

Namibia

Country Focus Report

2025



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A) An Introduction to the Enabling Environment

What we understand by an Enabling Environment is the combination of laws, rules and social attitudes that support and promote the work of civil society. Within such an environment, civil society can engage in political and public life without fear of reprisals, openly express its views, and actively participate in shaping its context. This includes a supportive legal and regulatory framework for civil society, ensuring access to information and resources that are sustainable and flexible to pursue their goals unhindered, in safe physical and digital spaces. In an enabling environment, the state demonstrates openness and responsiveness in governance, promoting transparency, accountability, and inclusive decision-making. Positive values, norms, attitudes, and practices towards civil society from state and non-state actors further underscore the supportive environment.

To capture the state of the Enabling Environment, we use the following six principles:

SIX ENABLING PRINCIPLES

-  **Respect and Protection of Fundamental Freedoms**
-  **Supportive Legal and Regulatory Framework**
-  **Accessible and Sustainable Resources**
-  **Open and Responsive State**
-  **Supportive Public Culture and Discourses on Civil Society**
-  **Access to a Secure Digital Environment**

In this Country Focus Report, each enabling principle is assessed with a quantitative score and complemented by an analysis and recommendations written by our Network Members. Rather than offering a singular index to rank countries, the report aims to measure the enabling environment for civil society across the six principles, discerning dimensions of strength and those requiring attention.

The findings presented in this report are grounded in the insights and diverse perspectives of civil society actors who came together in a dedicated panel with representatives from civil society to discuss and evaluate the state of the Enabling Environment. Their collective input enriches the report with a grounded, participatory assessment. This primary input is further supported by secondary sources of information, which provide additional context and strengthen the analysis.

Brief Overview of the Country Context

Reporting period: November 2024 – November 2025

The 2025 calendar year was dominated by the transition to a new government led by President Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah following her inauguration on 21 March. Although the [ruling Swapo Party](#) started its new five-year term with [a reduced level of electoral support](#) and only a narrow majority in the National Assembly, the party continued to govern from a position of political dominance, with civil society advocacy [having limited influence on policy and decision-making](#). At the same time, this dominance remained largely benign, and the operating environment for civil society remained generally unrestricted. Securing sufficient funding to [sustain their operations](#) remains a greater preoccupation for many civil society organisations (CSOs) than the prospect of government restrictions.

Constitutional protections for freedom of expression, association and assembly remain intact, and CSOs [are generally able to operate freely](#). The country retains a functioning and independent judiciary and a pluralistic and [largely free media](#).

While the legal space remains open, some recent developments suggest a gradual erosion of civic space. Legislative responses to court rulings on same-sex rights, the introduction of potentially restrictive legislation such as the [Public Gatherings and Processions Bill](#), and increasing [regulatory scrutiny of non-profit organisations](#) and their funding all point to a more constrained operating environment for civil society. Civic space is not contracting dramatically, but the conditions under which CSOs operate are becoming more challenging and uncertain.

At the same time, the [termination of major US government grants](#) in early 2025 has created a significant funding crisis for parts of civil society, particularly those organisations working in the fields of health and HIV/AIDs. This has exposed the extent of reliance on external funding and raised concerns about long-term sustainability.

Government engagement with [civil society remains inconsistent](#). While some CSOs maintain constructive relationships with government, others are consulted only occasionally or in the very late stages of policymaking. Civil society advocacy on governance, extractive industry, and rights-based issues was seldom met with outright hostility, [but was frequently ignored or bypassed](#). For example, repeated [calls to operationalise the Access to Information Act](#) were largely ignored, while civil society was effectively excluded from official discussions on the joint declaration relating to [the genocide negotiations](#) with Germany.

Overall, Namibia's civil society environment in 2025 can be described as partially enabling. Civic space remains open, but without more sustainable funding options, there is a risk of deepening the observed gradual decline. A weakened civil society creates greater scope for [authoritarian governance](#) to take hold.

B) Assessment of the Enabling Environment

PRINCIPLE SCORE

1. Respect and Protection of Fundamental Freedoms

Score:¹



Civic freedoms – including freedom of association, peaceful assembly, and expression – are generally respected, but there are periodic restrictions, pressures, or violations that prevent the country from being classified as fully “Open” ([CIVICUS Monitor](#)).

1.1 | Freedom of Association

While the [Namibian Constitution](#) guarantees key civil liberties, including “freedom of association” (Art. 21(1)(e)), observed events in 2025 illustrate tensions between formal protections and their practical application. For instance, the University of Namibia (Unam) [banned political activities](#) and associations on its campuses in the run-up to the November 2024 elections. This decision drew [heavy criticism from opposition politicians](#) and independent analysts who argued it infringed on constitutional civil liberties. University campuses are critical spaces for youth, including women and marginalised groups, to engage in civic and political discourse. Restrictions of this nature disproportionately curtail the participation of young people and underrepresented voices, thereby narrowing inclusive civic engagement.

