CITIZEN VOICES CURATED AND AMPLIFIED

Charting the Path to Accountability in Uganda

Report on #UgandaNGOExhibition

June 9, 2023 - June 26, 2023

Contents

Chaos Theory
@Samwyri

#UgandaNGOsExhibition will bite best if funders of the organizations being exhibited are tagged by the curators. If the organizations are claiming blackmail and hatchet jobs, the funders will give them a clean bill after investigations and audits.

Agather Atuhaire
@AAgather

I hope they listen before it is too late. We can't have a dysfunctional government and an NGO sector rotten to these levels!! Where will our hope come from? #UgandaNGOsExhibition

Ms Cecilia Kakyo
@TildaKakyo

A reality amongst many unsaid stories of the #UgandaNGOexhibition Mark you.. MANY UNSAID STORIES

#SocialDistancing
@Innocentt_T

#UgandaNGOsExhibition
#UgandaNGOExhibition

Dr Otile Jacob
@DrOtileUg

Our NGOs are actually worse than government they criticize #UgandaNGOsExhibition

Never underestimate the power of speaking up. We are celebrating these small wins. The #UgandaNGOsExhibition is actually shaking up some things. And we will continue to push for accountability & fair treatment of p'plo who work in these spaces.

OLOWO AUGUSTINE
@AugustineOlowo

Thank you, I hope those speaking for others here see yours message, Esp. those who say they "worked with" those who say they "worked with" organization for 6 months, wrote a
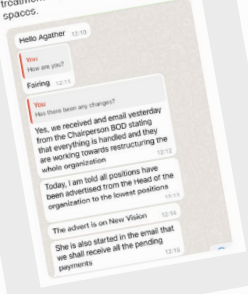
SON OF LOYO...
@FERDINANDIUS

With this allow me to extend my appreciation to @theICTJ Ugandan chapter led by @skasande2 I did my internship there in 2017 and was treated like a son. That inspired my Thesis on International Criminal Justice System focusing on Malabo #UgandaNGOsExhibition

Executive Summary

This report provides a critical analysis of the discourse surrounding the NGO sector in Uganda, sourced from the #UgandaNGOExhibition and #UgandaNGOsExhibition hashtags on Twitter. It outlines both commendable facets of NGO work and key challenges that necessitate strategic action. NGOs in Uganda have been praised for their innovative contributions to societal challenges, reflecting their resilience and dedication. However, the sector also grapples with allegations of corruption, nepotism, and capacity issues, further exacerbated by inefficiencies within regulatory bodies and political interference.

Based on these findings, recommendations for strengthening the sector include improving transparency and accountability, enhancing impact assessments, fostering collaboration, and prioritizing diversity, equity, and inclusion. The report also calls for stronger regulation, both internal and external, including a more effective NGO Bureau and independent oversight mechanisms. Building on positive aspects will further foster continuous improvement.

1. Introduction

The #UgandaNGOsExhibition is a dynamic social media movement launched in June 2023 with the express aim of amplifying dialogue surrounding the challenges encountered within the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) sector in Uganda. This online initiative finds its roots in a preceding campaign – the Uganda Potholes Exhibition – orchestrated by renowned Ugandan artist and curator, Jim Spire Ssentongo. The initial exhibition constituted a visual commentary on urban infrastructure in Uganda's capital, Kampala, featuring striking photographic documentation of the city's potholes. Other previous editions had focused on health and security.

The #UgandaNGOsExhibition campaign was spearheaded by lawyers, journalists and activists - Agather Atuhaire and Godwin Toko - and effectively harnessed the power of social media to generate a broad and engaged audience. By June 27, 2023, the campaign had hit a remarkable 2,432 tweets. Further, the campaign permeated other online spaces, earning six mentions across various websites. The campaign's extensive reach is underscored by its impressive impact metrics: it's reach was 26.5 million accounts in total, of which 9.3 million were unique. The campaign garnered 16.2K social endorsements such as likes, favorites, and 'thumbs up', and was further bolstered by 4.5K retweets and shares. Sentiment analysis of the campaign's mentions unveiled a diversity of reactions, with 9.0% positive, 19.8% negative, and a predominance of neutral responses at 68.9%.

