



2021 CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATION SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

NAMIBIA
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For Namibia

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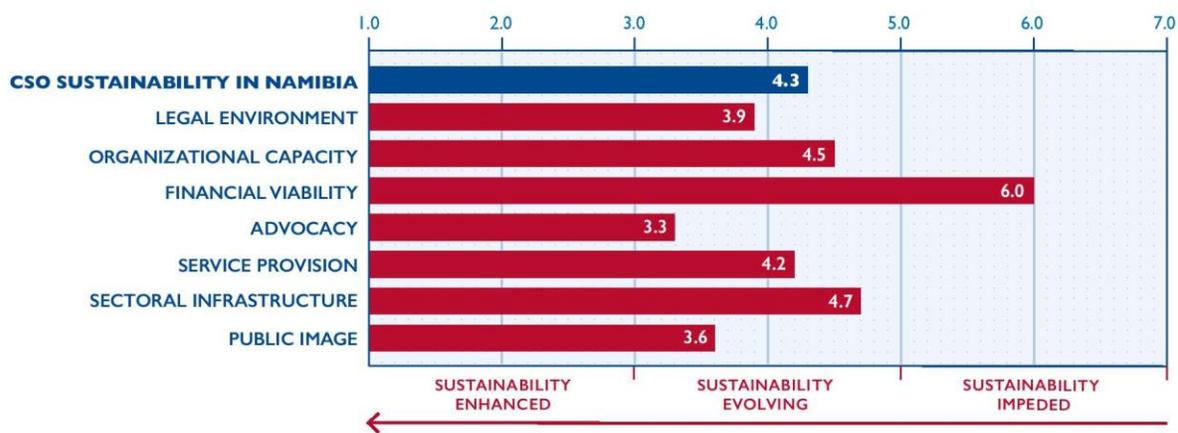
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OVERALL CSO SUSTAINABILITY: 4.3



In 2021, life in Namibia was dominated by a deadly third wave of COVID-19 infections. Between the start of the pandemic in March 2020 and the end of 2021, Namibia recorded 3,645 deaths related to the virus, 75 percent of which took place in a harrowing period between May and August 2021. The government rolled out an immunization campaign in March 2021, but it was hampered by delivery delays and widespread hesitancy to accept the vaccine fueled by disinformation. The government imposed varying restrictions on freedom of movement and the size of public gatherings throughout the year. A nighttime curfew was in place from June to October. However, freedoms of expression and of the media were respected, and the police exercised more restraint in enforcing pandemic restrictions than in 2020. CSOs remained relatively uninvolved in the pandemic response, although a few national organizations sought to provide accurate information and expose fake news about the pandemic while other CSOs mitigated pandemic-related hardships by distributing food and clothing.

Politically, the year was marked by stretches of pandemic-induced inactivity. Parliamentary sessions were suspended for part of the year. When the National Assembly was in session, debates were often acrimonious, with little law making actually taking place. In April, the speaker of the National Assembly had security staff forcibly remove from the chamber two leaders of the populist opposition party, the Landless Peoples Movement, after they disrupted President Hage Geingob’s state-of-the-nation address. The parliamentarians’ subsequent suspension from the parliament was overturned by the Supreme Court.

In May, the Namibian and German governments reached an agreement regarding reparations and an official apology for the genocide of the Herero and Nama peoples in the early twentieth century. Germany’s offer of EUR 1.1 billion (approximately \$1.3 billion) in reparations to be paid over thirty years was swiftly rejected by opposition parties as well as the affected traditional communities, which felt that they had been sidelined during the negotiations. When members of parliament from the ruling Swapo Party of Namibia also voiced concerns about the settlement, the government shelved parliamentary ratification of the agreement.

Namibians continued to experience economic travails in 2021 after an unprecedented 7.9 percent contraction in the country’s economy in 2020. Although the economy bounced back to an estimated 2.4 percent rate of growth in 2021, according to the Namibia Statistics Agency, 15,442 formal jobs were lost since the start of the pandemic, of which nearly 30 percent were in the travel and tourism sector, the Ministry of Labor reported. Given the predominance of the informal sector in the Namibian economy, labor experts estimated that the true number of jobs lost to COVID-19 was actually much higher.

