

KAMPALA, UGANDA

2018

REPORT OF THE INAUGURAL ANNUAL YOUTH CIVIL SOCIETY SYMPOSIUM



TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERS
NETWORK-AFRICA

7/30/2018

ACRONYMS

1. CSO.....Civil society organization
2. HRBA.....Human Rights Based Approach
3. KE.....Kenya
4. NGO.....Non-Governmental Organization
5. TRANET-AFRICA..... Transformative Leaders Network-Africa
6. TZ.....Tanzania
7. UG.....Uganda
8. USAID.....United States Agency for International Development
9. YCSO.....Youth Civil Society Organization

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Notice. Information about TRANET-Africa's address and membership is updated contains the most recent information.

CALL TO ACTION: SUPPORT THE ANNUAL YOUTH CIVIL SOCIETY SYMPOSIUM

The Annual Youth Civil Society Symposium is a platform for youth civil society leaders to network, learn and share knowledge, deliberate on the shrinking civic space and forge ways on how to respond to the effects caused by declining civic space. It is also a platform for youth civil society leaders to heal from the psychological traumas of the frontline work especially for those who are under threat and are facing serious security risks as a result of their legitimate and peaceful work and have not benefited from existing protection mechanisms. The symposium offers youth civil society leaders to discuss, learn and invigorate issues of corporate governance, accountability and transparency as means of fostering youth CSO legitimacy, resourcing and access to funding among others. Participants further build their capacities on pressing issues such as physical, personal as well as digital security and cyber harassment for female youth civil society leaders. **To donate** today kindly send us an email via donations@tranetafrica.org. To partner in the implementation of the Annual Youth Civil Society Symposium, kindly send us an email via partnerships@tranetafrica.org for general inquiries kindly emails us via info@tranetafrica.org. **You can make donations from as low as 200 Euros, 250 Dollars and 100 pounds.**

To learn more about our programming and activities, kindly visit www.tranetafrica.org

1. INTRODUCTION: ABOUT TRANET-AFRICA

Founded in 2016, TRANET-Africa is a Not-for-Profit Organization registered as a Company Limited by Guarantee with the Uganda Registrations Services Bureau (URSB) on the 14th day of August 2018 under registration number 80020001178149 with a vision of a society where the leadership upholds the ideals of social justice and good governance where social justice defenders enjoy the freedom and security to undertake their legitimate activities and mission to enhance social justice as well as build and protect a cadre of leaders at risk because of their peaceful and legitimate activities advancing processes that eliminate social injustice through research, advocacy, networking and capacity building.

Since her inception, TRANET-Africa has undertaken initiatives that seek to enhance capacities of civil societies amid shrinking civic space, enhance protection and safety of social justice defenders (HRDs) to uphold social justice and good governance as well as delving in research, documentation and campaigning for social justice and protection of social justice defenders across the region. TRANET-Africa is a founding member of the Migration Network- Global a group of civil society organizations undertaking work on migrant workers' rights, and addressing causes of irregular and regular migration from the countries of origin across the globe. It is also a member of the Protection Working Group of the Global Coalition, Youth, Peace and Security Coordinated by the office of the UN Secretary General's Envoy on Youth. TRANET-Africa coordinates the African Youth Human Rights Defenders Network, a network of young activists and organizations advancing the rights of young people in their diversity across the African continent.

The Annual Youth Civil Society Symposium is a platform for youth civil society leaders to network, learn and share knowledge, deliberate on the shrinking civic space and forge ways on how to respond to the effects caused by declining civic space. It is also a platform for youth civil society leaders to heal from the psychological traumas of the frontline work especially for those who are under threat and are facing serious security risks as a result of their legitimate and peaceful work and have not benefited from existing protection mechanisms. The symposium offers youth civil society leaders to discuss, learn and invigorate issues of corporate governance, accountability and transparency as means of fostering youth CSO legitimacy, resourcing and access to funding among others. Participants further build their capacities on pressing issues such as physical, personal as well as digital security and cyber harassment for female youth civil society leaders.