In addition, the Office of the Labour Commissioner continued to [deregister trade unions](#) for failing to submit annual returns, raising important concerns for collective representation. While regulatory enforcement is necessary for accountability, [labour experts warned that](#) its impact

¹This is a rebased score derived from the [CIVICUS Monitor rating](#) published in December 2025.

in this case undermines thousands of workers' access to organised advocacy and collective bargaining mechanisms. Vulnerable workers—including women, informal-sector actors, and low-income groups—are disproportionately affected, as they rely more heavily on collective structures for representation, ultimately constraining civil society's capacity to promote inclusive economic justice and social protection.

Progressive court rulings such as the [Supreme Court's recognition](#) of same-sex marriages conducted abroad (May 2023) and the High Court's [decriminalisation of sodomy](#) (June 2024) represent significant advances in formal equality and human rights protections. In reaction, [politicians pushed for legislation](#) outlawing same-sex marriage. In January 2025 President [Nangolo Mbumba signed the Marriage Act](#), which restricts marriage to opposite-sex partners and bans the recognition of same-sex unions, even if couples are legally married in another country. In May 2024, it was [reported](#) that six members of the LGBTQI+ community had been murdered in the previous 12 months in apparent hate crimes related to the upsurge in homophobic rhetoric. This subsequent rise in hate speech and homophobic incidents reveals a disconnect between legal reform and societal attitudes. The backlash also places LGBTQI+ civil society actors at increased risk, limiting their ability to operate safely and advocate openly, thereby constraining the inclusivity of the civic space despite progressive jurisprudence. The resulting climate of fear undermines both participation and protection—two critical pillars of an enabling environment for civil society—limiting the ability of affected communities to organise, advocate, and seek redress.

Despite these sector-specific constraints and regressions, civil society organisations in Namibia generally continue to operate openly, organise events, and engage in advocacy without systemic or formal restrictions. This indicates a relatively permissive legal and regulatory framework overall. However, the quality of this enabling environment is uneven: while formal space exists, access to and safety within that space are not equally distributed. Structural inequalities, social backlash against minority rights, and selective restrictions in key arenas (such as universities and labour representation) mean that not all groups can exercise civic freedoms on equal terms.

1.2 | Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

The [Namibian Constitution](#) guarantees the “freedom to assemble peaceably and without arms” (Art. 21(1)(d)). Public protests are generally permitted, and arrests related to demonstrations remain rare. However, occasional incidents highlight the limits of this openness.

In June 2025, police [briefly detained](#) members of the United Democratic Party during a demonstration in Katima Mulilo, although they were later released without charge. These incidents suggest that while repression is not systematic, the application of public order laws can be inconsistent. These uncertainties can disproportionately affect smaller or politically marginal groups, who may have fewer resources to navigate legal risks. Even isolated enforcement actions can contribute to a chilling effect, reducing the willingness of vulnerable populations to engage in collective action and thereby limiting the inclusiveness of civic space.

Legislative developments have also raised concerns. [The Public Gatherings and Processions Bill](#) introduced in 2024 proposes stricter regulation of public assemblies, including mandatory advance notification requirements and criminal penalties for non-compliance. Although the Bill has not yet been passed by the National Assembly but awaits reintroduction, civil society [concerns](#) highlight its potential to constrain participatory freedoms. The requirements it introduces may enhance state oversight, but also risk imposing administrative and legal barriers to spontaneous or grassroots mobilisation, disproportionately burdening smaller

organisations and informal movements, including those led by underrepresented groups, that are already resource stretched.

Overall, Namibia's environment for freedom of assembly can be characterised as broadly enabling but with emerging areas of concern. Constitutional protections and the general tolerance of protests support an open civic space; however, inconsistent enforcement practices and the prospect of more restrictive legislation introduce elements of uncertainty. Ensuring that legal frameworks and their application remain consistent, proportionate, and sensitive to the needs of diverse groups will be critical to sustaining an enabling environment that supports equitable civic participation.

1.3 | Freedom of Expression

The [Namibian Constitution](#) guarantees “freedom of speech and expression” (Art. 21(1)(a)). Namibia continued to enjoy relatively strong protections for freedom of expression and press freedom in 2025, remaining one of the better-performing countries in Africa on most international democracy and media-freedom indices. Journalists generally operate without direct censorship or routine state repression. [Protections for civil liberties are generally robust](#) while journalists are generally free to work without interference from the authorities.

At the same time, the media environment showed [signs of growing pressure](#) and polarisation. Some journalists faced intimidation, [dismissals](#) or political pressure for critical reporting.

Namibia nevertheless remained symbolically important to global press freedom because of the historic 1991 Windhoek Declaration, which helped establish World Press Freedom Day and positioned Namibia as a continental reference point for independent journalism. In 2025, Namibia continued to rank among Africa's top countries in the [RSF World Press Freedom Index](#), although rankings fluctuated slightly year to year and observers warned against complacency amid increasing global and regional pressure on independent media.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

2. Supportive Legal and Regulatory Framework

Score:



Namibia's legal framework allows civil society to operate but does not provide strong institutional support and can hamper smaller CSOs who lack the capacity to deal with red tape. At the same time, regulatory developments, such as the FIC anti-money laundering requirements, suggest a gradual increase in oversight, which may affect the autonomy of the sector if not carefully managed.