The overall sustainability of CSOs did not change in 2021. The legal environment was slightly less enabling as the government seemed intent on increased regulation of the sector and a long-standing legal dispute over the right to conduct research was left unresolved. CSOs’ organizational capacity regressed slightly as existing challenges with human resources and finances were compounded by pandemic restrictions, unplanned expenditures, and the shift of program funds to meet emergency needs. Many CSOs experienced a slight deterioration of their financial

situations as funding for core costs remained scarce and an ailing economy made the private sector unable or unwilling to step in. Service provision was slightly weaker as precarious finances and pandemic restrictions forced many CSOs to cut back on services. At the same time, advocacy was moderately stronger as CSOs successfully pressed for change on issues related to the environment, corruption, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and other (LGBTQI+) rights. CSOs' public image improved slightly as their activities received ample media coverage and their use of social media increased. Only the sectoral infrastructure did not change.

The overall size of the Namibian CSO sector in 2021 was unclear as there is no official register of nonprofit organizations. The Civil Society Information Center (also known as CIVIC +264) verified that 104 CSOs countrywide were active as of the end of 2021.

LEGAL ENVIRONMENT: 3.9



The legal environment for CSOs declined slightly in 2021 as the government seemed intent on increasing regulation of the sector and a long-standing legal dispute over the right to conduct research was left unresolved.

The rules regarding the various forms of CSO registration did not change in 2021. CSOs are required to register with the Business and Intellectual Property Authority as not-for-gain companies under the Companies Act or with the Master of the High Court as trusts under the Trust Moneys Protection Act. Many smaller organizations choose to constitute themselves as membership-based voluntary associations, which do not require registration. CSOs continued to struggle with bureaucratic barriers and inefficiencies in the registration systems in 2021. The Namibia Development Trust

(NDT), for example, encountered a very slow process when it sought to update its records with the Master of the High Court. Similarly, the Namibian Chapter of the Internet Society (ISOC) found the process of registering with the Business and Intellectual Property Authority to be laborious and costly.

CSOs remained concerned about the authorities' efforts to introduce increased oversight and compliance requirements for the sector in 2021. The government continued to raise the prospect of a government-civil society partnership framework with possible new registration requirements. The European Union-funded Enhancing Participatory Democracy in Namibia (EPDN) project helped facilitate discussions about such a framework. However, little was achieved, partially because of pandemic restrictions, which limited consultations. The EPDN project is expected to start driving this initiative more intently in 2022. While CSOs acknowledge that internal governance deficits exist in the sector, they also fear that additional requirements will increase their administrative burden and could be abused to limit their activities and target their funding.

The long-running legal case to have parts of the Research, Science, and Technology Act of 2004 declared unconstitutional was still not resolved in 2021. Three organizations—the Legal Assistance Center (LAC), Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), and *The Namibian* newspaper—have challenged the law and its regulations, claiming that it imposes draconian controls on entities conducting any kind of research. In 2021, these organizations came to view the case as also involving access-to-justice issues, as its resolution had been delayed for several years to allow the government to revise the act. In view of the government's failure to deliver an acceptable revised draft of the law, the complainants felt that the case was being dragged out unnecessarily. They indicated that they would ask for it to be put back on the court's agenda in 2022 so that a judgment could finally be issued.

There are no legal limitations on CSOs' access to foreign funding. However, in March 2021, the Bank of Namibia's Financial Intelligence Center (FIC) circulated an assessment report claiming that CSOs are at serious risk of exposure to money laundering and terrorism financing. During stakeholder consultations, CSOs expressed the view that the FIC's claims were questionable given the sector's modest assets and limited access to funding. Several CSOs and churches felt that they had been unfairly targeted, especially when high-profile corruption and money-

laundering cases in Namibia do not normally involve CSOs but do often implicate politicians. Following issuance of this report, the FIC urged all CSOs to register with it so they could be monitored. Very few organizations are believed to have done so.

