



TERMS OF REFERENCE

COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACT OF DIALOGUES BETWEEN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATION LEADERS AND THE MINISTER OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS

1. Context and Background

The Human Rights Centre Uganda (HRCU), in partnership with the National Bureau for Nongovernment Organisations (NGOs) (NGO Bureau), has implemented interventions aimed at strengthening the relationship between Government and the Civil Society sector in Uganda. The project has been supported by the Embassy of Ireland since its inception in 2018. Key partners in the implementation of the project have included the Ministry of Internal Affairs, government Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs), and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) leaders at national and sub-national levels.

The project emerged within a context of increasing tension and mistrust between Government and CSOs, particularly around regulation, compliance, civic participation, accountability, and the role of CSOs in governance. Uganda's NGO regulatory framework has evolved considerably, to include the NGO Policy, NGO Act Cap 109, NGO Regulations and related Statutes/ Guidelines. While the regulatory framework is intended to promote accountability, coordination and an enabling operating environment, aspects of its implementation have at times generated concerns among CSOs regarding excessive regulation, inconsistent interpretation and administrative practices.

The project therefore seeks to create sustained platforms for engagement between Government and the Civil Society sector at national, regional, district and community levels. One of the key mechanisms has been the high-level dialogue between CSO leaders and the Minister of Internal Affairs, which provides a platform through which CSOs can raise concerns affecting their operations directly with Government leadership, obtain responses from relevant authorities, make recommendations and follow up on commitments. The dialogues have addressed a range of issues affecting the operating environment of CSOs, including the NGO regulatory framework, compliance and accountability, the role of District NGO Monitoring Committees (DNMCs), taxation, security concerns, office break-ins, the participation of CSOs in elections, oil and gas-related concerns, the role of Community Based Organisations, and the broader trust deficit between Government and Civil Society.

The follow-up meeting held on 13 February 2025 in Kampala noted that these engagements had provided opportunities for open and constructive conversations and had enabled stakeholders to explore joint responses to challenges affecting CSO operations. The February 2025 CSO follow-up meeting was particularly important in demonstrating the need to move beyond convening dialogue meetings towards systematically assessing whether the platform is producing meaningful results. The meeting sought to review commitments made during previous dialogues, assess progress in their implementation, identify unresolved issues, and agree on areas requiring further action. The follow-up meeting identified several persistent areas of concern, including security threats against CSOs and Human Rights Defenders (HRDs), challenges affecting CBO registration and operations, taxation and regulatory challenges, and the operating environment for CSOs. Importantly, participants also reflected directly on the structure and effectiveness of the dialogue platform itself. Recommendations included more participatory planning, sharing issue

papers before meetings, rotating participants to broaden representation, institutionalizing national-level dialogues, harmonizing the activities of Government regulators, improving communication channels, and introducing pre- and post-dialogue surveys and feedback mechanisms. The project has also documented several positive developments associated with its broader interventions, including improved coordination between CSOs and regulators, increased functionality of DNMCs, increased attendance of high-level Government officials at dialogues, and progress on some regulatory and financial compliance concerns. However, the operating environment for CSOs remains challenging, and mistrust between Government and Civil Society persists in some areas.

Against this background, the project partners propose to undertake a comprehensive assessment of the impact of the CSO–Minister of Internal Affairs dialogue platform from 2021 to date. The assessment will examine the relevance, effectiveness, responsiveness, inclusiveness, sustainability, and contribution of the dialogues to improved Government–CSO relations and to addressing issues affecting the operating environment of CSOs. The assessment is also intended to generate evidence and lessons that can guide the future design and institutionalization of the dialogue platform.

2. Purpose and Objectives

2.1 Purpose of the Assessment

The overall purpose of the assessment is to determine the contribution, achievements, effectiveness, and longer-term influence of the dialogue platform between CSO leaders and the Minister of Internal Affairs since 2021, identify lessons and good practices, and provide practical recommendations for strengthening and institutionalizing the platform.

The assessment will go beyond documenting the number of meetings held or issues discussed. It will establish what has changed as a result of the dialogues, for whom, how, and under what circumstances, while also identifying areas where the platform has not achieved the intended results. The assessment will therefore examine the dialogue as a process and change mechanism, including the extent to which dialogue has contributed to:

- Improved Government–CSO relations;
- Increased mutual understanding and trust;
- Improved responsiveness of Government to concerns raised by CSOs;
- Changes in Government policies, practices, procedures or decisions;
- Resolution or reduction of regulatory impediments;
- Improved participation of CSOs in policy and governance processes;
- Improved understanding and implementation of the NGO regulatory framework;
- Strengthened coordination between Government regulators and CSOs; and
- A more conducive operating environment for CSOs.

