



SUPPORTING
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Enabling Environment Snapshot

Namibia

2026

Context

Reporting period: January 2026-August 2026

Namibia continues to have a comparatively open civic environment, supported by [constitutional guarantees](#) of freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. The September 2025 [Baseline Snapshot](#) and [Country Focus Report](#) found that these freedoms were generally respected, but identified concerns around inconsistent civil society consultations by government, the delayed implementation of the Access to Information Act and the finalisation of the [Government & Civil Society Partnership and Engagement Policy \(2024-27\)](#), restrictive research regulations, declining Civil Society Organisation (CSO) funding, occasional media pressures and gaps in digital rights protections.

During January-August 2026, these structural concerns remained largely unresolved, while several developments provided evidence of both institutional progress and continuing vulnerabilities. Civil society remained active in [policy debates](#) and secured new opportunities for participation in national planning in some sectors, while building on existing [working relationships](#) with the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). At the same time, journalists faced pressure, the Access to Information framework remained inoperative, and the GRN-Civil Society Partnership and Engagement Policy remains in draft format at the National Planning Commission, restrictive research requirements remained in force, and funding pressures continued to affect CSO sustainability.

1. Respect and protection of fundamental freedoms

Namibia's [constitutional protections](#) for freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly remain broadly intact. However, the period saw several incidents raising concerns about the practical space available to critical voices. In January, *The Namibian* journalist Tracy Tafirenyika was subjected to [xenophobic remarks](#) by Urban and Rural Development Minister James Sankwasa following her reporting on his outstanding municipal bills. In February, journalist Jemima Beukes was [escorted from State House](#) after attempting to question President Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah about alleged family interests in the oil sector. The Presidency [defended the removal](#) on grounds of protocol, while media organisations raised concerns about intimidation and blocking of journalists' access to senior officials.

The [African Media Barometer 2026](#) released in June recorded a decline in Namibia's overall score from 3.1 in 2022 to 2.7 out of 5 in 2026, attributing the decline not to the collapse of media freedom but to structural pressures, including economic constraints and institutional weaknesses. A notable constraint is that criminal defamation remains part of [Namibia's common law](#), although prosecutions are rare and most defamation matters are handled through civil courts. Section 242 of the [Criminal Procedure Act 51 of 1977](#) contains specific evidentiary provisions concerning defamation proceedings involving periodicals. Its continued availability has implications for freedom of expression because the possibility of criminal proceedings may discourage journalists and civil society actors from undertaking robust criticism of public officials.

A significant countervailing development was the [10 June High Court judgment](#) awarding N\$300,000 to activist Michael Amushelero and N\$80,000 to Dimbulukeni Nauyoma following their 2023 arrest and detention in connection with an unemployment protest. The Court found that the police had unlawfully interfered with their right to demonstrate. The judgment provides an important judicial remedy against unlawful state action and reinforces the role of the courts as a check on restrictions on peaceful assembly.

The [Public Gatherings and Public Processions Bill](#) remains an area to monitor, given concerns identified in the previous snapshot about its notification requirements and potential impact on peaceful assembly. The Bill has yet to be re-introduced in the National Assembly. Overall, fundamental freedoms remain formally protected and the courts provide meaningful avenues for redress, but recent incidents involving journalists and activists demonstrate continuing risks in the practical exercise of civic freedoms.

2. Supportive legal and regulatory framework

The legal framework for CSOs remains broadly enabling, with voluntary associations able to operate [without mandatory registration](#) and no general requirement for [international NGOs to register](#). However, administrative inefficiencies and fragmented regulatory requirements continue to affect smaller organisations.

A significant unresolved issue is the [Research, Science and Technology Act of 2004](#). Following a [constitutional challenge](#) by the Legal Assistance Centre, The Namibian and IPPR, the government agreed in October 2023 to amend provisions and regulations requiring researchers and research institutions to obtain government authorisation. [The settlement became a High Court order](#), with amendments to regulations required within six months and legislative amendments within 12 months, and by 2026 these deadlines passed without the agreed legislative reforms. The restrictive framework therefore remains formally in force, and the [National Commission on Research, Science and Technology \(NCRST\)](#) continues to state that researchers and research institutions must register and obtain written authorisation for research projects. This represents a continuing legal bottleneck for independent research organisations and creates scope for selective or restrictive application.

However, despite Namibia being [removed from the grey-list](#) by the international Financial Action Task Force (FATF), the FIC seems to be much more selective this year than in 2025 when it comes to providing exemptions to CSOs from [having to register with the FIC](#), which is an exhausting exercise, especially for smaller Non-Profit Organisations (NPOs). During engagements with civil society, the FIC initially stated in a presentation in October 2025 that only...