2.0 BACKGROUND

According to the National NGO Bureau, 12,237 CSOs were registered in Uganda at the end of 2016 and perhaps the highest in sub Saharan Africa. Specific information about their areas of activity and geographic scope was not readily available. There is however high belief that majority of them could be youth led, youth focused and or youth founded. It is also highly questionable whether the statistics captured are inclusive of community based organizations registered at the district and sub county levels respectively or not.

In considering the 2016 CSO sustainability index for Sub-Saharan Africa by USAID, it was observed that overall sustainability of CSOs in Uganda declined in 2016, in part because of increased government harassment, weaker organizational capacity, reduced infrastructure support, and a poor public image also hindered CSOs' work. However, the financial situation of CSOs did not change appreciably during the year, and advocacy and service-providing activities were also relatively stable. The report emphasizes that, declining funding was the most frequently mentioned impediment to CSO sustainability.

It is apparent that out of every ten civil society organizations, eight were likely to be youth led, youth focused or both and that many of them stay unfunded, underfunded or majority are actually least funded as compared to organizations founded or led by their older counterparts, TRANET-Africa sought to deepen understanding on the challenges of youth civil society organizations and hence organized the first **Aid and Development Symposium 2018** that was held in Kampala Uganda on the 23rd of July 2018 under the theme: *“donor aid and civil society driven development in a capitalist era, where is the place of the*

youth?” The purpose of the Symposium was to create a platform through which youth led/founded/focused organizations and young people can engage with government agencies in Uganda, other youth, donor agencies, multilateral agencies, diplomatic missions, CSOs and the private sector among others to deliberate on ways through which aid/funding can be strengthened to benefit youth organizations and also invigorate debate on possible alternative development approaches/ models that



Some of the participants pictured listening attentively to one of the speakers

can be explored in the midst of shrinking donor support towards CSOs, growing youth CSO community, declining provision and creation of jobs by government and an ever skyrocketing private sector. Through the platform it was expected that the Donor agencies operating in Uganda as well as other CSO actors can learn and or get the experiences and challenges that youth organizations face so as to help donors to reexamine their approach on how to deal with the youth and youth led/ focused organizations in Uganda.

2.1 EXPECTED OUTCOMES OF THE SYMPOSIUM

It was expected that by the end of the Symposium, participants would have generated ideas on how social enterprise development can be fostered amid shrinking donor funding and lack of a legal/ policy frame work to promote social enterprise development in Uganda; information that would enable donors, diplomatic missions and United Nations agencies among others to learn the challenges of youth civil society and deliberate on ways how aid can be made to benefit youth. Through this platform, key donor agencies shall also have the opportunity to understand from the perspective of the youth how aid can be made to work for the youth, youth focused and youth led organizations? The symposium in particular sought to get answers to the following questions; What development alternatives can be explored to make aid work for the vulnerable youth organizations, in a capitalist era and rights based approach to development?, how can social enterprise development be fostered...what are the advantages and challenges?; How to foster social enterprise development as an alternative towards shrinking donor funding; Declining foreign aid to local organizations. How to develop local funding initiatives and approaches? Rights based approach to development, examining the pitfalls and advantages, what way? Partnerships for development; is the current model working for the young people, if no, what way and how, and Taxation and civil society- what way for civil society organizations. Are there any alternative taxation approaches to be explored by Uganda Revenue Authority (URA) and other government entities?

2.3 FORMAT OF THE SYMPOSIUM

An introduction to the subject matter was made by the moderator. One of the key speakers delved into the concept of philanthropy and aid in Africa versus the global north and the rights based approach. Giving diverse perspectives, the speaker exhausted the implication of the shrinking civic space in Africa in the context of young people. A panel discussion then followed where two speakers gave their thoughts on the challenges of young people accessing funding and the other delved deeper in the issues why she felt youth civil society organizations were not getting funding. The discussion was then opened up to the audience with the guidance of the moderator who asked critical questions. Speakers were advised to speak mostly from the experience of their organizations or those they had worked with before. After the reactions from the audience, the speakers responded to the reactions and away forward and action points were developed on what the civil society leaders present felt were causing youth civil society not to attain funding, what could be done to strengthen youth ability to access funding among others. Below is a summary of the participants present and area of work involved in and what transpired from the symposium.