CSOs may compete for government contracts. Few organizations do so, mainly because of limited capacity, a tedious and lengthy procurement process, most tenders' lack of relevance to CSOs' areas of expertise, and the possibility that working with government institutions will undermine their independence and control over projects. CSOs may also engage in income-generating activities.

All CSOs are supposed to pay pay-as-you-earn tax on permanent employees' salaries. CSOs are exempt from value-added tax except when they provide services or sell products for commercial purposes. Charitable, religious, and welfare organizations are exempt from taxes on income, including funding from donors. CSOs find that remaining compliant with tax and labor laws is an ongoing challenge requiring dedicated resources and skilled staff. For example, the Namibia Media Trust (NMT), an organization campaigning on issues related to media freedom and freedom of expression, became involved in a protracted effort to rectify a tax issue in 2021. Authorities did not revive plans proposed in 2019 to tax income that charities derive from commercial activities.

Private legal services are available to CSOs but are costly. LAC normally provides legal advice to CSOs on a pro bono basis. However, as the only nonprofit law firm, LAC is unable to provide sufficient services to keep up with demand.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY: 4.5

As the COVID-19 pandemic entered its second year, the organizational capacity of CSOs weakened slightly. Existing challenges with human resources and finances were compounded by pandemic restrictions, unplanned expenditures, and the shift of program funds to meet emergency needs. This uncertain situation in turn hampered strategic planning, while lockdowns and other pandemic-related measures disrupted internal management.

Although national and some international travel restrictions were eased during the year, the severe mid-year wave of COVID-19 infections and deaths overwhelmed the country's health-care system. CSOs' day-to-day operations were undermined by exposure to the virus and infections among staff and their families.

CSO staff found it harder to communicate with stakeholders or lost valuable work time getting tested, recuperating from illness, or taking care of sick family members. For example, the staff of the Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSF), a German political foundation operating in Namibia, worked mostly from home, which limited their ability to offer support to partner organizations. CSOs' implementation of projects was disrupted in other ways as well. IPPR, for example, was unable to carry out a research validation meeting in person and was forced to resort to emailing questions, which garnered few responses.

CSOs' ability to connect, coordinate, and mobilize constituencies was constrained during the year. While many CSOs turned to online solutions, these were not always ideal. Having shifted its training and stakeholder consultation events online, the Namibia Institute for Democracy (NID) observed that it was challenging to keep participants engaged and online throughout these sessions. Grassroots and rural organizations with limited or no access to information technology and the internet struggled to remain active. Field trips organized by CIVIC +264 to allow smaller local organizations to meet and network with regional CSOs were delayed until the end of the year because of the severity of the pandemic.

CSOs' management and operations were also undermined by limited core funding and institutional support from donors. Internal governance did not improve and in fact CSOs' governance capacities worsened in 2021. In October, allegations surfaced that a prominent youth activist from #ShutItAllDown, which campaigns against sexual

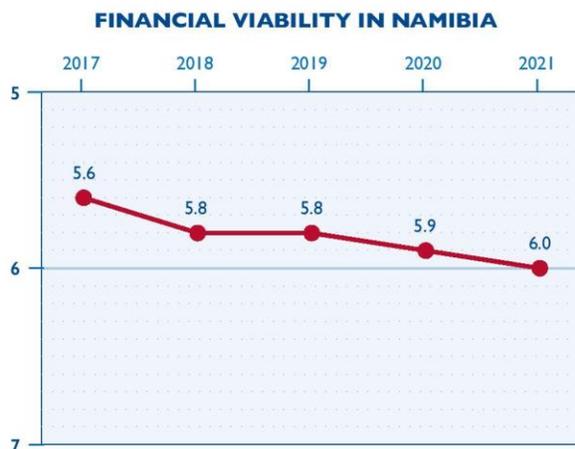


and gender-based violence (SGBV), had embezzled funding provided to the movement. The activist was questioned by law enforcement officials, and the matter was eventually resolved when the funds were paid back. Such unfortunate instances underlined the fact that many CSOs continued to lack adequate administrative supervision, financial controls, and fully involved boards and trustees.