“The following types of NPOs were identified as presenting higher vulnerability levels:

- 1. Religious Bodies – e.g., churches and mosques.*
- 2. Residential Child Care Facilities – especially those receiving international donations.*
- 3. Various Welfare Organisations – including children’s homes and social welfare entities.”*

However, feedback from CSOs/NPOs in 2026 showed that exemptions are not as easily granted as seems to have been the case in the past, and that now almost all CSOs have to register with the FIC, according to the [Directive No. 4 of 2023](#):

“NPOs involved in charitable services are inherently vulnerable for TF abuse. Such charitable services include housing, healthcare, social services, education etc.”

Therefore, the FIC will have to be engaged on possible changes to relevant [Directives](#) and [Guidance Notes](#).

Overall, the general framework remains enabling, but the continued existence of restrictive registration and research requirements illustrates the gap between legal commitments and implementation.

3. Accessible and sustainable resources

The civil society sector continues to experience significant financial pressure following the [January 2025 US government stop-work directive](#), which was also raised as a concern [by Namibian Civil Society](#).

The resulting withdrawal of health-sector funding forced organisations including Project Hope Namibia, IntraHealth and Jhpiego to reduce or [discontinue programmes, with substantial employment consequences](#). Project Hope Namibia alone reported the potential loss of approximately 600 jobs following [the funding freeze](#).

The effects of the funding shock continued into 2026, particularly for organisations working in [health, HIV prevention and services for vulnerable communities](#). Limited domestic funding and weak private-sector capacity make it difficult for CSOs to replace lost international resources.

Non-financial resources also remain concentrated in Windhoek as facilities such as the [House of Democracy](#) and the [Franco-Namibian Cultural Centre](#) provide valuable meeting and coordination spaces, but their metropolitan concentration leaves rural organisations at a disadvantage. Although funding opportunities remain available, resources cannot yet be considered fully sustainable or equally accessible. The disruption caused by the withdrawal of major international funding demonstrated the vulnerability of organisations dependent on external donors, while short-term and project-based funding makes it difficult for CSOs to maintain core staff and long-term advocacy capacity. Smaller, rural, youth-led, women-led and LGBTQI+ organisations may face additional barriers because they often have less administrative capacity and fewer established donor relationships. Consequently, the challenge is not only the availability of funding, but its predictability, sustainability and equitable accessibility.

Although the World Bank's [downgrade of Namibia to 'lower-middle income country'](#) for 2026 will potentially put Namibia again on the list for some global funding from which it has been exempted because of its previously higher status, these changes will take some years to come into effect and may not be significant given the current [global donor landscape and geopolitical situation](#).

4. Open and responsive state

Government's consultations with civil society remain uneven, often with invitations being sent out at the last minute and little to no feedback provided regarding the outcomes of the consultation process. Furthermore, the implementation of key open governance laws remains severely stalled. Although passed in 2022 as a milestone towards transparency, the [Access to Information Act No. 8 of 2022](#) remains entirely inoperative in 2026. On 27 February 2026, Minister of Information and Communication Technology, Ms. Emma Theofelus, [halted the recruitment of the first Information Commissioner](#) just three days before applications closed. According to her, the halt was prompted by concerns from public sector and civil society stakeholders pointing out a lack of extensive consultations on the operationalisation of the Act.

However, civil society actors warned that any prolonged bureaucratic delay deprives the public of legal avenues to enforce accountability, despite dedicated commissioner funding being allocated in the 2026/2027 national budget. During World Press Freedom Day events in Windhoek in May 2026, veteran journalist Gwen Lister [publicly criticised](#) delays in implementing Namibia's Access to Information Act (2022), arguing that the lack of implementation undermines journalists' ability to access information and increases vulnerability to legal and digital harassment. Speakers at the event, including representatives of the European Union and UNESCO, emphasised that a free and independent press is essential for democracy and called for the appointment of an Information Commissioner and full implementation of the legislation. Such developments demonstrate both the continuing institutional delay and the importance of genuine consultations in establishing the mechanisms necessary to make the right of access to information effective. It also highlights the need for a functioning [Government – Civil Society Partnership and Engagement Policy](#) to be in place.

Conversely, the last year saw a positive shift in structured democratic inclusion in different thematic areas. On 21 July 2026, the National Planning Commission (NPC) formally invited the civil society coordination hub [CIVIC+264 to nominate a representative to the Core Working Group](#) for the National Human Resources Development Plan (NHRDP) 2026–2036, which provides a direct channel for civil society input into long-term national planning.