2.2 Specific Objectives

The assessment will specifically seek to:

1. Assess the relevance and design of the dialogue platform from 2021 to date, including its purpose, structure, thematic focus, participation, frequency and approaches, and its responsiveness to the changing Government–CSO operating environment.

2. Assess the effectiveness and inclusiveness of the dialogue platform in facilitating meaningful, representative and constructive engagement between Government and CSOs, including the quality of participation, discussions, responsiveness, representation and follow-up.
3. Assess the outcomes and contribution of the dialogues to changes in Government policies, practices, administrative and regulatory processes, Government–CSO relationships, and the broader operating environment for CSOs, including the extent to which commitments and recommendations have been implemented.
4. Identify key achievements, challenges, unintended outcomes, good practices and lessons learned from the dialogue process, including factors that have enabled or constrained its effectiveness and impact.
5. Assess the sustainability and institutionalization potential of the dialogue platform and develop practical recommendations for strengthening its design, management, inclusiveness, follow-up, accountability and impact beyond the current project period.

3. Scope of the Assessment

3.1 Timeframe Scope

The assessment will cover the period from 2021 to 2026. The Consultant will reconstruct the evolution of the dialogue platform over this period and identify major milestones, changes in approach, emerging issues, and results.

3.2 Thematic Scope

The Consultant will identify and document cases demonstrating change resulting from the dialogue platform. Potential cases include:

1. NGO regulatory reforms and compliance
2. FIA/AMLA requirements affecting NGOs
3. Security-related violations and protection of CSOs/HRDs
4. Taxation and tax exemption challenges
5. CBO registration and regulation
6. CSO participation in electoral processes
7. Coordination between CSOs and Government regulators
8. Changes in Government perception of the contribution of CSOs

The assessment will cover, but not be limited to:

A. Relevance

- Relevance of the dialogue platform to the challenges facing CSOs.
- Responsiveness to changes in the regulatory and civic space environment.
- Relevance of dialogue themes and agendas.
- Relevance of the platform to Government priorities.

B. Dialogue Quality and Effectiveness

- Quality and openness of dialogue.
- Participation and representation.

- Preparedness of participants.
- Quality of issue papers and evidence presented.
- Responsiveness of Government officials.
- Quality of recommendations and commitments.
- Mechanisms for follow-up.

C. Results and Contribution

The assessment should examine changes associated with dialogue engagements in areas such as:

- NGO registration and compliance;
- NGO regulatory procedures;
- engagement with the NGO Bureau;
- engagement with URA, URSB, NSSF, DNMCs, Sub County NGO Monitoring Committees (SNMCs) and other regulators;
- treatment of CSOs by security agencies;
- protection of Human Rights Defenders;
- CSO participation in elections;
- civic space;
- Government–CSO coordination;
- CBO registration and regulation;
- taxation of CSOs;
- access to financial services;
- participation of CSOs in policy and governance processes.

D. Commitment and Follow-up

The Consultant will examine:

- commitments made during the dialogues;
- who made the commitments;
- whether actions were assigned;
- whether timelines were established;
- whether actions were implemented;
- evidence of implementation;
- reasons for non-implementation;
- mechanisms for tracking commitments; and
- whether CSOs received feedback on commitments.

E. Relationship and Trust

The assessment will examine whether the dialogues have contributed to:

- improved mutual understanding;
- reduced mistrust;
- improved communication;
- improved collaboration;
- increased confidence between Government and CSOs;
- more constructive engagement during periods of heightened political or regulatory tension.

F. Sustainability and Institutionalization

The assessment will examine whether the dialogue platform should be institutionalized and, if so:

- under what institutional arrangement;
- with what mandate;
- with what participation structure;
- at what frequency;
- with what accountability and follow-up mechanisms;
- and with what resources

G. Learning

- What approaches have worked particularly well?
- What approaches have not worked?
- What lessons can be replicated in other Government–CSO engagement platforms?
- What should be done differently to increase the impact of future dialogues?

4. Design and Approach

The assessment will adopt a mixed-methods, contribution-focused design that combines qualitative and quantitative approaches. Given the nature of the dialogue intervention, the assessment should not assume that observed changes are solely attributable to the dialogues. Instead, the Consultant should establish a credible contribution story, triangulate evidence from different stakeholders and document sources to determine the extent to which the dialogue platform plausibly contributed to observed changes. The assessment should reconstruct the Theory of Change of the dialogue platform, for example:

Dialogue between CSO leaders and Government → improved information exchange and mutual understanding → Government responsiveness and commitments → follow-up and implementation → changes in policies/practices/relationships → improved CSO operating environment.

