



# Mid Term Review “Policy Framework for Strengthening Civil Society” in Uganda Final report

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# Mid Term Review “Policy Framework for Strengthening Civil Society” in Uganda

## Final Report

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## List of abbreviations

<b>AHA</b>	Anti-Homosexuality Act
<b>AWDF</b>	African Women’s Development Fund
<b>BHOS</b>	Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation
<b>CA</b>	Contribution Analysis
<b>CBOs</b>	Community Based Organisations
<b>CoP</b>	Community of Practice
<b>CS</b>	Civil Society
<b>CSF</b>	Civic Space Fund & Flex Fund
<b>CSOs</b>	Civil Society Organisations
<b>CW</b>	Capacity Works
<b>DDE</b>	Sustainable Economic Development Department (MFA)
<b>DGF</b>	Democratic Governance Facility-
<b>DMM</b>	Directorate of Multilateral Institutions & Human Rights (MFA)
<b>DSH</b>	Directorate of Stability and Humanitarian Aid (MFA)
<b>DSO</b>	Department of Social Development (MFA)
<b>EACOP</b>	East African Crude Oil Pipeline
<b>EKN</b>	Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands
<b>EQ</b>	Evaluation Question
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FCDO</b>	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
<b>FGD</b>	Focus Group Discussion
<b>FIMI</b>	International Indigenous Women’s Fund
<b>FNS</b>	Food and Nutrition Security
<b>G@W</b>	Gender at Work
<b>GBV</b>	Gender based violence
<b>GiZ</b>	German Agency for International Cooperation
<b>IGG</b>	Inclusive Green Growth Department (MFA)
<b>IOB</b>	International Research and Policy evaluation department (MFA)
<b>IWO</b>	Indigenous Women Organisations
<b>KII</b>	Key Informant Interview
<b>L&amp;I</b>	Learning and Innovation
<b>L&amp;L</b>	Linking and Learning
<b>LFS</b>	Leading from the South
<b>MACS</b>	Multi Annual Country Strategies
<b>MENA</b>	Middle East and North Africa
<b>MFA</b>	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
<b>MoU</b>	Memorandum of Understanding
<b>MTR</b>	Mid-Term Review
<b>M&amp;E</b>	Monitoring and Evaluation
<b>NGOs</b>	Non-Governmental Organisations
<b>NDP</b>	National Development Plan
<b>OCA</b>	Organisational Capacity Assessment
<b>PoV</b>	Power of Voices
<b>PoW</b>	Power of Women



<b>PwD</b>	Person with Disability
<b>SCS</b>	Strengthening Civil Society
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal
<b>SGBV</b>	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
<b>SP</b>	Strategic Partnership(s)
<b>SRHR</b>	Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights
<b>SRoL</b>	Security and Rule of Law
<b>ToC</b>	Theory of Change
<b>TOR</b>	Terms of Reference
<b>VPN</b>	Virtual Private Network
<b>VSLA</b>	Village Savings and Loan Association
<b>WPS</b>	Women, Peace and Security
<b>WRGE</b>	Women Rights and Gender Equality
<b>WYG</b>	Women and Young Girls
<b>YGW</b>	Young Girls and Women

# Executive Summary

## MTR purpose and process

In early 2024, the Strengthening Civil Society (SCS) policy framework (2021–2025) in Uganda was subjected to an external mid-term review (MTR) to assess its continued relevance, the capacity status of implementing partnerships and partners, progress and contribution towards key outcome areas, and the coherence and efficiency in policy implementation. Based on these assessments, the MTR formulates recommendations for the remaining period of the policy framework and the development of future policy and funding frameworks aiming to contribute to strengthened civil society.

In 2026, the MTR is to be complemented by an endline evaluation, which will use the MTR findings as a basis for comparison to account for the results and use of resources under the SCS policy framework. This end evaluation will also explore the quality of policy implementation by the strategic partnerships (SPs) and funds.

In conducting this MTR, the team collected and analysed information about the experiences and achievements of the SPs and funds operating under the policy framework in Uganda in the 2021-2023 period. The MTR used this information to draw lessons at an overall policy level, rather than assessing the performance of individual partnerships and/or interventions. This meant that all inputs were anonymised, and no explicit references are made to individual partners or partnerships. Given the sensitivity of issues being addressed by some of the SPs, the MTR has taken a range of precautions to ensure the confidentiality and safety of its informants, while ensuring that participation was strictly voluntary.

The MTR took place from January to June 2024, starting with an inception process to elaborate the detailed design of the MTR, in which deliberate efforts were made to ensure maximum coverage of the SPs and funds and minimise bias. The subsequent data collection process included an extensive desk study, online survey, (online) interviews and country visits, in which 22 of the 25 SPs and all funds active in Uganda were met. In addition, the MTR relied on a range of external informants to provide generic and case-specific independent insights to triangulate findings. Two validation meetings with representatives of around 80% of the SPs took place in May, which helped to enrich the data analysis. These efforts led to the MTR drawing the following conclusions per evaluation criteria:

## Relevance

The SCS policy framework remains highly relevant in the context of a shrinking civic space in Uganda, particularly where it contributes to keeping the government accountable for the quality of public services and the protection of civic rights as the country recovers from the Covid-19 pandemic. The (interrelated) pathways of the ToC – as recognised by the MTR – are valid, and the assumptions made in the ToC remain relevant but are incomplete in addressing the preconditions for and sustainability of advocacy efforts. Besides, the ToC is exclusively focused on the contribution of civil society to inclusive sustainable development, leaving the role of government and other key actors open, including the embassy as a strategic partner.