2.1 | Registration

The legal framework generally allows civil society organisations, faith-based organisations and other non-profit entities to register without overt political restriction. [There are multiple legal routes available for registration](#). Organisations are usually able to formalise their operations, albeit with administrative delays. There is no systematic discrimination preventing organisations from registering on the basis of their objectives or constituencies.

Registration [processes are often slow, bureaucratic and burdensome](#). Administrative capacity problems within state institutions are a significant obstacle. Particular concerns have been raised regarding the Office of the Master of the High Court where prolonged delays affect trusts.

The challenges associated with registration are often more acute for rural and grassroots organisations. Registration services remain concentrated in Windhoek, requiring organisers from rural communities to travel long distances at considerable cost. Women, youth groups and smaller community-based organisations can face additional social and practical barriers, including limited access to legal assistance, intimidation by traditional power structures, and difficulty gaining donor recognition once registered.

2.2 | Operating Environment

CSOs are generally able to operate openly and carry out advocacy, research and service-delivery activities without requiring prior government approval. CSOs are free to [determine their own governance structures](#), objectives and operational priorities. Government officials invited to CSO events or engagements will often attend, reflecting a degree of institutional openness towards civil society participation.

However, the operational environment is increasingly burdensome from an administrative and compliance perspective. Reporting obligations linked to government regulation, banking requirements and [Financial Intelligence Centre \(FIC\) compliance](#) remain challenges, particularly for smaller organisations with limited staffing and technical capacity.

The Research, Science and Technology Act has been criticised by civil society organisations as unconstitutional and overly restrictive. First challenged in court in 2015 by the Legal Assistance Centre, the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), and The Namibian newspaper, the law has remained contentious due to its potential to restrict independent research, advocacy, and freedom of information. Although the government agreed [in an October 2023 court settlement](#) to review and amend the law, [no meaningful reform has followed](#), leaving a lingering chilling effect over the research environment.

Funding constraints remain one of the [most significant operational challenges](#) facing civil society. Access to international funding often favours larger, urban-based organisations with stronger administrative systems. Smaller grassroots and rural organisations face additional disadvantages due to complex application procedures, compliance burdens and limited institutional capacity. The combined effects of administrative demands, financial pressures and regulatory uncertainty create an environment that is only partially enabling for many organisations.

2.3 | Protection from Interference

Namibia's legal framework generally provides formal protections for civil society organisations against arbitrary dissolution or direct state interference. CSOs are able to exist and carry out their activities without overt interference from the state.

Concerns [have been raised](#) about attempts to limit demonstrations by making them dependent on police approval.

Financial vulnerability remains a major concern, with lack of government funding and wider resource constraints limiting the independence and sustainability of civil society. The few organisations dependent on government subsidies may face subtle pressure to self censor or moderate their advocacy positions although such cases are not publicly reported. In addition, burdensome administrative and compliance requirements can have a negative effect, particularly for overstretched organisations with limited capacity.

Namibia's legal framework for civil society is permissive but fragmented. Organisations can [register under multiple legal forms](#), including non-profit companies, trusts, welfare organisations, or operate informally as voluntary associations. This should enable flexibility for CSOs, which can choose which format is most appropriate for their work. However, bureaucratic delays tend to complicate matters.

In 2023, the Financial Intelligence Centre (FIC) [introduced new requirements for non-profits and faith-based organisations](#) to disclose detailed information on donors, beneficiaries and

finances. While intended to address money laundering risks, civil society actors [raised concerns](#) about excessive oversight and potential exposure to political risk.

Although enforcement softened in 2025, compliance pressures remain. In early 2025, reports indicated that over [120 welfare organisations faced deregistration](#) for failing to meet reporting requirements set by the Ministry of Health and Social Services. This highlights the administrative burden facing organisations, particularly smaller ones.

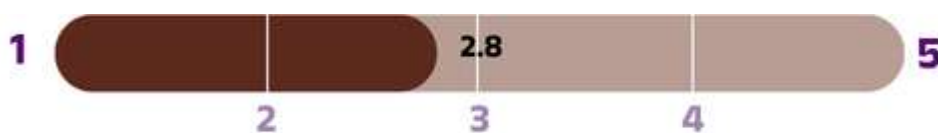
Efforts to develop a [Government–Civil Society Partnership Policy](#) have been ongoing for several years. While the [current draft does not appear overly restrictive](#), its prolonged development reflects a lack of clarity regarding the role and contribution of civil society.

The policy was submitted to Cabinet for approval in 2024, but in 2025 there were no signs that it had been formally accepted.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

3. Accessible and Sustainable Resources

Score:



Access to adequate, reliable, and equitable resources is a central determinant of the strength and independence of civil society in Namibia. While Namibia retains some external support and limited domestic contributions, growing financial instability, structural inequalities in resource distribution, and heavy dependence on short-term donor funding are placing increasing pressure on the sector, with significant implications for inclusivity, effectiveness, and long-term sustainability.