The Consultant should test this pathway using available evidence.

4.1 Desk Review

The Consultant will review relevant documentation, including: project proposals and designs; project log frames and theories of change; dialogue reports; attendance lists; issue papers; commitment/action trackers; follow-up reports; policy and regulatory documents and relevant advocacy documents. The February 2025 follow-up report should be treated as a key source because it documents both substantive issues raised during previous dialogues and participants' recommendations for improving the dialogue mechanism itself.

4.2 Key Informant Interviews

The Consultant will conduct interviews with a purposively selected group of stakeholders, including:

Government

- Ministry of Internal Affairs;
- National Bureau for NGOs;

- District/City NGO Monitoring Committees;
- relevant MDAs such as Uganda Police, RDC secretariat, PAU, UNOC;
- Uganda Revenue Authority;
- Financial Intelligence Authority;
- Uganda Registration Services Bureau;
- security agencies where relevant;
- Electoral Commission where relevant.

Civil Society

- HRCU;
- national CSO leaders;
- regional CSOs;
- grassroots organisations/CBOs;
- women-led organisations;
- organisations representing persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups;
- Human Rights Defenders.

4.3 Stakeholder Survey

A short, structured survey may be administered to previous dialogue participants to assess perceptions of: relevance; inclusiveness; quality of dialogue; Government responsiveness; follow-up; implementation of commitments; changes in Government–CSO relations; overall contribution of the platform. Where feasible, the survey should include both current and previous participants to assess changes in perception over time.

4.4 Case Studies

The Consultant should develop 3–5 outcome/change case studies demonstrating where the dialogue platform appears to have contributed to meaningful change. Potential cases may include: changes relating to NGO regulatory compliance; FIA/AML-related issues; engagement with the NGO Bureau; security-related concerns; CSO participation in electoral processes; CBO registration; taxation issues and concerns for oil and gas CSOs.

4.5 Contribution Analysis

For major reported results, the Consultant should assess: What changed? When did the change occur? What role did the dialogue play? What evidence supports the claimed contribution? What other factors may have contributed? How strong is the evidence of contribution?

The Consultant will identify changes in:

- Government behaviour;
- relationships;
- regulatory practices;
- institutional coordination;
- CSO advocacy approaches;
- new collaboration mechanisms.

5. Timeframe

The assignment is expected to take approximately **30 working days** from contract signing. The consultant should come up with a work plan to that effect. The Consultant may propose an alternative work plan if justified in the technical proposal.

6. Responsibilities of HRCU

HRCU will:

- provide relevant project documentation;
- facilitate introductions to key stakeholders;
- provide logistical support where agreed;
- review and provide comments on deliverables;
- facilitate access to relevant stakeholders;
- approve final deliverables.

6.1 Responsibilities of the Consultant

The Consultant will:

- develop a detailed methodology;
- conduct the assessment independently and objectively;
- ensure appropriate ethical standards;
- collect and analyse data;
- triangulate findings;
- maintain confidentiality;
- submit all agreed deliverables within the agreed timeframe;
- present findings to HRCU
- incorporate appropriate feedback into the final report.

7. Key Deliverables

The Consultant will be expected to produce:

1. Inception Report
2. Data Collection Tools
3. Preliminary Findings Presentation
4. Draft Assessment Report
5. Final Assessment Report
6. 2021–2026 Dialogue Commitment Matrix

8. Qualifications for the Consultant(s)

The assignment may be undertaken by an individual consultant or a consulting team.

The Consultant/team should possess:

- A Master's degree in Monitoring and Assessment, Development Studies, Social Sciences, Public Policy, Governance, Human Rights, International Development or a related discipline.
- At least 7 years of demonstrated experience in research or assessment of development, governance, human rights, or civil society programmes.
- Demonstrated experience in civil society operating environment; NGO regulatory frameworks; Government–CSO relations; civic space and human rights; policy and advocacy assessment;
- Strong knowledge of the Ugandan governance and civil society context.
- Demonstrated experience working with Government institutions and CSOs.
- Strong qualitative and quantitative research skills.
- Experience in stakeholder consultations and participatory research.
- Excellent analytical and report-writing skills.

9. Specifications for the Submission of Offers

Interested Consultants/consultants should submit a technical and financial proposal (with a budget in Uganda Shillings (UGX) and detailed CVs of the lead Consultant and proposed team members to snalukwago@hrcug.org and copied to info@hrcug.org no later than **Monday, 15th September 2026 at 5:00 pm**.