2.4 SUMMARY OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Total No.	Gender			Area of work					Age				Country				
	M	F	O	SR HR	Governance	Skills/employment	Womens rights	Budget and tax	12-15	15-24	24-35	35-45	45-above	UG	KE	TZ	SS
40	30	8	2	20	5	10	4	1	0	3	25	10	2	36	2	1	1

3.0 OUTCOMES FROM THE SYMPOSIUM

3.1 Strategies on how to strengthen relationship/partnership between youth led, focused/ founded organizations with the donor community government agencies among others

a. Government and donors establish networking and knowledge sharing forums

Participants agreed that there the donor institutions as well as government establish forums to network, dialogue and share knowledge with youth civil society leaders so as to be able to reexamine the current previous engagements and jointly forge ways through which partnerships with donors can be made meaningful and impactful. These platforms were proposed to be both at the national and or district/ regional.

b. Government and donor institutions foster affirmative action.

Youth are marginalized by many circumstances such as age. Due to the age factor of youth and given the fact that majority youth are still in their learning stages, using the same policies to determine funding decisions as well as using the same regulatory framework towards youth civil society would be discriminative based on age. As compared to other civil society actors who could be 40 years and over, youth civil society leaders mostly below the age of 35 were still learning. While it was conclusive that all youth leaders below the age of forty, quite a number had built their capacities.

c. Donor institutions develop flexible funding mechanisms to meet the diverse needs of diverse organizations.

A simple analysis of the work of the youth civil society organization reveals that the size and scope of the most civil society organizations was smaller as compared to other non-youth led or founded organizations. This means that majority of the youth organizations wouldn't need too much funds to sustain their operations, they would literally need flexible funding to enable them respond to the issues they are addressing. Almost all the participants present revealed that they had contacted one or more non youth organizations who had already secured funding to implement in the community or to mobilise on behalf of the organization that has received funding. This shows that while the capacity of youth civil society is doubted, they are actually considered those that can enable successful implementation of projects and activities by financially stable organisations. This, participants felt was tokenization of youth civil society.

3.2 Strategies on how local funding initiatives can be fostered

a. Government streamlines legislation to foster local giving.

Young people present at the symposium believed streamlining legislation to enhance local giving would also go a long way in boosting resource mobilization for civil society organizations in general. This they believe might involve reviewing the Uganda Revenue Authority Act. For instance, instead of people paying tax, they could choose to give to charity as it is the practice in some countries.

b. Strategies on how to foster social enterprise development in Uganda developed

Participants at the symposium were convinced that the only law that promotes not for profit organizations is the companies' act 2012 where an organization can choose to register as companies limited by liability. However, this registration status does not exempt the organization from certain tax obligations hence the need for an act that specifically establishes social enterprise promotions so that civil society organizations have variety of means of registrations that they can choose from depending on their need, aspirations and income demands. This would ensure that social enterprises are geared towards solving social problems while generating profits that can be reinjected into the organization for sustainability purposes. Currently, many donors hardly accept civil society organisations from using their donations to undertake social enterprise or socially oriented profit oriented projects and this is apparently true of the laws in Uganda.

3.3 Potential alternative development approaches established as opposed to the rights based approach or strategies through which the rights based approach to development can be strengthened.

- a. **Enhancing awareness of government leaders as well as community leaders on the rights based approach to development.**

Participants at the symposium were convinced that community leaders as well as government leaders at various levels were not aware of the rights of the youth, the working dynamics of civil society organizations and the Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA). This occurrence according to the participants enhances harassment of youth activists and youth civil society workers at the various levels. They therefore believe this can be resolved by enhancing the capacities of government as well as community leaders on the work of youth civil society organizations, creating awareness about youth rights and the Human Rights Based Approach to development.

- b. **Intertwine the rights based approach and needs based approach by fostering social enterprise development models.**

Participants believed that the rights based approach on the side of the organizations had its own pitfalls since it create a situation where some community members may fear to support certain courses hence making local resource mobilization efforts futile. Therefore participants believed intertwining the rights based approach and the needs approach would go a long way in enhancing the ability of the rights holders to be empowered beyond the rights awareness to economic empowerment. They believed that a poor person is easy to compromise and since advocacy is costly both in terms of time, financial and emotions. Therefore intertwining the rights based approach and the needs based approach would go a long way in enhancing not only the efforts of youth civil society but all the civil society organizations in general.