The economic and human costs of the pandemic and its restrictions burdened CSO staff. For example, because of funding constraints, ISOC and Eloo, an agricultural organization, relied increasingly on unemployed youth and interns working on a voluntary basis. These volunteers often lacked commitment to their jobs, and necessary oversight of their work was sometimes lacking, weakening the quality of an organization's work. CSOs reported an upsurge in mental health problems among staff, particularly younger professionals, as a result of pandemic restrictions. With counselling options in Namibia limited and usually very expensive, several CSOs found it difficult to support staff dealing with mental health issues.

Building on investments in equipment and experience gained in 2020, some CSOs were well positioned to make effective use of social media and online tools while pandemic restrictions were in effect in 2021. NID, IPPR, CIVIC +264, and NMT regularly used Microsoft Teams, Zoom, and similar platforms to hold online meetings and connect with stakeholders, government officials, and the public. NMT started to set up a dedicated podcast studio, which will be available for use by other CSOs for a fee. However, the cost of broadband connections, computer equipment, and website services remained a challenge for most of the sector. ISOC sought to ensure participation in its webinars and online meetings by offering to refund data costs.

FINANCIAL VIABILITY: 6.0



Many CSOs experienced a slight deterioration in their financial situations in 2021, continuing the downward trend of recent years. Funding for CSOs' core costs remained scarce, while the ailing economy meant the private sector was unable or unwilling to step in except to fund emergency public health measures related to the pandemic.

Most CSO funding originates with foreign donors, particularly Western governments and international organizations such as the United Nations (UN). However, Namibia's classification by the World Bank as an upper middle-income country makes it ineligible for funding from many donors. In 2021, the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA), which has funded various projects in the country over the last decade,

decided to exclude Namibia from future funding and focus instead on larger African countries such as South Africa and Kenya. Towards the end of 2021, Sister Namibia, which was founded in the 1980s and is one of Namibia's foremost feminist organizations, lost its main donor and had to drastically cut costs and restructure its operations to remain financially viable. Among other steps, Sister Namibia retrenched permanent staff and rented out most of its office building.

Donors increasingly require partners to have appropriate legal status, up-to-date financials, and track records of handling significant grants. These requirements mean that donors usually direct funding to established CSOs able to show sufficient organizational and staffing capacity. Grassroots organizations with little capacity and regulatory know-how find it difficult to access funding. Donors are generally reluctant to fund voluntary associations because of their lack of financial controls and oversight. Many funders, including the US Embassy, provide small short-term grants with limited coverage of overhead costs and other institutional expenses. CSOs generally view donors as preferring to support the government rather than civil society. For example, in March 2021, the International Monetary Fund approved \$270 million in emergency fiscal support for Namibia, but the funds were primarily intended to cover government expenses and the pandemic response and did not reach CSOs.

An exception to the general curtailment of funding was increased donor support for environmental issues in 2021. For example, NDT observed an increase in funding from organizations such as the World Wide Fund for Nature

(WWF) for small community-based organizations. Aside from environmental protection, most other fields, including human rights and the promotion of democracy, garnered less support.

The depressed local economy offered few opportunities for CSOs to diversify their funding in 2021. Government support for civil society has always been limited, but as it faced a prolonged fiscal crisis and incurred additional costs to manage the pandemic, the government offered no funding to CSOs in 2021.

Businesses, particularly big corporations and international companies, often bypass civil society and support communities directly, mainly by providing goods and consumables. Some companies, especially in the financial and extractive industries, increased their support in 2021, mostly to prop up the struggling public health sector during the mid-year wave of COVID-19 infections. Businesses generally prefer to support politically neutral causes such as sports, conservation, soup kitchens, and the arts. B2Gold, a Canadian mining company based in Namibia, is a long-term funding partner of the Save the Rhino Trust and in 2021 provided financing for the salaries of field staff monitoring the animals' movements. The local tourism industry, which prior to the pandemic was an important source of funding for environmental CSOs, was unable to generate funds to support the sector because of persisting restrictions on international travel in 2021.