3.1 | Accessibility of Resources

Access to resources remains the most significant constraint facing civil society in Namibia, and the situation deteriorated further in 2025.

The sector is [highly dependent on international funding](#), and recent global developments have exposed the risks associated with this model. In January 2025, a US government “stop-work” directive led to [the termination of major funding streams, particularly in the health sector](#). As a result, several large organisations were forced to [close or scale down operations](#), with resultant job losses.

This shock has impacted across the sector, reducing service delivery capacity and increasing competition for remaining funding. Many smaller organisations are particularly vulnerable, as they lack the reserves or diversification strategies needed to absorb such shocks.

Domestic financing sources remain limited. The private sector is generally averse to funding potentially controversial civil society initiatives, preferring less politically sensitive activities such as community welfare projects, sports sponsorships, and environmental clean-up campaigns. [Philanthropy is underdeveloped](#), and government funding [for independent CSOs is minimal](#).

There are some positive developments. The European Union continues to provide support, including [a €2 million grant in 2025 for civil society](#) initiatives focused on inclusive green growth. The [World Bank’s reclassification](#) of Namibia as a lower-middle-income country in

mid-2025 may increase eligibility for development assistance, although it could also [reinforce aid dependency](#).

Institutional or [core funding is particularly lacking](#), leaving organisations to pursue short-term project funding as a means of survival. State resources are overwhelmingly directed towards government institutions, with barely any financial support available for independent civil society initiatives.

The funding environment is also marked by significant inequalities between larger urban organisations and smaller grassroots groups. Rural and women-led organisations are particularly disadvantaged. Information about funding opportunities often does not reach rural communities in time or in accessible formats. Donor application systems and compliance requirements can be overly complex for emerging organisations with limited capacity.

Beyond funding shortages themselves, civil society organisations also face resource and information constraints. Access to information was highlighted as a challenge in some sectors, including around beneficial ownership data and environmental governance issues. Onerous donor requirements, administrative burdens and regulatory uncertainty can further strain already overstretched organisations. While banking services are generally accessible, documentation requirements can still create obstacles for smaller organisations.

3.2 | Effectiveness

Many civil society organisations in Namibia are capable of delivering effective advocacy and services when resources are available. However, the effectiveness of funding is often undermined by inconsistent funding flows and burdensome reporting requirements. Donor frameworks are frequently rigid and poorly adapted to local realities, especially if administered from Pretoria.

A recurring concern is the unequal relationship between larger urban CSOs and smaller grassroots organisations. Larger CSOs often act as intermediaries for donor funding, controlling the bulk of resources while smaller rural groups receive limited support despite carrying out much of the local implementation work. This dynamic can weaken the autonomy of community-based organisations and reinforce structural inequalities within civil society itself. Competition for limited donor resources can be intense, contributing to fragmentation and limiting opportunities for collaboration and long-term capacity building.

International donor priorities are sometimes influenced by government sensitivities around certain minority rights issues. At the same time, the country's upper-middle-income classification (until mid 2025) was seen as creating [additional funding challenges](#), with donors often underestimating the country's persistent social inequalities and resource constraints.

3.3 | Sustainability

The long-term sustainability of resources for civil society organisations remains a major concern across the sector. There is a heavy dependence of Namibian CSOs on short-term, project-based donor funding, with limited access to core institutional support. Annual or short-duration donor agreements are particularly problematic, making it difficult for organisations to engage in long-term planning, retain experienced staff or invest in institutional development. When projects end, activities often stop immediately due to the absence of reserve funding or alternative income streams.

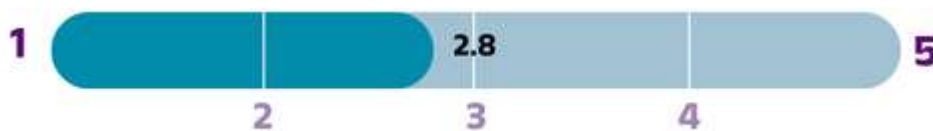
These sustainability challenges are especially acute for rural and smaller community-based organisations. Many rural CSOs lack fundraising capacity, diversified income sources or financial reserves, creating chronic instability and dependence on external donors. There continue to be weaknesses in organisational capacity, including shortages of skilled personnel, governance support and administrative resources.

Civil society's dependence on external donor funding creates long-term vulnerability, particularly in the context of shifting global political and economic priorities. There are real concerns that funding could be reduced or redirected with little warning due to international developments beyond the control of Namibia. The CSO sector requires stronger strategic coordination, more investment in institutional strengthening and more serious reflection on long-term sustainability models beyond project-based funding cycles.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

4. Open and Responsive State

Score:



State–civil society relations in Namibia remain uneven and somewhat contradictory. While government rhetoric and policy frameworks such as the inclusion of civil society in NDP6 signal recognition of CSOs as development partners, in practice engagement is inconsistent, with limited access to decision-makers, weak information flows, and largely ad hoc participation processes. Transparency gaps, especially in key sectors, combine with limited and often symbolic consultation practices to constrain meaningful participation, particularly for rural and marginalised groups. At the same time, accountability mechanisms remain underdeveloped, with minimal feedback loops and slow implementation of access to information frameworks. These challenges are compounded by emerging political narratives that question the legitimacy of civil society, creating additional uncertainty for the sector.