There was also improved cooperation between [Namibia's Financial Intelligence Centre \(FIC\)](#) and civil society. In March, CSOs participated alongside the FIC and EU in [a week-long National Risk Assessment workshop](#) examining money-laundering and terrorism-financing risks, representing a more collaborative approach than the compliance tensions experienced in [2023](#).

In May 2025, a [Constitutional Review process](#) was initiated, and parliament conducted regional consultations, explicitly inviting CSOs, youth and women's groups, activists and communities to make submissions on constitutional reform, human rights, governance and electoral issues. While it is not exactly clear why such a major national process was initiated, it provided a meaningful opening for civil society to participate.

Additionally, during the opening of the Namibia Oil and Gas Conference in August 2026, Vice President Lucia Witbooi stated on behalf of the President that [dialogue with civil society, communities, and local enterprises is "a necessity"](#) to ensure the current oil boom translates into tangible national benefits and robust "local content" regulations. As part of the implementation of Namibia's [Strategy for the Transformation of the Agri-Food Sector \(STAS\)](#) civil society organisations are not only equal co-chairs of technical working groups but have also been appointed as [members of the STAS Steering Committee](#), meaning CSOs are not merely being involved in implementing activities but included in coordination.

Overall, the relationship between government and civil society remains ambivalent. In particular, the ATI Act remains a major weakness, while various new mechanisms for structured civil society participation indicate movement towards a more inclusive approach to policymaking.

5. Supportive public culture and discourses on civil society

Civil society generally continues to occupy a visible and legitimate space within Namibia's public sphere. The [2026 World NGO Day celebrations](#) on 27 February 2026, held for the first time outside Windhoek in the coastal town of Swakopmund, brought together more than 50 civil society organisations (CSOs) and [received support](#) from the Governor of the Erongo Region, who [encouraged](#) greater civil society participation in policy development and implementation. The event reflected official recognition of the contribution of CSOs to national development and highlighted efforts to broaden civic participation beyond the capital.

Civil society actors continue to actively shape public debate on governance and accountability issues. For instance, in July 2026, CSOs joined Members of Parliament in [calling](#) for longer National Assembly sitting hours to address legislative backlogs and improve parliamentary [effectiveness](#). Such interventions indicate that civil society remains a recognised stakeholder in governance discussions and retains the capacity to influence public policy debates. The government's [Sixth National Development Plan](#) (NDP6, pp. 29-30) further reinforces this position by explicitly identifying civil society as a key driver of national development..

However, public and political narratives surrounding civil society remain mixed. While development-oriented and service-delivery organisations are generally viewed positively, organisations engaged in advocacy, governance, human rights and government accountability continue to face periodic scrutiny. Statements made by senior SWAPO Party figures and National Assembly Speaker Saara Kuugongelwa-Amadhila in late 2025, which associated foreign-funded organisations with regime-change agendas and [questioned their democratic legitimacy](#), contributed to sceptical narratives about some segments of civil society. Although such rhetoric was not prominently repeated during 2026, it continues to shape perceptions of advocacy-oriented organisations and may discourage public engagement with politically sensitive civic initiatives.

During the reporting period, the government's position on LGBTQI+ rights remained cautious, contributing to continued uncertainty for organisations advocating for LGBTQI+ rights. The environment for LGBTQI+ rights organisations thus remains contested. The [2024 Dausab v Minister of Justice judgment](#) remains subject to the government's appeal. In May 2026, during the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) session, Namibian Minister of Justice and Labour Relations Fillemon Wise Immanuel [defended the government's pace](#) on LGBTQI+ reform by asking the international community to allow the nation to move "gradually" through extensive domestic consultation rather than rushing the issue. This occurs in an increasingly hostile environment following the enactment of the [January 2025 Marriage Act](#), which explicitly bans same-sex marriage, and amendments to the Civil Registration Act that outlaw legal gender recognition for transgender individuals. While LGBTQI+ organisations continue to operate freely, persistent political and societal resistance contributes to uncertainty and may negatively affect their public legitimacy, access to allies and ability to advocate effectively on rights-related issues.

6. Access to a secure digital environment

Namibia continues to maintain a relatively open digital environment, with no nationwide internet shutdowns or systematic online censorship. However, legal, economic and infrastructural weaknesses continue to affect the ability of civil society and journalists to operate securely online.

As previously mentioned, the [African Media Barometer 2026](#) identified growing economic pressure on journalists and media organisations, with financial insecurity contributing to self-

censorship and weakening investigative journalism. The report's overall score declined from 3.1 to 2.7 between 2022 and 2026.