Overall, Namibian CSOs have limited options and capacities to generate income from their activities. Many CSOs serve poor communities and have limited opportunities to fundraise aggressively. Membership-based entities are few in number and rely for funding on a handful of civic-minded, well-off members of the public.

Many organizations struggle with keeping adequate, up-to date financial records and paying for annual audits. Only a small number of CSOs publish financial information. In 2021, NID convinced its main funding partner to pay for the completion of its outstanding annual audits, which had been delayed because of a lack of funds to pay the auditors.

ADVOCACY: 3.3

Advocacy was moderately stronger in 2021 as CSOs successfully pressed for change on a host of issues related to the environment, corruption, and LGBTQI+ rights, in some cases raising international attention.

Direct engagements between CSOs and policymakers and legislators were limited in 2021, in part because of the severity of the COVID-19 crisis, particularly in the middle of the year. For example, CSOs such as NID, CIVIC +264, and IPPR had limited contact with the Anti-Corruption Commission, even though the commission was supposedly developing a new national strategy in consultation with stakeholders. Government consultations with civil society were mostly ad hoc, and the government often organized engagements with CSOs on very short notice, giving the impression that the consultations were a perfunctory exercise.

However, CIVIC +264 and IPPR were able to arrange three online consultations that brought together CSOs and the minister of finance to discuss national budget priorities and plans for a sovereign wealth fund. As a result of CSOs' successful lobbying in the first consultation in February, the minister removed value-added tax from sanitary pads, which groups such as Women's Action for Development had demanded for several years. The second and third meetings in February and September were about priorities for the national budget. Most CSOs' suggestions were ruled out because of a lack of financing, but the spirit of the consultations was constructive and a more formalized schedule of discussions was developed for 2022. Civil society continued to engage with the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), a self-monitoring mechanism for assessing national governance standards that involves government, civil society, and the private sector. However, some CSOs felt sidelined in the APRM process, especially as the government had to be lobbied to include CSO representatives on the APRM National Governing



Council. Online validation workshops for the country's APRM baseline report were held at the height of the third wave of the pandemic and thus were poorly attended.

CSOs made little progress on reforming existing legislation in 2021, especially as pandemic restrictions and infections disrupted the parliamentary schedule. CSOs did, however, advocate for open discourse on issues of high public interest and played an active role in public hearings by parliamentary committees. For example, equal-rights campaigners objected to amendments to the Combating of Domestic Violence Act, which were presented in the parliament in February. The proposed changes to the law ignored recommendations from LAC to extend the act to cover same-sex couples. The draft amendments were later withdrawn but are likely to be re-tabled in the National Assembly in 2022. Various organizations engaged in a lively debate about abortion rights at a four-day public hearing in October held by the Parliamentary Committee on Gender Equality, Social Development, and Family Affairs. Civil society was divided on the issue, with church groups opposing reform of the law and pro-choice groups such as the Voices for Choices and Rights Coalition calling for progressive reforms. CSOs engaged in subsequent regional public hearings on the issue, during which gender and pro-choice activists felt that church groups received privileged treatment.

In November, ISOC and the ACTION Coalition, which is made up of ten CSOs lobbying for better access to information, presented their views on the Access to Information Bill at a public hearing organized by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Information and Communication Technology. CSOs did not have major objections to the bill and were willing to work with it in its current form. The bill was passed in 2022.

Public protests and community activities were muted during the year, partially because of over-zealous police enforcement of pandemic restrictions. A few social movements and CSO coalitions coalesced around issue-specific causes and managed to hold protests and other events. The LGBTQI+ community and its supporters were particularly vocal concerning a court case brought against the Home Affairs Ministry by a gay couple whose twin babies born to a South African surrogate were denied citizenship by Namibian authorities. The High Court decreed in an interim ruling that the twins must be issued emergency travel documents so that they could enter Namibia. Later, the couple won a separate case in which the court ruled that their other surrogate child was eligible for Namibian citizenship. The government's appeal of this ruling was in progress at the end of the year. Equal rights activists used social media effectively to draw international attention to the case, adding to the pressure on the government.