4.1 | Transparency

The relationship between civil society and the new administration is mixed and still evolving. While President Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah has publicly communicated [openness towards engagement](#), established CSOs have struggled to secure high-level meetings or gain access to decision-makers, including in sectors where cooperation has historically been relatively constructive. Civil society itself also needs to become more organised and strategic in its engagement with government, including strengthening coordination between organisations, improving public communication and demonstrating the practical value that CSOs can contribute to policy discussions and development processes.

Government information often reaches communities inconsistently, with rural areas facing particular barriers linked to distance, limited internet access and weak local communication systems. There are difficulties in obtaining information in key areas such as mining, fisheries and natural resource governance. Although Namibia has adopted an Access to Information framework, implementation remains slow, with [uncertainty around how the law](#) will function in

practice. Others noted that many policy discussions remain insufficiently open to meaningful public input and that consultations are sometimes conducted at short notice or treated as procedural exercises rather than genuine engagement processes.

There is concern that formal stakeholder engagement platforms remain limited in many sectors, requiring CSOs to actively search for information or rely on press statements and informal networks. At the same time, there is a need for stronger knowledge-sharing and leadership development within civil society itself, particularly to ensure continuity between older and younger generations of activists and organisations. Coordinating and umbrella structures such as [CIVIC +264](#) and [NamNet](#) could play a stronger role in strengthening sector-wide engagement, advocacy capacity and institutional cooperation.

The inclusion of a dedicated section on civil society in the [Sixth National Development Plan \(NDP6\)](#), which was launched in [July 2025](#), represents an important acknowledgement of the sector's role in national development, governance, and social accountability. By recognising civil society as a development partner rather than merely a stakeholder, the plan points to the possibility of a more inclusive and participatory approach to policy implementation and oversight. Despite the lack of follow-up engagement from government, the inclusion of civil society does give CSOs leverage to approach government with proposals for collaboration.

4.2 | Participation

Opportunities for civil society participation in decision-making processes exist in Namibia, but they remain inconsistent, ad hoc, and often inaccessible to marginalised groups. Rural communities, women-led organisations, and grassroots CSOs are frequently excluded from meaningful engagement due to the centralisation of consultations in urban areas and the costs associated with travel and participation. Where rural communities are represented, participation often occurs indirectly through traditional leaders, whose engagement may not always involve wide community consultation or effective feedback mechanisms.

Consultation processes are frequently conducted at short notice, limiting the ability of CSOs to prepare substantive input or engage their constituencies effectively. In many cases, consultations are perceived as procedural or symbolic exercises rather than genuine opportunities to influence policy outcomes. The absence of formal guidelines or institutionalised participation mechanisms contributes to inconsistent engagement practices across ministries and sectors. While some CSOs have successfully influenced public policy in specific areas such as [national budget accountability](#), participation overall remains highly dependent on existing networks, relationships, and the discretion of state institutions.

Civil society's own institutional and financial weaknesses also limit its ability to participate effectively in governance processes. Many organisations continue to struggle with [capacity constraints, limited staffing, and financial insecurity](#), reducing their ability to engage consistently in policy advocacy and public participation initiatives. Participants emphasised the importance of strengthening civic education, voter education, financial literacy, and community engagement as essential foundations for sustainable democratic participation. Without stronger participation platforms and more inclusive engagement mechanisms, many marginalised communities are likely to remain excluded from national decision-making processes.

The [National Planning Commission maintains a civil society help desk](#), and initiatives such as the EU-funded Enhancing Participatory Democracy in Namibia programme have sought to

strengthen engagement. However, these efforts have not resulted in systematic inclusion of civil society in policymaking.

Consultation processes are often criticised as superficial or poorly timed. For example, civil society input into the Sixth National Development Plan was requested only at the final stages of drafting, limiting its impact.

In some cases, legislation has been developed without consultation, as seen with the Public Gatherings Bill.

CSOs are represented in mechanisms such as the [African Peer Review Mechanism National Governing Council](#) and are engaged by institutions like the Anti-Corruption Commission as part of the [National Anti-corruption Strategy and Action Plan](#).

However, marginalised groups are often excluded from meaningful participation, and coordination within civil society itself remains a challenge. Overall, the state cannot be described as fully open or responsive. Engagement exists but is inconsistent and often insufficient.

4.3 | Accountability

Government accountability towards civil society remains limited and inconsistent. CSOs and community representatives frequently reported that little or no feedback is provided following consultations, leaving stakeholders unclear about whether or how their input influenced policy decisions. Rural communities face additional challenges in this regard, as communication channels are weak and traditional leaders often lack the resources or systems necessary to report back effectively to communities after engagement with state institutions.

