ACTIVITY REPORT

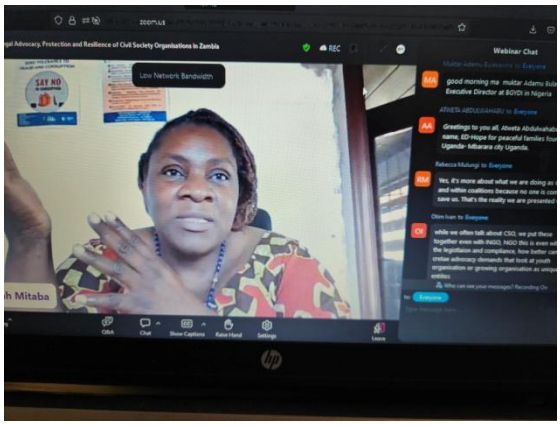
International Civic Space Virtual Exchange

Project Team Lead	Mwaba Emmanuel Nonde
Designation/ Department	Programmes Officer
Organization	Zambia Council For Social Development (ZCSD)
Activity	Activity 3: International Civic Space Virtual Exchange
Target group	CSOs both International and Local
Date of Activity	24th September 2026
Venue:	Virtual meeting
Participant's description	CSO's both local and international were invited to participate
Activity description	ZCSD with the help of Civic Advisory hub conducted a virtual exchange connecting Zambian CSO's leaders with their counterparts from other countries who have navigated similar regulatory challenges. The exchange focuses on what has actually worked, which legal strategies held up, how coalitions have been built and sustained.
Objectives of the activity	For Participants to develop a shared synthesis of key lessons and practical recommendations relevant to Zambia.
Outputs	Virtual Meeting Proceedings and Key Discussions The virtual meeting was officially opened by the Executive Director of the Zambia Council for Social Development (ZCSD), Madam Leah Mitaba, who emphasised that the primary purpose of the meeting was to strengthen the resilience and capacity of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to engage constructively with regulators. The meeting also provided an opportunity to share findings from the Civic Space Study conducted by ZCSD with support from the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL). Presentation on Zambia's Civic Space The Consultant for the Civic Space Study, Mr Daniel Libati, was invited to set the scene on the state of Zambia's civic space based on the findings of the research. Mr Libati provided an overview of the various pieces of legislation governing the operations of CSOs in Zambia. He highlighted key legislation under which organisations may be registered, including the Companies Act, Societies Act, and

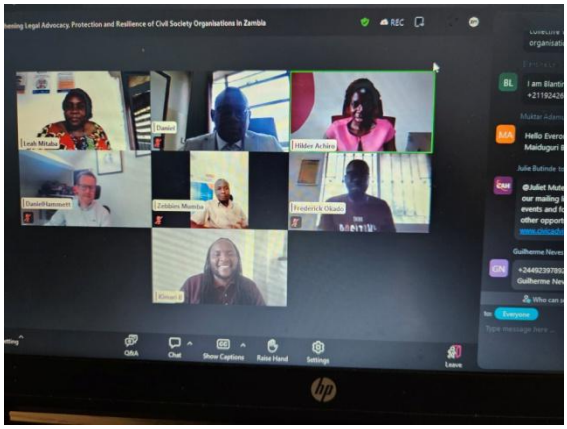
	NGO Act. He further highlighted various regulatory institutions responsible for ensuring compliance among CSOs, including the National Health Insurance Management Authority (NHIMA), National Pension Scheme Authority (NAPSA), and Zambia Revenue Authority (ZRA). Mr Libati noted that although the NGO Act is already in existence, there is limited awareness among CSOs regarding the significance of the NGO Bill No. 6 of 2025 and the potential implications it may have on the sector if enacted. He explained that while some CSOs are aware of the Bill and recognise its potential implications, including issues relating to registration, licensing, reporting, self-regulation and accountability requirements, many organisations remain insufficiently informed. He further shared findings indicating that very few CSOs are aware of the provisions of the NGO Bill No. 6 of 2025. This highlighted the need for increased awareness-raising and meaningful consultation with CSOs and other stakeholders before the Bill is enacted into law. Dialogue and Engagement with Government The next presentation was delivered by Mr Oluseyi Babatunde, Executive Director of the Network of Nigerian NGOs. His presentation focused on approaches to establishing and sustaining dialogue between civil society and government, drawing from his experience in Nigeria. Mr Babatunde emphasised the importance of CSOs understanding when to collaborate with government and when to adopt a more confrontational approach in order to achieve meaningful change. He stressed that effective advocacy requires CSOs to build relationships with civil servants and develop a strong and coordinated civil society bloc that understands the issues at hand and how best to engage government. He encouraged CSOs to reach out to regulators and demonstrate that civil society is a partner rather than an adversary. CSOs should help regulators understand the challenges they face, while also proposing practical solutions to compliance-related challenges. Mr Babatunde further encouraged CSOs to learn how to navigate the different regulatory institutions and understand the specific challenges associated with each regulator. He emphasised the importance of research, evidence-based advocacy and quiet diplomacy, noting that confrontation should not always be the first approach when CSOs encounter regulatory difficulties. Instead, organisations should seek an appropriate balance between collaboration and constructive confrontation depending on the circumstances. The presentation by Mr Brian Kimari from Uganda focused on building and sustaining effective civil society coalitions. Mr Kimari