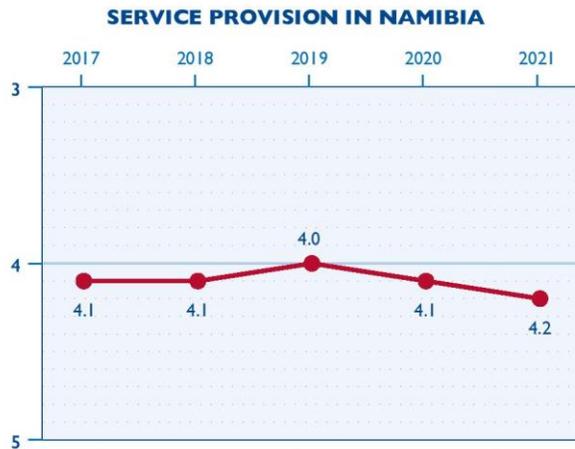
Environmental CSOs were active and scored several successes in 2021. CSOs opposed to oil exploration activities by the Canadian company ReconAfrica in Namibia's northern Kavango Basin voiced concerns that the company had drilled test boreholes without adequate precautions to protect the sensitive Okavango Delta, a World Heritage wetland site. Activists alleged further that ReconAfrica planned to use controversial fracking methods. Petitions from the Women's Leadership Center and a consortium of CSOs operating under the name Saving the Okavango's Unique Life called for a ban on explorations and prompted a visit to the Kavango area by the Parliamentary Committee on Natural Resources. The committee thereafter raised concerns about the process for approving exploration activities. ReconAfrica's controversial activities garnered international media attention and inspired various celebrities, in tandem with Namibian activists, to take up the cause of protecting the Kavango Basin. For example, Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex, and local environmentalist Reinhold Mangundu wrote a joint opinion article on the issue for *The Washington Post*, which appeared in October 2021. In another environmental case, a local interest group, the Stampriet Aquifer Uranium Mining Committee, accused a Russian-backed company, Headspring Investments, of acting outside the law while exploring for uranium. In response, the government withdrew two drilling permits issued to Headspring.

A rare victory against government abuse was scored in early April with the resignation of the defense minister. The Affirmative Repositioning (AR) movement published leaked evidence on Twitter indicating that the minister held a significant amount of money in an undeclared bank account in Hong Kong, which was allegedly linked to a controversial, decade-old arms deal between the Namibian government and a state-owned Chinese company. No further action was taken after the minister's resignation.

The leader of AR, a former mayor of Windhoek, also launched a highly visible public campaign against the Red Line, a veterinary cordon fence banning the distribution of meat from Namibia's northern communal areas in areas south of the Etosha National Park to prevent the spread of livestock disease. The former mayor lodged a case in the High Court seeking to have the Red Line declared unconstitutional on the grounds that it violated the dignity of the Namibian people and was discriminatory. The case was still pending at the end of the year.

In 2021, civil society was more focused on the possibility of a new partnership policy with government. However, pandemic restrictions hindered CSOs' efforts to reform regulations and other legal matters affecting the sector in 2021. In addition, the individual responsible for the government's civil society desk passed away from COVID-19, and the post was not filled during the year.

SERVICE PROVISION: 4.2



CSOs' service provision deteriorated slightly in 2021 as precarious financial positions and pandemic restrictions forced many CSOs to cut back on services.

Namibian CSOs normally offer a range of services, including outreach on health and educational issues, nutritional support, legal and administrative advice, training on issues such as environmental protection, and civic education. For some CSOs, the COVID-19 health emergency was the dominant concern of the year, turning attention away from other national issues, such as education and SGBV. For example, the Society for Family Health and other CSOs focused on health care redirected resources to fight the pandemic, thereby reducing other crucial services, such as outreach and the distribution of contraceptives. Pandemic-induced curfews

and other restrictions limited CSOs' activities, especially those that could not easily be moved online.