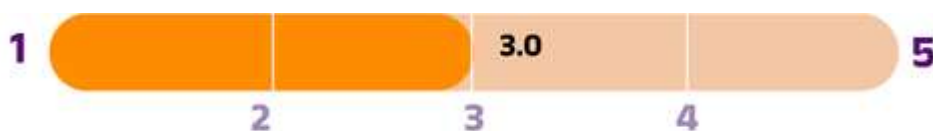
Although the Access to Information Act has been passed, its continued lack of implementation limits the ability of citizens and CSOs to hold government institutions accountable. Formal mechanisms allowing civil society to follow up on policy processes, appeal decisions, or demand explanations from authorities remain weak or absent. Some ministries engage more openly than others. For example, the Ministry of Finance holds an [annual consultation meeting with civil society](#) to consult on national budget priorities.

Concerns were also raised regarding accountability within civil society itself. Some participants noted that not all CSOs adhere to strong standards of governance or maintain accountability to their own members and constituencies. At the same time, persistent funding shortages continue to weaken the sector's ability to monitor state performance and promote public accountability effectively. A more conducive enabling environment, including stronger transparency mechanisms and more institutionalised engagement processes, will be necessary to strengthen accountability relationships between the state, civil society, and citizens.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

5. Supportive Public Culture and Discourses on Civil Society

Score:



Public discourse and perceptions of civil society in Namibia are broadly positive but remain limited in depth, inclusivity, and visibility. While CSOs have demonstrated their ability to influence national debates, their contributions, particularly those of rural and grassroots organisations, are often underrepresented in media and public dialogue. Civic understanding of the sector is narrow, frequently associating CSOs with service delivery rather than their broader governance and advocacy roles, which constrains meaningful civic engagement. At the same time, structural inequalities persist, with marginalised groups facing barriers to participation despite a generally progressive legal framework.

5.1 | Public Discourse and Constructive Dialogue on Civil Society

Public discourse about civil society remains generally positive with hostile attacks few and far between, although recognition of the sector's contributions and diversity is often lacking. There were two negative statements made by senior leaders in 2025 which indicated government's distrust of civil society. President Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah [called on former liberation movements](#) to push back against "foreign-funded civil society organisations" (CSOs) and NGOs. She linked these groups to external interference, grouping them with economic warfare tactics like sanctions and unjustified tariffs intended to push for "regime change" in Southern Africa. She made the comments at a gathering of former liberation movements in South Africa, but did not repeat them in other fora. In a second statement made at the Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament in Geneva, National Assembly Speaker Saara Kuugongelwa-Amadhila [criticised](#) direct donor funding to CSOs, arguing that such organisations lack democratic legitimacy and may not represent broader societal interests. These remarks, delivered on prominent international platforms, reflect a growing narrative that delegitimises civil society and questions its role in governance and development. The framing of CSOs as undemocratic or externally manipulated introduces reputational risks and may undermine public trust. It also points to possible policy shifts in the future that could restrict funding channels, impose regulatory constraints, or limit civic engagement.

CSOs have nevertheless achieved notable successes, including advocacy for gender equality, environmental protection, and social policy reforms. Campaigns such as the push for a [Basic Income Grant](#) and [gender-balanced political representation](#) demonstrate the sector's ability to influence national discourse.

Rural civil society organisations, in particular, remain largely invisible in public discourse, and evidence or perspectives generated at grassroots level are only occasionally included in national decision-making processes.

CSO activities are rarely reflected in national media coverage, with government-related news – particularly on state media – tending to dominate. Many CSOs lack effective communication and media strategies, limiting the visibility of their programmes and reducing their ability to attract public attention.

Nevertheless, the media – including growing forms of citizen journalism and digital engagement – do present opportunities for CSOs to advance their advocacy agendas and promote their activities..

5.2 | Perception of Civil Society and Civic Engagement

Public perceptions of civil society in Namibia are generally positive, although there remains limited understanding of the sector's diversity and democratic role. Civil society is often associated primarily with welfare provision or donor-funded projects rather than advocacy, accountability, or citizen empowerment. In many communities, particularly in rural areas, CSOs are viewed as capable of creating positive change only when they are able to provide tangible forms of support such as transport, food assistance, or outreach services. As a result, civic engagement is often closely tied to the availability of external resources and support.

Civic education remains weak across much of the country, particularly outside urban centres. While electoral participation in national elections is generally high, widespread understanding of participatory democracy, civic rights, and citizen responsibilities remains limited. Young people in particular often express feelings of disillusionment and powerlessness regarding their ability to influence political or social change. Although some forms of civic education exist, they are often fragmented, poorly coordinated, and insufficiently accessible, especially in rural and marginalised communities.