4.0 FACTORS HINDERING YOUTH CSOs ACCESS TO RESOURCES

a. Undeveloped project/ programme capacities

Out of the 40 participants present, 30 acknowledged they had no knowledge in project design, proposal writing, monitoring and evaluation. This meant that they could not submit technically competitive projects/ grant proposals. Majority of the participants accepted that rather than struggle to write proposals that they would hardly benefit from, they would rather engage in crowd sourcing and fundraising drives.

b. Internal governance challenges, management and lack of accountability systems

Out of the 40 participants present, 30 acknowledged they had no accounting systems in their organizations. Five were relying on Microsoft excel as only 2 acknowledged having accounting tools such as quick books. While some organizations had financial accounting systems, those who had quick books said they struggled to maintain a competent accountant to manage the system. Out of the forty participants, only two reported having conducted external financial audit at least in the last two financial years prior to the Symposium. This was largely attributable to the fact that accredited auditors or audit firms were expensive and affording an accountant was also difficult given the lacking or limited funding and resources. Since the mandate to appoint an auditor lies on the board of directors, almost half of the organizations represented had no functional boards while for those who had, some were merely ceremonial as there was no much work to do. Those who had boards of directors had limited capacity or knowledge on corporate governance.

c. Stiff competition in the sector

Participants present at the symposium agreed that youth civil society was used as a testing ground and or were highly likely to be perceived as those to be used to be the end implementers of projects where they are given handouts to mobilize as core funding was preferred to more established organizations mostly led by older men and women most times who start organizations and say they are supporting youth.

Competitive in the sector has been observed to be on the high-rise yet most youth civil society organizations just like non youth civil society organization continue to rely on foreign funding yet domestic and local giving has not yet developed partly due to the lack of clear policies guiding local philanthropy.

As seen in the summary table, over half of the participants were doing work in the area of sexual and reproductive health rights such as menstrual hygiene, family planning and birth control, sex education among others. By example, these have to compete for the few available funding opportunities.

d. Donors giving ideas to other organizations:

Participants present at the symposium unanimously concurred that donor organizations well highly likely to give their ideas to other organizations most times those they are already funding in the pretext of lack of capacity of the applicant. *“You spend time and resources to do research and come up with a good project idea only to be told they are not sure of our capacity to successfully implement this project. Instead of coming to see how you and them can forge ways to make it possible, you find your project idea has been given to another organization most times the one they are already funding”* a youth representing and community based organization from northern Uganda stated.

Another youth present at the summit claimed he had once reached to an intergovernmental agency for partnership and instead of working with him they gave my idea to another organization they were already working with.

They could not even tell me to come and join to become a team with them. When I kept pressing, the relationship started to look bad.” A young women human rights defender narrated.



E. Lack of impact documentation and external communications to the outside world and potential partners

It was also observed that whereas young people may blame donors for giving out ideas to other organizations, they had no definite ways to document impact of their previous engagements and lack a clear and coherent communications strategy to communicate with the outside world. This lack of impact documentation according to one of the participants who has had a long period working with organizations documenting impact believes creates a situation where the applicant is doubted since proving previous experience becomes difficult hence creating doubt about the applicant.

e. Inability to access referees and or recommenders.

Young people who participated in the symposium, believed that due to their youthfulness, number of people were likely to doubt them and could hardly recommend or refer them for funding. “For almost every grant you apply for, you will be asked to provide at least two or three referees who can endorse your work. If you don’t provide and even though you provide, you can’t be sure about what that referee might write. Others might not even write and it is worse when you put someone without first seeking for their permission,

they could even say they don't know you" one of the female participants revealed. Almost all the youth present agreed they struggled with getting reliable referees as most of the people were working with organizations who were likely to be competing organizations an unlikely to recommend someone they perceived a competitor.

f. Rigid donor funding policies....lack of flexible funding mechanisms

All the participants presented confirmed having applied for funding more than five times from different donors and never getting any. Only 1 percent of the participants acknowledged having received funding. According to the participants their inability to access funding was based on the fact that donors have same funding policies where all applicants irrespective of their previous funding history, internal systems and governance processes have to apply for yet there are always specific issues they are a looking for from the applicants they select as their partners. Those they believe is because of having rigid funding policies.