One exception to this trend was the work of the Shack Dwellers Federation of Namibia (SDFN), probably the most effective grassroots CSO in Namibia, which focuses primarily on serving the urban poor living in informal settlements. Using community-led approaches, SDFN continued to provide housing and run 1,036 saving groups in all fourteen regions of Namibia in 2021. RISE Namibia, a small but longstanding CSO focused on community development in more remote areas, sought to improve household food security by providing training and support for backyard food production to communities in the country's south.

CSOs have little scope for generating income from their services, since the communities that they serve are invariably poverty stricken.

Government recognition of the role played by CSOs remained limited in 2021. Among government ministries, the Ministry of Finance takes its consultation with CSOs most seriously.

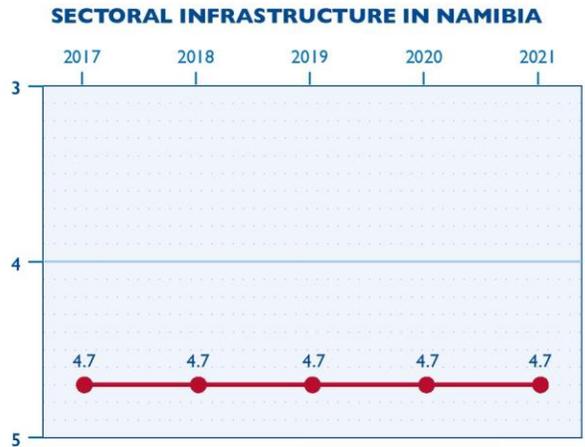
SECTORAL INFRASTRUCTURE: 4.7

The sectoral infrastructure supporting civil society did not change in 2021.

CSOs have little support from resource centers or intermediary support organizations. The few operational CSO resource centers in Namibia include the House of Democracy, supported by HSF, which offers office space and meeting rooms to partner organizations and other groups at reduced cost. In 2021, HSF began to set up a podcast studio for use by its CSO partners. The Namibian Chamber of Environment offered space for discussions of current issues, such as green hydrogen and mining. NDT and other CSO partners are planning to establish an environmental hub for CSOs, which will include a training institute.

Namibia has hardly any local grantmaking CSOs. One of the few such organizations is the Environmental Investment Fund of Namibia, which focuses on sustainable economic development in an environmentally conscious manner. The fund's activities are financially supported by the government and international organizations such as the UN Development Programme and the Green Climate Fund. While the bulk of its funding targets green start-ups and sustainable, for-profit business plans, a few CSOs also benefit.

Coordination and cooperation between CSOs improved in 2021 thanks to CIVIC +264, which increasingly serves as a contact point for inquiries from the government and the private sector. In 2021, CIVIC +264 liaised on the sector's behalf with the APRM National Governing Council and the FIC. Loose CSO coalitions were active in 2021 on a number of issues, including abortion, equal rights, and environmental protection. These coalitions focused mostly on lobbying the government and gaining media attention for their causes. Donor organizations have indicated that they would like to see more coordination and cooperation in the Namibian CSO sector but did not offer support for this purpose to groups other than CIVIC +264. A long-awaited national conference to discuss the possibility of a new umbrella body for CSOs and the form this organization should take was delayed until 2022. The conference, to be organized by CIVIC +264, will consider the best approach to coordinating civil society given the demise of the National NGO Forum (NANGOF) Trust, an umbrella body that stopped functioning several years ago.