In terms of geographical distribution, Uganda accounted for the majority of mentions with 1.3K, followed by the United States (151), the United Kingdom (70), Niger (47), Nigeria (42), South Africa (40), Kenya (36), Indonesia (19), Italy (16), and Jersey (16), among others. Regarding how the NGO Exhibition was presented on Twitter, the engagement rate can be calculated as the sum of likes, retweets, quotes, and replies divided by the number of tweets and then by the total number of followers, multiplied by 1006. The median engagement rate on Twitter is 0.037%, with rates higher than this considered good or awesome6. High engagement rates are indicators of strong influence and popular content.

This report endeavors to delve into the rich content generated by the #UgandaNGOsExhibition campaign, offering a thorough analysis of the salient topics elicited by the dialogue. Our goal is to present a holistic view of the campaign's discourse and furnish insightful recommendations for addressing the issues raised, thus contributing constructively to the broader conversation on NGO operation in Uganda.

2. Context for the #UgandaNGOsExhibition

The CSO Sustainability Index, developed by UNNGOF in partnership with FHI 360 and ICNL, measures the civil society sector's sustainability across seven dimensions: Legal environment, Organizational capacity, Financial viability, Advocacy, Service provision, Sectoral infrastructure, and Public image. In 2021, the sustainability of the sector deteriorated moderately as six of the seven dimensions recorded a decline[2]. Various factors contributed to this challenging environment. Following a controversial election, the sector grappled with severe restrictions on social and economic activity due to a surge of COVID-19 infections, the suspension of the Democratic Governance Facility (DGF), a five-year governance program funded by European donors, and the suspension of fifty-four CSOs. These events, along with a declining human rights situation, a national health crisis, pandemic prevention measures, and hostile posturing by the state, created an existential struggle for survival among many CSOs[2].

The #UgandaNGOsExhibition, therefore, took place within this context, serving as an open platform to scrutinize the practices and operations of these NGOs and to foster a dialogue around these pressing issues. The #UgandaNGOsExhibition provided a unique opportunity to collect and analyze public sentiment and feedback regarding the performance of NGOs in Uganda. It was a window into the NGOs' operations, highlighting both their positive impacts and the challenges they face. The exhibition has concluded, but the work continues as the organizers aim to hold NGO leaders accountable and ensure continuous improvement in the sector[3].

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3. Methodology

Our analysis primarily focused on examining the discourse surrounding the #UgandaNGOExhibition and #UgandaNGOsExhibition hashtags on Twitter from June 9 to June 27, 2023. We collated and scrutinized a comprehensive set of 2,432 tweets using these hashtags within this specified timeframe. Despite recognizing the existence of related dialogues on other digital platforms, we concentrated our analytical focus on Twitter, known for hosting vibrant societal debates. This information was gathered using automated data scraping technologies, enabling us to systematically retrieve all tweets containing the targeted hashtags.

These data scraping tools not only ensured our dataset was extensive and accurate, but they also collected a broad array of data elements for each tweet, such as its content, timestamp, user profile information, and associated engagement metrics. Once the data was compiled, we executed thorough content and sentiment analyses. Content analysis assisted in identifying and categorizing key emerging themes, while sentiment analysis offered insights into the dominant emotions conveyed by the Twitter users. By employing these combined methodologies, we were able to deliver a well-rounded and nuanced understanding of the discussions and impacts stemming from the #UgandaNGOExhibition.

Campaign Reach
26.5M Accounts

9.3M+ Unique Accounts

16.2K Social Endorsements

4.5K Retweets and Shares

The campaign's mentions unveiled a diversity of reactions

Positive	Negative	Neutral
✓	✗	—
9%	19.8%	68.9%

4. Emergent Issues

This report offers an analytical perspective on the discourse related to the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) sector in Uganda as reflected on Twitter. Amidst a robust debate, the hashtags #UgandaNGOExhibition and #UgandaNGOsExhibition emerged as key markers for discussions. Our intention was to highlight the positive and negative issues raised as well as recommendations for addressing them. The insights gleaned from this analysis elucidate the crucial roles NGOs play in the Ugandan societal fabric, serving as a vital counterpoint to ongoing scrutiny and skepticism.