They were convinced that most of the funding policies were discriminative in the sense that if a donor says they are looking to fund organisations they were likely to have term such as; must have audited books of accounts for the last three financial years, have a finance officer, have a board and tax clearance certificate for instance, and in a situation where an organization doesn't have all of those, they would differently not get the funding and yet that is the reality of most organizations and some others that might not be youth. So participants were concerned that instead of getting money to be able to strengthen all those systems, they have to instead spend money to put those systems in place which resources most times they are lacking.

5. COMMON YOUTH AGENDA DEVELOPED: HOW YOUTH CAN STRENGTHEN THEIR ORGANIZATIONS AND ENHANCE ACCESS TO RESOURCES.

- a. **Youth work together and avoid unnecessary competitions:**
Participants agreed that youth civil society actors were involved in unhealthy competition and that there is need to forge meaningful and mutually reinforcing partnerships as opposed to the unconstructive competition. Particularly youth who participated in the symposium were weary of the uncalled for blackmail that some organizations use as a stepping stone to gain access to opportunities.
- b. **Youth strengthen their skills in CSO leadership and management:**
Participants agreed that there is need to provide capacity building to youth civil society organizations to enhance their capacities and for those who might not be able to receive free capacity building trainings, invest in themselves to undertake free online reading and or paid for short professional courses in organizational development.
- c. **Foster robust M&E and Documentation:**

Participants believed that youth CSOs strengthening impact documentation and strategic planning, project design and implementation can go a long way in enhancing their possibility of getting funding. As it was observed, almost all the youth civil society organizations struggled with impact documentation, reporting and communications with stakeholders. Participants therefore agreed that youth civil society actors.

d. **Youth CSOs develop robust strategies:**

Participants present believed that one of the reasons youth civil society is only surviving rather than thriving is because they are disorganized and are involved in doing almost each and everything hence making it difficult to develop a niche. Therefore participants were convinced that developing resource mobilization and communications strategies.

e. **Holding continuous annual symposiums:**

Participants present said they had learned something new from the experiences shared by other participants present and hence believed that if fostered, the symposium could be a good learning, networking and knowledge sharing platform.

f. **Regular capacity building sessions:**

Participants urged TRANET-Africa to foster the capacities of other organizations by providing technical capacity building in the areas of organizational development, strategic planning, resource mobilization and financial management, corporate governance among others so as to strengthen the youth civil society organizations.

6. CONCLUSION

Civil society is diverse in nature, in needs and aspirations as well as scope. Using similar funding and regulatory frameworks to address the needs of diverse civil society is not only discriminatory, but also perpetuates the problems that are. While the civil society face almost the same problems and challenges, youth by the nature of their age are judged most times on the basis of being youth and hardly taken seriously. Donor institutions need put in place concerted efforts to enhance the capacities of youth civil societies while providing basic support to them as a way of enhance their ability to manage bigger projects in the future.

The information contained here as a result of the discussions at the symposium that has been into simplified language for ease of access and digesting by different stakeholders. Therefore, there is need to continue deepening research on the challenges of the civil society and how to respond to the declining funding and civic space.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. General Recommendations

Civil society organizations as well as the government take serious steps in enhancing awareness about the rights based approach for key government officials as well as community leaders.

2. To Government

- a) Government enacts a social enterprise promotions act to foster social enterprise development
- b) Government of Uganda takes serious steps to revise the laws on charities as well as taxation to enhance local philanthropy.

3. To youth civil society actors

- a) Youth civil society undertake activities and practices within their organizations that might affect their credibility and legitimacy.
- b) Youth actors prioritize mental health as part of their work as running institutions without money and especially those involved in advocacy activities comes with costs.
- c) Youth civil society leaders make effort to continuously strengthen systems as well as programmes/ project management capacity of their teams.

4. To donors

- a) Donors develop flexible funding approaches to address the diverse needs of civil society organizations.
- b) Establish forums to network, dialogue and share knowledge with youth civil society as a learning processes to help shape funding policies.
- c) Be open to the diverse civil society organizations and find ways to engage with the different organizations as opposed to telling them to go and work with so and so, most times organizations you are already funding.

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