

2021 Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index – Sub-Saharan Africa

Overview The 2021 Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index (CSOSI) for sub-Saharan Africa reports on the state of CSO sectors in 32 countries in the region. The CSOSI addresses both advances and setbacks in seven key components or “dimensions” of the sustainability of civil society sectors: legal environment, organizational capacity, financial viability, advocacy, service provision, sectoral infrastructure, and public image. The CSOSI is intended to be a useful source of information for local CSOs, governments, donors, academics, and others who want to better understand and monitor key aspects of sustainability in the CSO sector.

The CSOSI provides a comprehensive assessment of the capacity of civil society to serve as both a short-term partner in implementing development solutions and a long-term actor in ensuring that development outcomes are sustained. The CSOSI empowers local civil society actors to collectively assess not only the environments in which they operate, but also their

own capacities to advocate, operate sustainably, and communicate with citizens. Allowing local civil society to self-identify their development challenges is the first step in promoting resiliency and long-term self-reliance.

The CSOSI is produced by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in partnership with FHI 360, the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL), and a local implementing partner in each participating country. A total of 73 countries across the globe were surveyed in various regional editions of the CSOSI in 2021.

Results Compounding the challenge of the pandemic, countries throughout sub-Saharan Africa faced extreme weather and insecurity in 2021. This confluence of crises strained the ability of weak or unstable governments to meet the needs of their citizens and highlighted civil society’s expanding role as providers of services and defenders of basic rights. Meanwhile, while contending with the pandemic, insecurity, and climate change, government officials in seven countries covered by this year’s Index were focused on remaining in power in 2021. The role of CSOs in the elections varied, usually depending on the depth of the authorities’ commitment to democratic processes. In Benin, Uganda, and Zambia, CSOs’ election-related work was frustrated by the government, while in The Gambia and Ethiopia they were able to mobilize voters more actively.

Despite the challenges, this year’s *CSOSI for Sub-Saharan Africa* depicts a civil society recovering from the unprecedented strain of the first year of the global COVID-19 pandemic. In contrast to 2020, when only five countries recorded overall improvement in sustainability, 11 countries reported overall improvement in 2021. Four countries reported deterioration in their overall sustainability score, compared to eight countries in 2020. While improvements were distributed fairly evenly across all dimensions, deteriorations were concentrated in the legal environment and financial viability dimensions.

Resources The 2021 CSOSI regional reports can be found on FHI 360’s [resource page](https://www.csosi.org). Explore historical CSOSI data at <https://www.csosi.org>.