4.1 Positive Issues

1. **Provision of Essential Services:** A recurrent theme that emerged from the tweets under analysis is the indispensable role NGOs play in Uganda's social fabric by delivering essential services, especially to marginalized communities. These services encompass a wide range, from education and healthcare to food security and livelihood support. For instance, the NGO @compassion has made a significant impact in Uganda over the past half-century, providing education, healthcare, and other vital services. The NGO's reach has been so impactful that its beneficiaries, like @Hbamulinde, have lauded the organization for its transformative work. Other NGOs like @WorldVisionUganda, @ActionAidUganda, and @WaterAidUganda have also received commendations for their contributions towards improving societal wellbeing.

2. **Advocacy for Human Rights:** An insightful analysis of the collected data revealed another notable role of NGOs in Uganda - human rights advocacy. These NGOs advocate for the rights of various marginalized groups, ranging from journalists and refugees to sexual minorities, and play a critical role in challenging oppressive laws and policies. Notably FHRI was applauded for sensitizing the captives about human rights, rescuing the juveniles, offering legal guidance nationwide as highlighted by @NamubiruBarbara.

3. **Empowerment of Communities:** Community empowerment emerged as another pivotal domain where NGOs are making a significant difference in Uganda. They are facilitating training and skill development, promoting participation in decision-making processes, and addressing structural inequalities. For example, as George Bakiwanya (@Bakiwanyageorge): tweeted, "The contribution of NGOs to the economy is tremendous, in terms of foreign exchange, employment, tax, and empowering communities. The ongoing NGO smear campaign is misguided. Our main focus right now should be on the national debt crisis.

4. **Support to Children:** Lastly, the analysis spotlighted the essential role of NGOs in supporting children, particularly those who are orphaned or vulnerable due to factors such as poverty, disease, and conflict. Watoto Child Care Ministries stood out as a beacon in this sector, providing comprehensive care to over 3,000 orphaned children in their model villages. The tweets underscored the positive reactions from users, emphasizing the transformative work done by the organization, signifying its strong reputation and positive impact within Uganda and beyond.

Our intention was to highlight the positive and negative issues raised as well as recommendations for addressing them. The insights gleaned from this analysis elucidate the crucial roles NGOs play in the Ugandan societal fabric.

4.2 Negative Issues

In our comprehensive analysis of the #UgandaNGOExhibition and #UgandaNGOsExhibition hashtags on Twitter, we uncovered various concerns within the NGO sector. While numerous positive contributions by NGOs were highlighted, it is essential to recognize and address the challenges that also emerged from the discourse. These key issues demand attention and remediation to strengthen the integrity, effectiveness, and overall reputation of NGOs in Uganda. The following analysis delves into these crucial concerns.

1. **Lack of Transparency and Accountability:** A prominent concern within the NGO sector in Uganda is the perceived lack of transparency and accountability. This concern is underscored by several tweets, with some pointing out instances where an NGO refused to release financial records. Without transparent operation and accessible financial records, accountability becomes an uphill task, and the effectiveness of services offered remains questionable. Users like @TriciaGNabaye called for an industry-wide introspection, emphasizing the need for stringent measures to ensure accountability.

2. **Exploitation of PWDs:** Another troubling issue is the alleged exploitation of vulnerable populations, specifically children and persons with disabilities (PWDs). This exploitation, including low-wage labor, unreasonable work hours, and poor safety conditions, has dire consequences on the lives of these vulnerable individuals. Tweets from users like @SpireJim serve as a stark reminder of these grave allegations and their implications on the overall integrity of the NGO sector.

3. **Poor Working Conditions for Staff:** The discussion on Twitter also brought forth allegations of poor working conditions for NGO staff, sometimes encompassing long work hours without appropriate compensation. Such conditions can lead to employee burnout and diminished productivity, reflecting poorly on the sector. Through a number of tweets, participants highlighted the need for effective regulation to ensure safe and fair working conditions. As @Negohe_Tabu tweeted, "Indeed very many Ugandans who are assumed to be employed by NGOs are living in dire conditions. Your fight to highlight the plight of people working with NGOs is timely and will help to address many issues in the sector."