Despite these challenges, there is still a favourable perception of civil society within public spaces, and many citizens continue to regard CSOs as [important actors in promoting accountability and community development](#). However, opportunities for public engagement and dialogue remain constrained by limited platforms for coordination and information-sharing among CSOs themselves. Strengthening civic education, decentralising access to information, and improving public understanding of civil society's role could significantly enhance citizen participation and democratic engagement across the country.

5.3 | Civic Equality and Inclusion

Namibia maintains a mainly progressive legal and policy framework regarding equality and inclusion, and many groups are formally able to participate in civic life. Women actively participate in women's organisations and community initiatives, while civil society spaces generally remain open to diverse forms of engagement. However, inclusion remains patchy in

practice, and many marginalised groups continue to face significant barriers to meaningful participation in decision-making processes and public discourse.

Rural communities frequently perceive themselves as being excluded from national processes and treated unequally in comparison to urban populations. People with disabilities continue to face major accessibility barriers, including inadequate meeting facilities, lack of interpretation or translation services, and limited access to information in accessible formats. Citizens with different sexual orientations also continue to experience exclusion and social stigma. Limited understanding among some state institutions, public servants, and even sections of civil society itself regarding the role and diversity of CSOs contributes to exclusionary practices and weak engagement with marginalised communities.

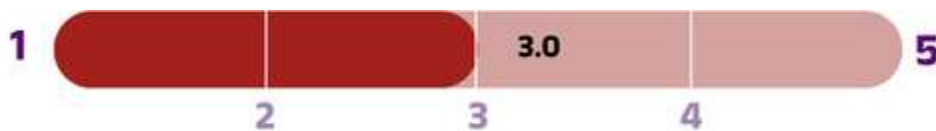
Although some [ministries and sectors have made efforts](#) to include diverse groups in consultation and participation processes, these efforts [remain inconsistent and often insufficient](#). While Namibia continues to project an image of openness and inclusion, persistent inequalities in access to information, participation opportunities, and public engagement continue to hamper the effective involvement of marginalised communities.

Engagement with policymakers remains limited, and civil society is often [excluded from key events](#), such as the 2025 Green Hydrogen Summit, where civil society representatives had to lobby for access to speaking platforms.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

6. Access to a Secure Digital Environment

Score:



Namibia's digital civic space remains formally open and largely unrestricted, providing a foundation for online expression and engagement. However, this openness is undermined by significant structural and capacity constraints, including weak data protection frameworks, rising online harassment, limited digital literacy, and persistent inequalities in access to connectivity and digital tools. Rural communities and smaller CSOs are particularly disadvantaged, facing high data costs, poor infrastructure, and limited technical capacity.

6.1 | Digital Rights and Freedoms

Namibia maintains an open digital environment with no widespread use of internet shutdowns or overt online censorship. Freedom of expression online is generally protected, with few visible signs of systematic state interference in digital communications. Discussions around data protection, digital regulation and online governance are becoming more prominent, although the legal framework in these areas remains fragmented and underdeveloped.

There is no [comprehensive data protection law](#), leaving organisations vulnerable to privacy risks. Online harassment is increasing, particularly against LGBTQI+ activists, and digital literacy is underdeveloped. High data costs and infrastructure gaps limit access for many citizens.

Rural and remote communities continue to face significant connectivity challenges due to weak network coverage, high data costs and limited access to reliable internet services. These barriers reduce access to information and constrain the ability of communities and smaller civil society organisations to participate fully in online advocacy, consultation and public debate.

While there is limited concrete evidence of systematic state surveillance or deliberate internet restrictions, there are perceptions of monitoring and online control. There are legitimate concerns about cybersecurity vulnerabilities following [high-profile hacking incidents affecting](#)

[state institutions](#) and telecommunications systems. Many CSOs have limited technical knowledge and understanding of emerging digital governance issues, including debates around satellite internet services such as Starlink and future data protection regulation.

6.2 | Digital Security and Privacy

There is no widespread evidence of systematic surveillance or cyberattacks targeting civil society organisations in Namibia. However, [there is unease about the digital security environment](#), including suspicions that certain forms of monitoring or interference may occur without any accountability.

Digital literacy remains limited, particularly among smaller and rural organisations. This leaves some activists and community groups [vulnerable to misinformation, intimidation and online harassment](#), especially through widely used platforms such as WhatsApp. While privacy protections formally exist in some areas, awareness and understanding of digital rights and security practices remain weak. In practice, many users accept digital vulnerabilities as part of everyday life without fully understanding how data collection, monitoring or online manipulation may affect them.

Concerns have been raised around the slow development of Namibia's legal and regulatory framework for [digital privacy and data protection](#). The country lacks a fully operational data protection regime while there is limited public discussion about digital governance issues. While there was little indication of systematic state repression in the digital sphere, the lack of decentralised public awareness, limited civic education and weak institutional safeguards leave both citizens and CSOs exposed to emerging digital security risks.

6.3 | Digital Accessibility

Digital accessibility remains a major challenge in Namibia, particularly for rural communities and smaller civil society organisations. Weak network coverage, high data costs and [limited digital infrastructure](#) are major barriers to participation in online spaces.