	explained that successful coalitions are built around shared risks, common ground and collective priorities. He emphasised that coalitions must identify common areas of interest and establish priorities that are realistic and achievable. CSOs should manage their expectations, recognising that not everything they initially hope to achieve as a coalition may be feasible. Consequently, coalitions should agree on realistic and clearly defined priorities. Mr Kimari further recommended that coalitions establish a steering committee to provide strategic direction and leadership. He highlighted the importance of having structured dialogue platforms through which coalition members can communicate and coordinate their activities. He also stressed that coalitions should speak with one voice and operate under a shared strategy rather than having individual members pursue different positions and approaches. A common strategy and coordinated messaging, he noted, are essential for building a strong and credible coalition. The final session was facilitated by Professor Daniel Hammett from the University of Sheffield, who provided insights into CSO financing within the changing global funding landscape. Professor Hammett provided a brief historical overview of development and donor financing, tracing changes from the 1980s to the present. He highlighted the significant reduction in donor funding, noting that this trend is not limited to Africa but is also being experienced in developed countries. Drawing on the United Kingdom as an example, Professor Hammett noted that UK government spending on development assistance has declined significantly in recent years. He used this trend to illustrate the broader changes taking place within the international development financing environment. In response to the growing financial challenges facing CSOs, Professor Hammett highlighted how some organisations have begun shifting their approaches, particularly by moving away from competition towards collaboration. He noted that organisations are increasingly exploring joint implementation of projects, sharing resources and working collectively as a way of responding to declining funding opportunities and ensuring the sustainability of civil society initiatives. Key Takeaways The meeting highlighted several important areas for strengthening the capacity and resilience of CSOs in Zambia: • Increased awareness and understanding of the NGO Bill No. 6 of 2025 is necessary among CSOs. • CSOs should strengthen constructive engagement and dialogue with regulators and government institutions. • Effective advocacy requires a balance between collaboration,

	evidence-based engagement, quiet diplomacy and constructive confrontation. • CSOs should strengthen coalitions based on common interests, realistic priorities and shared strategies. • Coalitions should establish clear leadership structures and communicate with a coordinated voice. • The changing donor funding environment requires CSOs to explore collaboration, joint implementation and alternative approaches to sustainability. • CSOs need to strengthen their capacity to understand and navigate the different regulatory requirements applicable to their operations.
Outcomes / impact achieved through the activity	ZCSD has an understanding of how to navigate the relationship with its regulators on how to approach its regulators whether through collaboration or confrontation or means which can be available depending on the issue at hand. ZCSD understands that regulators are not enemies but institutions with whom they can collaborate with using dialogue as opposed to being confrontational. The Virtual Meeting provided a space for CSO in Zambia to see that the challenges faced in Zambia are also experienced in other countries such as Kenya, Uganda, Zimbabwe and Nigeria to mention a few. ZCSD and CSO's in Zambia have a firm grasp on how to approach Regulators in Zambia as a united block of CSO's that have full understanding of the desired results of our action of attaining a NGO law that should strengthen Civic Space.
Project Perspective / Briefing	The Virtual meeting was a success in that it brought valuable insights from the peer countries that participated in it and the activity objective was achieved since that now CSO under the ZCSD network are looking forward to use the shared information in the work of advancing advocacy of a good NGO law to be put in place
Annex	List of participants and Picture of the Panel







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