Namibia has existing laws regulating aspects of digital activity, including the [Electronic Transactions Act 4 of 2019](#) and the [Communications Act 8 of 2009](#), but these do not provide a comprehensive cybercrime framework. [The Government's draft Cybercrime Bill](#), 2026 seeks to establish a unified framework for preventing, investigating and prosecuting cybercrime and protecting computer systems, data and privacy.

The Bill is nevertheless significant for the enabling environment because cybersecurity regulation can directly affect freedom of expression, privacy and digital civic participation. The [NMT Media Foundation's February 2026](#) submission recognised the need to address genuine cybercrime while emphasising that the legislative response must remain within constitutional limits. Its engagement highlights the importance of ensuring that cybercrime offences are clearly and narrowly defined and that investigative and enforcement powers are subject to appropriate safeguards to avoid broad or ambiguous provisions having a chilling effect on online speech, journalism and civil society advocacy.

Namibia also continues to lack [comprehensive data-protection](#) legislation in force. The [previous snapshot](#) identified this as a significant gap, leaving CSOs and individuals vulnerable to privacy violations and with limited remedies in the event of data breaches. The situation has still not improved as the continued absence of an operational framework leaves CSOs handling sensitive information about beneficiaries, activists and vulnerable groups without the protection that a comprehensive data-protection regime would provide.

Furthermore, digital participation remains deeply restricted by a stark [rural-urban digital divide](#). According to the [Namibia Statistics Agency](#), while 50% of urban households have mobile internet connectivity, only 16% of rural households are connected. In [peripheral regions like Kunene](#), overall coverage drops below 50%, limiting the ability of rural CSOs to participate equally in national digital advocacy and policy discussions. These disparities directly affect the ability of rural CSOs to carry out their work. Limited connectivity makes it more difficult for rural CSOs to disseminate information, mobilise communities, participate in online consultations and policy discussions, access government information, engage with national stakeholders, and advocate for the interests of the communities they represent. It also limits the ability of rural communities to access and respond to CSO-led campaigns and advocacy initiatives. As government, media and civil society increasingly use digital platforms for public engagement, unequal connectivity can therefore translate into unequal opportunities for civic participation. The digital environment therefore remains open, but weak privacy protections, economic pressures on digital journalism and substantial urban-rural inequalities continue to constrain secure and equal civic participation.

Challenges and opportunities

The January–August 2026 period reflects continuity rather than a fundamental change in Namibia's civic environment as the country remains relatively open, with constitutional protections for civic freedoms, an active civil society sector and functioning avenues for judicial redress. The High Court's judgment in favour of Amushelelo and Nauyoma demonstrates that courts can provide an effective check when civic rights are unlawfully restricted.

At the same time, the period highlights a persistent gap between formal rights and their practical implementation. The continued failure to operationalise the Access to Information

Act, the unenforced NCRST research judgement, extensive registration requirements with the FIC, financial pressures on CSOs and declining media-environment indicators all point to structural weaknesses. The incidents involving journalists Tracy Tafirenyika and Jemima Beukes further demonstrate the sensitivity surrounding critical journalism and scrutiny of public officials.

There are nevertheless emerging opportunities for stronger civic participation. The invitation to CIVIC+264 to participate in national human-resource planning and the more collaborative FIC–CSO engagement demonstrate that government institutions can create meaningful channels for civil society participation when these are deliberately institutionalised. NamNet is having similar experiences in its interactions with the National Planning Commission, and there is reason to hope for the Government-Civil Society Partnership and Engagement Policy to be finalised and approved by Cabinet before the end of this year.

The principal opportunities lie in strengthening judicial oversight, institutionalising government–CSO engagement, operationalising access to information and creating more sustainable resources for civil society. The principal risks remain the financial vulnerability of CSOs, restrictions or pressures affecting critical journalism, unresolved regulatory barriers to independent research, and persistent gaps between Namibia's formal legal protections and their implementation.

Overall, Namibia's enabling environment remains relatively open, and the principal concern is not the absence of formal civic rights, but the uneven implementation of those rights and the institutional, financial and practical barriers that limit their effective exercise.

One of the current weaknesses of Namibia's civil society is the lack of well-capacitated and sufficiently funded representing and coordinating bodies, yet a recent call for proposals by the Delegation of the European Union to Namibia is likely to provide much needed financial strengthening of civil society across all thematic areas.

This publication was funded by the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

EU SEE

SUPPORTING
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY



Funded by
the European Union