The 2023 Population and Housing Census highlights [the scale of Namibia's digital divide](#). Only 28.5% of Namibians own smartphones, while in rural areas nearly 60% of people do not have access to a phone at all. Although [internet penetration](#) reached 64.4% by 2025, significant connectivity gaps remain, with an estimated 12% of the population – mainly in remote regions – still without 4G coverage.

Meaningful digital participation often depends on having access to WiFi, appropriate devices and sufficient financial resources to purchase data.

[High data prices remain a major obstacle](#), particularly for low-income households and grassroots organisations with limited operational budgets. As a result, digital exclusion continues to affect large sections of the population despite some national progress in communications infrastructure.

[Low levels of digital literacy](#) and technical capacity remain constraints on civic engagement. Many rural organisations lack the skills, training and tools needed to use digital platforms effectively for advocacy, networking or information-sharing. Large parts of the country still face substantial accessibility challenges.

C) Recommendations

The report recommends that Government should:

- Finalise and implement a Government–Civil Society Partnership Policy that establishes clear, predictable and inclusive consultation mechanisms across government, with minimum standards to prevent late-stage or symbolic participation.
- Review regulatory and compliance frameworks (including reporting and financial oversight requirements) to ensure they are transparent, consistent, and do not place disproportionate burdens on CSOs, particularly smaller and grassroots organisations.
- Accelerate implementation of the Access to Information framework and strengthen proactive disclosure in key sectors (e.g. natural resources), ensuring information reaches rural and marginalised communities.
- Ensure that laws and their enforcement, particularly around public assembly and association, are applied consistently and do not disproportionately affect marginalised or dissenting groups.
- Prioritise the adoption of data protection legislation, strengthen safeguards against online harassment, and invest in reducing data costs and expanding rural connectivity to enable equitable digital participation.

The report recommends that Civil Society should:

- Improve cooperation through networks and umbrella bodies to enhance advocacy effectiveness, share information, and engage government more strategically and consistently.
- Develop alternative resource mobilisation strategies, including local fundraising, partnerships, and income-generating activities, to reduce dependence on external donors and short-term project cycles.
- Invest in media engagement, digital communication, and evidence-based advocacy to improve public understanding of civil society's role beyond service delivery, including its governance and accountability functions.
- Strengthen outreach to rural, women-led, and marginalised groups, ensuring their perspectives inform advocacy and that participation is not mediated solely through urban or elite actors.
- Improve organisational governance, digital literacy, and technical capacity to engage effectively in both policy processes and emerging digital spaces.

The report recommends that Donors and the International Community should:

- Increase access to long-term, core institutional funding rather than short-term project-based support, enabling CSOs to plan, retain staff, and build resilience.
 - Simplify application and compliance requirements to ensure smaller, rural, and emerging organisations can access support, and invest in intermediary or capacity-building mechanisms where needed.
 - Avoid reinforcing imbalances between large urban CSOs and grassroots organisations by promoting equitable partnerships and direct support to community-based actors.
 - Fund initiatives that strengthen civic education, digital literacy, and inclusive participation platforms, particularly for youth and marginalised communities.
 - Continue supporting human rights, inclusion, and accountability initiatives—including those involving sensitive or minority rights issues—while engaging government constructively to safeguard an open and enabling civic environment.
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D) Research Process

Each principle encompasses various dimensions which are assessed and aggregated to provide quantitative scores per principle. These scores reflect the degree to which the environment within the country enables or disables the work of civil society. Scores are on a five-category scale defined as: fully disabling (1), disabling (2), partially enabling (3), enabling (4), and fully enabling (5). To complement the scores, this report provides a narrative analysis of the enabling or disabling environment for civil society, identifying strengths and weaknesses as well as offering recommendations. The process of drafting the analysis is led by Network Members; the consortium provides quality control and editorial oversight before publication.

For Principle 1 - which evaluates respect for and protection of freedom of association and peaceful assembly - the score integrates data from the [CIVICUS Monitor](#). However, for Principles 2–6, the availability of yearly updated external quantitative indicators for the 86 countries part of the EUSEE programme are either limited or non-existent. To address this, Network Members convene a panel of representatives of civil society and experts once a year. This panel uses a set of guiding questions to assess the status of each principle and its dimensions within the country. **The panel for this report was convened in November 2025.** The discussions are supported by secondary sources, such as [V-Dem](#), the [Bertelsmann Stiftung Governance Index](#), the [RTI Rating from the Centre for Law and Democracy](#), and other trusted resources. These sources provide benchmarks for measuring similar dimensions and are complemented by primary data collection and other secondary sources of information available for the country. Guided by these deliberations, the panel assigns scores for each dimension, which the Network Members submit to the Consortium, accompanied by detailed justifications that reflect the country's specific context. To determine a single score per principle, the scores assigned to each dimension are aggregated using a weighted average, reflecting the relative importance of each dimension within the principle. This approach balances diverse perspectives while maintaining a structured and objective evaluation framework.

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