



## 9. NGO Activity

### 9.1 Key changes and developments in NGO activity in the past five years

Originally, most NGOs in Uganda were charity-driven religious institutions. However, since the NRM government came into power in 1986, there has been rapid growth in the number of all kinds of NGOs, especially in service delivery sectors such as health, education, micro-finance, water and sanitation, and agriculture.

At present, there is little reliable data on the number and nature of NGOs in the country. The GPR Group (2006) reported that the total number of NGOs registered in 2000/1 was around 3,500.

Ugandan NGOs are funded primarily through international NGOs and donors, with the average NGO generating only about 2.5% of its funding from members and individual donations (Uganda National NGO Forum, 2006). Some specifically rural-based CSOs – such as burial associations, credit clubs and women’s digging associations – raise their sources through membership contributions. In Uganda, it is apparent that, apart from rural organisations such as these, most other NGOs look for external funding. Hence, it can be argued that most NGOs are more or less like local managers of foreign aid.

Two umbrella organisations have been set up to provide some coordination to the NGO sector in Uganda. These are the Development Network of Indigenous Voluntary Associations (DENIVA) and the Uganda National NGO Forum. Both aim to encourage self-regulation and to facilitate the exchange of information and experiences amongst members.

Some NGOs have declared objectives of engaging the state or influencing its political activities. Some of the NGOs in Uganda that have worked towards this end include: Foundation for African Development (FAD), National Organisation for Civic Education and Elections Monitoring (NOCEM), Uganda Think Tank Foundation, and Uganda Joint Christian Council. Reputable international NGOs such as Plan International, World Vision, Oxfam and Red Banner are known for helping communities that have suffered losses from war (LRA victims in the north), famine, floods, drought and poverty. They extend their services via food, shelter, medical care, education and more. Local NGOs, such as TASO (The AIDS Support Organisation), offer care and counselling services to people living with HIV/AIDS.

## 9.2 Key NGOs involved in media development activities

Two of the international agencies most actively involved in developing media in Uganda are not strictly speaking NGOs, but rather the international development arms of the Swedish and US governments: the Swedish International Developing Agency (SIDA) and USAID.

In terms of actual NGOs, two key international players are:

- MS Danish Association for International Co-operation (MS Uganda), a Danish NGO; and,
- Panos Eastern Africa.

As mentioned earlier in Section 3.8, Panos Eastern Africa (2005) is conducting a region-wide project to train journalists to report accurately on terrorist activities and related issues.

A key national NGO involved in media development is the Uganda Media Women's Association (UMWA). Its aim is "to empower society to appreciate the issues of the least heard women, children, people with disability, the youth... through the active use of media for sustainable development" (UMWA, 2006). UMWA supports MAMA FM radio, which seeks to broadcast gender-sensitive educational programmes and offers training/practical experience for female journalists (UMWA, 2006).

## 9.3 Climate of opportunity for media development activities

While the state has shown support to NGOs as "gap-fillers" in development, it also treats the activities of NGOs with suspicion.

The state decided to manage the sector through a registration system established by the 1989 National NGO Registration Act. NGOs must register with the NGO Registration Board and pay a fee, with failure to comply being a criminal offence.

The 1989 Act was recently amended (NGO Registration Amendment Act) to allow the government greater ability to "monitor" the activities of NGOs. This move has received much criticism from NGOs in Uganda. The Coalition on the NGO Bill (CONOB) was set up to engage actors against this Act, and to resist it on the grounds of its "regressive" nature (Sustainability Watch, 2006). CONOB claims the Amendment Act is inconsistent with the autonomy of civic organisation and the guarantees of freedom and liberty embedded under the 1995 Constitution. It also contends that the nature of the restrictions imposed by the Act are grossly inconsistent with Uganda's commitments under several international charters. Uganda is party to both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), and is therefore enjoined to protect and promote the enjoyment of all rights contained therein, including the freedom of association through civic organisations.

Time will tell how this Act will be implemented in practice and what long-term consequences it will have on NGOs in Uganda.

## Key findings

- There is a lack of reliable data on the number and nature of NGOs in Uganda.
- While the sector has greatly expanded, the NRM government has been eager to hold NGOs within its confines, as evidenced by the provisions of the NGO Registration Amendment Act.
- Key international supporters of media development in Uganda are the government international development agencies of Sweden (SIDA) and the US (USAID).
- International NGOs working in media development include Panos and MS Danish Association for International Cooperation (MS Uganda).
- A key national NGO is the Uganda Media Women's Association (UMWA).