4. **Ineffective Regulation of the NGO Sector:** The overarching concern brought to the fore is the lack of effective regulation within the NGO sector. A stronger regulatory framework could address most of the above concerns, from enhancing transparency and accountability to preventing exploitation and ensuring fair working conditions. Tweets from users like @SpireJim point out the criticality of this issue.

5. **Corruption and Nepotism:** Another notable concern that arises from our analysis is the allegations of corruption and nepotism within the NGO sector. As indicated by tweets from users like @k_ophelia, instances of NGOs providing preferential treatment to relatives of their directors have been reported. Such practices not only undermine the integrity and perceived fairness of the NGO sector but can also lead to an inequitable distribution of resources and opportunities.

6. **Limited Public Awareness:** The general public's lack of awareness about issues within the NGO sector is another significant challenge. This limited awareness can hinder the accountability and effectiveness of NGOs. As noted by users such as @SpireJim and @GoodlyMonteiro, there's a pressing need for comprehensive information about the NGO sector to be disseminated to the public. Additionally, there's an urgent call for increased education about the importance of transparency and accountability within the NGO sector.

7. **Lack of Access to Funding:** Funding difficulties pose another substantial challenge for NGOs in Uganda, particularly those without extensive donor networks. This issue is highlighted by @SpireJim's tweet pointing out the reliance of NGOs on donor funding, which can be inconsistent and unreliable. These funding challenges can compromise NGOs' ability to plan effectively, secure necessary resources, and deliver quality services.

8. **Lack of Capacity:** Lastly, the relatively young and underdeveloped state of the NGO sector in Uganda indicates a prevalent lack of capacity among many NGOs. Factors contributing to this capacity gap include limited funding, insufficient training, and lack of experience. As noted by @GoodlyMonteiro, many NGOs in Uganda are still in early development stages and struggle to deliver services effectively. This can result in the poor quality of services, duplication of efforts, and lack of coordination among NGOs.

9. **Political Interference:** A recurring concern among NGOs in Uganda is the issue of political interference that threatens their operational independence. Particularly for organizations engaged in sensitive areas like human rights and anti-corruption efforts, such interference can significantly hamper their work. In a tweet, @k_ophelia raises the issue, stating, "There have been cases of NGOs being pressured by the government to stop their work or to change their programming." This points to an environment that can potentially deter NGOs from fulfilling their mission and compromises their effectiveness. The influence of politics over NGOs not only undermines their autonomy but also imposes an environment of apprehension and constraint. This condition can ultimately hinder NGOs' ability to meet their objectives and serve their beneficiaries effectively.

10. **Nepotism and Disproportionate Pay Gaps in NGOs:** There have been allegations concerning nepotism and unequal pay scales within NGOs. As illustrated by @Innocentt_T's tweet, such practices compromise the principles of accountability, transparency, and equity, which are fundamental to any organization, particularly those in the civil society sector.

11. **Issues with NGO Bureau/Lack of Proper Regulation and Oversight:** Finally, concerns have been raised regarding the NGO Bureau's transparency and functionality. This entity is crucial for regulating and overseeing NGO operations in the country. A tweet by @YusufSerunkuma, stating, "The lack of transparency and functionality in the NGO Bureau's website is concerning. It raises questions about the effectiveness of regulation and oversight within the NGO sector," raises questions about the bureau's effectiveness. This indicates a need for improved transparency and operational functionality for the NGO Bureau to hold NGOs accountable and ensure adherence to established guidelines and regulations.

5. Conclusion

A critical appraisal of the discourse surrounding the #UgandaNGOExhibition and #UgandaNGOsExhibition hashtags on Twitter reveals a multifaceted portrayal of Uganda's NGO sector. Through careful examination, we have uncovered both robust achievements and significant challenges, thereby enabling a comprehensive understanding of the sector's current state.

In the positive light, the discourse underscores the remarkable strides made by NGOs in Uganda in fostering social transformation. The sector's impactful work across various domains – healthcare, education, environmental conservation, and human rights, among others – is commendable and demonstrative of its capacity to drive development. The inherent innovative potential within the sector, as identified from the Twitter dialogue, indicates a robust engine for change that can be leveraged to push forward the development agenda.

