine, as many as a quarter of them say that communication, support, sincere advice and information are the most important things right now. By expanding the circle of volunteers to 350 throughout Lithuania, volunteers were able to devote more time to calls and home visits, even at a distance. In addition, volunteers remotely assess the emotional state of an older person, support, listen, remind them how to take care of themselves. And in order to ensure the necessary care not only for single grandparents, but also for all persons in self-isolation, a reserve of Lithuanian Red Cross volunteers was created in Vilnius, Kaunas and Klaipėda.



[More information about the initiative](#)



Gelbėkit vaikus / Save the Children

Initiative - “Solidarity Running Whistle”

This year, Save the Children invited Lithuanian educational institutions to reunite for a noble goal and organize the Solidarity Run 2020. Although the beginning of this school year was a big challenge for everyone, as many as 304 students and teachers decided to run to make the world a better place to live. The support gathered during the six years of Solidarity Running has helped thousands of Lithuanian children who attend 49 children’s day care centers of the organization Save the Children throughout Lithuania. Thanks to the support, we have also implemented many positive changes outside Lithuania - in Zambia and Ukraine.

The funds raised during this year’s run will go to children growing up in families in difficulty. It is in these families that children growing up experienced the greatest challenges during the former COVID-19 quarantine. Part of the support will also be given to Ukrainian children who have fled areas affected by the military conflict, and in particular to girls, who are at particular risk due to all the unrest in the country.



[More information
about the initiative](#)



CONCLUSIONS

1

The efforts of the last period of time of Government actors to reform the civil society space aim to work across sectors both vertically and horizontally. As The NGO Law legal base was finalized in 2020 including the NGO Fund and the Database now the implementation stage lays ahead. Although The NGO Law makes a distinction between public and mutual benefit NGOs, national umbrella organizations the distinction should be outlined during the allocation of the funds as well. An important question still remains: will the Fund only focus on the NGOs active in policy and advocacy or will distinguish the priorities and support the various sectoral operations.

2

The Database launched in October 2020 already allows the NGOs to register as an entity reflecting the society needs - the non for profit. The process is open and easy to access while it is done online and requires you to provide and fill the information. Will it help to clarify the NGOs as non for profit will be visible in the nearest future.

3

Ability to gather all political parties to sign the Memorandum was a great achievement for civil society. As the elections took place and the new Government took the office now it is the time to monitor the implementation of Memorandum and see if the agreements turned into actions not only the pre-election will.

4

The Sustainability Index for Lithuania states that overall CSO sustainability improved slightly in 2019, with improvements recorded in the legal environment, financial viability, advocacy, and service provision dimensions. As 2020 shocked the global world with a pandemic and we see the rise of the civil society initiatives, actions and the strong cross-sectoral partnership to tackle the challenges it is also important to use this valid ground for further development of civic activism as a continuous tradition to strengthen the SDG16.

5

Although the legal approved change and establishment of Development Cooperation Fund could be seen as a positive development the need for more detailed discussions of development cooperation future strategy and design on regulations will be the crucial moment for developmental NGOs.

6

Development Cooperation Fund and the National Development Cooperation Commission entitled to have a different strategic and decision making mandates in the overall Development Cooperation policy. As the Development Cooperation is still a narrow policy sector in Lithuania it raises the question of the synergy and partnership within these two legal bodies. CSOs delegate the representatives for the both legal entities.

7

The unnecessary tension, the small scale funding for DC projects, the duration of the projects (normally 7 months) and the unnecessary competition amongst the actors place a challenge for CSOs to participate in MFA funding. This includes the NGOs applying for the same funding in line with governmental or business entities. The rethinking process and the deeper analysis is the must while setting up a DC Fund and the programs in order to foster the partnership and collaboration as the ground principles of SDG17.