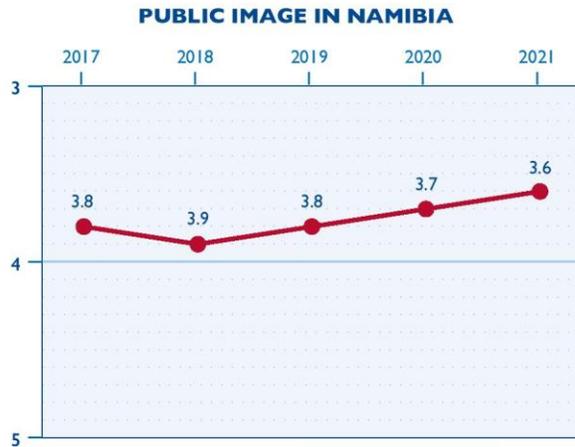
Training opportunities were limited in 2021. IPPR's Namibia Fact Check project offered short courses in fact checking and social media verification to civil society representatives and trainee journalists. In September, the project provided three days of training on verifying health-related information to community radio presenters with the support of the DW Akademie, a project of the German public media outlet Deutsche Welle. In November, RISE Namibia partnered with the Namibia Rural Women's Assembly on a two-day workshop about basic bookkeeping and financial reporting. The Namibian Association of Community-Based Natural Resource Management Support Organizations (NACSO), which is made up of eight CSOs and the University of Namibia, conducted training on forestry management. Capacity building offered by donors is usually ad hoc and aimed at existing partners. Among the few opportunities of this type in 2021, HSF provided training on diversity issues to its partner CSOs.

Collaboration between CSOs and other sectors such as government and business was modest and sporadic in 2021. NACSO facilitated training on wildlife monitoring for conservancy game guards and held planning meetings with the Ministry of Environment, Forestry, and Tourism. Several civil society initiatives sought to respond to communities' pandemic-related hardships in partnership with the private sector. For example, the charitable organization Co-Feed Namibia regularly collected and distributed donated food and other basic necessities to soup kitchens, old-age homes, orphanages, and needy households in partnership with private-sector entities, including the Lithon Foundation, a welfare organization, and Nedbank Namibia. NMT funded columns in *The Namibian* newspaper on COVID-related issues, which were provided by IPPR's Fact Check project.

PUBLIC IMAGE: 3.6

The public image of CSOs improved slightly in 2021 as their activities received positive media attention and their use of social media increased.

Recent years have seen a mushrooming of media outlets in Namibia, especially online publications and radio stations focused on current affairs. CSO representatives are often invited to provide commentary and analysis of political and social developments on these and other media outlets, a trend that accelerated in 2021 as the media sought informed voices on the COVID-19 virus, pandemic restrictions, and other legal and health topics. For example, staff from the Namibia Chamber of Environment, LAC, NID, and IPPR were featured regularly on current affairs programs or cited in newspaper articles, and CSO representatives became regular guests on the new Desert Radio channel. Articles by LGBTQI+ activists were frequently published by local newspapers, and IPPR's briefing papers on economic topics were often cited in articles on the business climate published by the Namibia Media Holdings group of newspapers. CSOs were also featured regularly in international media as critical, independent sources of information on issues such as corruption, controversial oil exploration, and LGTBQI+ activism. The media covered CSOs' help to communities coping with the effects of the pandemic. For example, articles were



published describing Co-Feed Namibia’s partnerships with local retail outlets to provide basic supplies to affected communities; Development Workshop’s receipt of approximately \$500,000 from Mobile Telecommunications Limited, Namibia’s main cellphone network, for housing and early childhood development; and a football tournament to raise money for vulnerable community members hosted by the Welwitschia Charity Foundation in Khorixas.

Positive media coverage of CSOs in 2021 contributed to favorable public perceptions of the sector. Senior governments officials, including the president, were not directly critical of civil society and instead called on citizens to avoid negativity and concentrate on positive developments. Private-sector perceptions of CSOs were

mixed during the year. Some CSOs were subjected to push back from companies engaged in controversial mining developments. For example, the Canadian oil exploration company ReconAfrica sought to discredit CSOs’ criticisms of its activities.

CSOs made more and better use of social media tools and platforms in 2021, continuing a trend that started with the onset of the pandemic. Streaming presentations by CSOs became more common and were popular with the public and media, although NID noted the difficulty of retaining an audience’s interest over the course of longer online sessions. Some CSOs created their own media channels and publications, such as NMT’s monthly *Ask The Experts* sessions on COVID-19 and its *YouthQuake* newspaper insert.

Other than the discussion of a possible new umbrella body, CSOs made few attempts to self-regulate in 2021. Only a small number of CSOs publish annual reports or financial information.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed herein are those of the panelists and other project researchers and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or FHI 360.

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