Nevertheless, in juxtaposing these positive aspects against the identified deficiencies, it becomes apparent that these successes exist amid substantial challenges. Salient issues brought to the fore include allegations of nepotism, corruption, and significant pay disparities within the sector. There are also concerns about the sector's transparency and accountability, coupled with indications of exploitative working conditions and public apathy towards the sector's affairs. An apparent lack of efficiency in the sector's regulatory bodies, as exemplified by the critique of the NGO Forum and NGO Bureau, amplifies these challenges, revealing a sector grappling with systemic hurdles.

> *Through careful examination, we have uncovered both robust achievements and significant challenges, thereby enabling a comprehensive understanding of the sector's current state.*

The analysis of the discourse from the Twitter dialogue underscores the vital role that social media platforms can play in fostering introspection, transparency, and accountability within the NGO sector.

More fundamentally, the sector's vulnerabilities to political interference, limited funding, and capacity shortfalls highlight the need for far-reaching structural and operational reforms. Such challenges, if not decisively addressed, have the potential to undermine the sector's transformative impact.

Therefore, a more coherent approach towards addressing these issues should incorporate strategies to enhance transparency and accountability, promote ethical conduct, and strengthen both internal governance and external regulatory structures. Additionally, the sector's capacity to foster meaningful stakeholder engagement and champion diversity, equity, and inclusion should be prioritized.

Moreover, in seeking to surmount these obstacles, the positive attributes of the sector offer a critical reservoir to tap into. The innovative spirit, resilience, and commitment to social change that epitomize Uganda's NGO sector are resources that, if harnessed effectively, could propel the sector beyond its current limitations.

In conclusion, the analysis of the discourse from the Twitter dialogue underscores the vital role that social media platforms can play in fostering introspection, transparency, and accountability within the NGO sector. The insights gleaned should form the basis for targeted interventions, strategic planning, and policy formulations aimed at enhancing the sector's efficiency and impact. The sector's stakeholders are called upon to heed these insights and galvanize collective action towards reinforcing the sector's capability to meet its mandate, thereby improving its contribution to Uganda's socio-economic development.

The hashtags #UgandaNGOExhibition and #UgandaNGOsExhibition have been instrumental in these discussions, attracting contributions from various stakeholders and providing a rich trove of data on the state of the NGO sector in Uganda.

6. Recommendations

The use of social media platforms, particularly Twitter, has offered unprecedented opportunities for NGOs in Uganda to share their work, discuss issues and challenges they face, and seek solutions to improve their impact. The hashtags #UgandaNGOExhibition and #UgandaNGOsExhibition have been instrumental in these discussions, attracting contributions from various stakeholders and providing a rich trove of data on the state of the NGO sector in Uganda. This report aims to analyze the insights gained from these discussions and provide concrete, actionable recommendations for strengthening and improving the NGO sector in Uganda.

Bolstering Transparency and Accountability: Transparent and accountable operations should be the cornerstone for NGOs. To promote this, NGOs need to ensure clear financial reporting and responsible fiscal management to foster public trust and confidence. The adoption of mechanisms that monitor fund allocation and usage will enhance transparency, ensuring funds serve their intended purpose, and these processes must be communicated clearly to the public. Additionally, effective accountability measures must be implemented to prevent misuse of funds, ensuring responsible parties within NGOs are held accountable for their actions.

Upgrading Impact Assessment and Reporting: Impact assessment and robust reporting mechanisms are essential to demonstrate the efficacy of NGOs' work. They should regularly evaluate their initiatives, assessing their interventions' impact on the communities they serve. Transparent and detailed reporting of the outcomes achieved can illustrate NGOs' tangible contributions and enhance their credibility. Furthermore, such practices promote a culture of learning, enabling NGOs to continually refine their strategies and maintain accountability.

Cultivating Community Engagement and Participation: Community engagement is a crucial factor in ensuring the relevance and effectiveness of NGOs' work. NGOs should therefore strive to enhance their engagement with local communities, ensuring that their initiatives reflect the needs, concerns, and aspirations of the people they serve. Partnerships with grassroots organizations and community leaders can ensure projects are tailored to local contexts, promoting community ownership and enhancing the long-term sustainability of interventions.

Encouraging Collaboration and Networking: It is recommended that NGOs adopt a more collaborative approach, fostering networks and partnerships amongst themselves to enhance their collective influence. Facilitating an environment of knowledge exchange, joint advocacy, and shared resources can augment their capacity to generate impactful change. Such cooperation can also eliminate redundant efforts, thus optimizing the use of resources, and promoting the dissemination of best practices. This interconnectedness will empower NGOs to effectively tackle multifaceted social issues, harnessing the strengths of various organizations to create a more profound and sustainable impact.

Amplifying Stakeholder Engagement: Stakeholder engagement is a pivotal aspect of successful NGO operations. Active involvement of relevant entities, ranging from government agencies, community groups, beneficiaries, to other civil society organizations, can create a more holistic approach to NGO projects. By cultivating these relationships and including stakeholders in decision-making processes, NGOs can align their initiatives more effectively with community priorities and needs. This inclusive and collaborative approach enhances the potential for sustainable, beneficial change within the communities they serve.

Championing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: Promotion of diversity, equity, and inclusion within NGO structures is crucial for their effectiveness and credibility. Equal opportunities should be provided to individuals from diverse backgrounds, and representation at all levels of the organization should be a priority. By cultivating an inclusive environment, NGOs can leverage a broader spectrum of perspectives and expertise. This practice can ultimately lead to more effective, fair, and nuanced interventions, that are responsive to the diverse needs of the communities they serve.

Advocating for a Robust and Responsive NGO Forum: The NGO Forum needs to assert its role as a proactive advocate for the NGO sector. Engaging dynamically with NGOs, the Forum should address their concerns, and drive positive sector-wide reforms. The Forum should position itself as a catalyst for collaboration, innovation, and collective action, fostering a dialogue between NGOs and other stakeholders. Through its leadership, the NGO Forum can guide the sector in addressing widespread challenges and opportunities, effectively representing the interests of NGOs and contributing to the overall strengthening of the sector in Uganda.

Bolstering Regulation and Oversight: It is critical to enhance the transparency, functionality, and effectiveness of regulatory bodies like the NGO Bureau. This includes proper management of the Bureau's online platforms, such as their website and registry, ensuring they provide accurate, updated information to all stakeholders. Strengthening regulation and oversight not only upholds the high standards expected of NGOs, but it also ensures adherence to regulatory guidelines, thereby reinforcing the integrity of the sector. Furthermore, NGOs should focus on amplifying their internal governance and self-regulation mechanisms. This could involve adopting stringent codes of conduct, implementing ethical guidelines, and fostering professional standards within the sector. An internal commitment to good governance practices will lead to more responsible and ethical NGOs, consequently boosting public trust and credibility.

Fortifying Independent Oversight and Monitoring Mechanisms: To tackle issues of corruption and nepotism within the NGO sector, the establishment of independent oversight and monitoring mechanisms is crucial. This might involve the creation of an autonomous body or committee tasked with carrying out regular audits, evaluations, and assessments of NGOs' operations, financial management, and adherence to ethical norms. This oversight entity should possess the authority to investigate complaints, enforce accountability measures, and suggest improvements. By endorsing independent oversight, the NGO sector can cultivate transparency, deter malpractice, and engender public trust.

Capitalizing on Positive Observations: Building upon the positive observations made about NGOs during the Uganda NGO exhibition is key to advancing the sector. NGOs should continue to utilize their expertise, innovative strategies, and dedication to effectively address social challenges. Sharing best practices and success stories can serve as a source of inspiration for others, fostering a culture of collaboration, learning, and continuous improvement within the sector. Recognizing and capitalizing on the strengths of the sector will enhance overall performance, driving the sector forward in its mission to address societal issues.

Sustainable financing of NGOs: Finally, to solve the issues funding, there is need for the funders to fast track the funds disbursement processes where commitments have been made. There is also need to enter into longer term funding commitments to give organization enough time to execute the projects as well as manage the employees engagements in a sustainable manner since it is difficult to engage exceptionally good talent on very short term contracts.

Source data can be accessed here: https://bit.ly/UgandaNGOsExhibitionData

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#CuratingCitizenVoices