## Status and progress in civil society capacity development

The MTR made a validated capacity assessment of twelve SPs structured according to the five success factors of the Capacity Works model. In addition, the advocacy capacity of 49 individual partners was assessed using six advocacy capacity dimensions. The synthesised results provide an overview of the current capacity status of the SPs and the partners involved (see figure below), which is meant to serve as a basis for comparison in the endline evaluation in 2026.

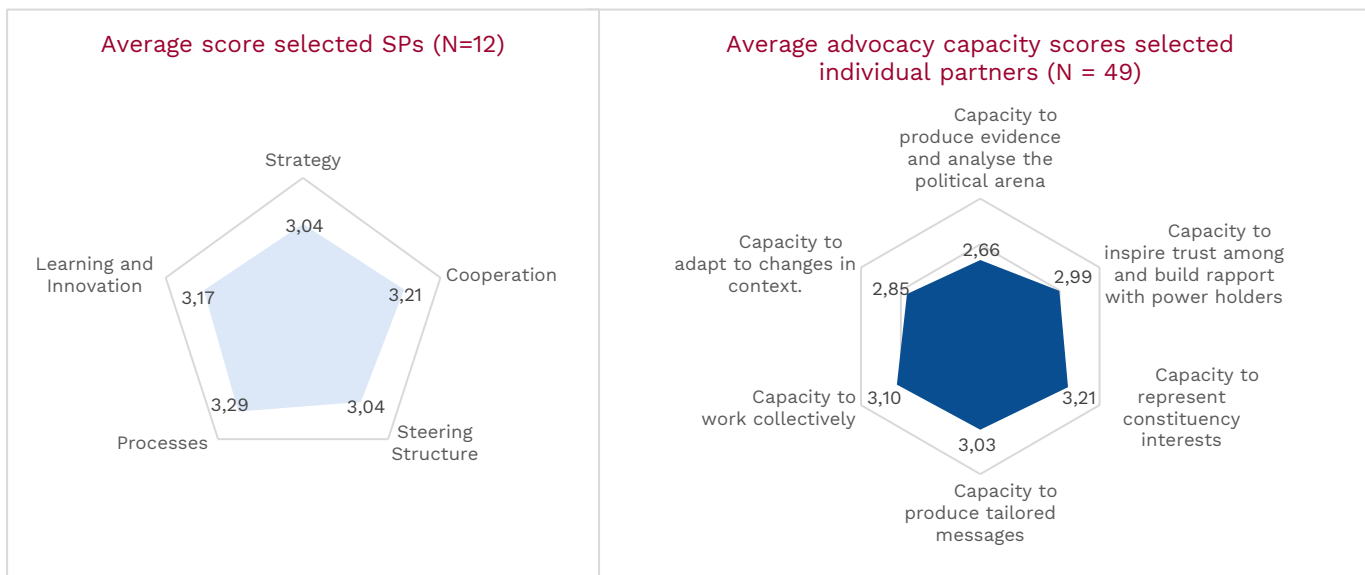


Figure 1: Average scores for partnership and individual capacity assessments.

Although this overview does not provide insights into progress since the start of the policy framework in 2021, it illustrates that the vast majority of SPs are functioning reasonably well, which – according to the interviews – demonstrates clear progress, especially for the newer SPs. At the same time, the SPs face challenges in ensuring the sustainability of the established connections and cooperation beyond the policy period. The individual partner assessments suggest that advocacy capacities are most advanced in terms of constituency representativeness, while the strongest scope for improvement can be found in evidence building and analysis.

The design and management of capacity strengthening efforts under the SCS policy framework were guided by the Ministry’s M&E framework and took shape through a variety of approaches and modalities benefitting over 300 CSOs partners at the national and sub-national level. Maintaining a comprehensive overview of the scale and diversity of all these efforts proves challenging, as is gaining a sound insight into the effects of them on the performance of the SPs and individual partners. Nevertheless, SP members confirm progress in capacity strengthening, citing many examples at the local and national level to substantiate this. This progress is confirmed in more general terms by external informants. In analysing this progress, flexibility and autonomy in prioritising and shaping capacity strengthening activities are seen as key success factors, while no particular modality could be singled out as being the most or least effective. Nevertheless, apparent preferences for exchange of experience and peer reviews over expert-centred modalities illustrate the progressing maturity of participating CSOs.

## Coherence

Coherence **within SPs** is overall reasonable and gradually increasing, while **among SPs** this is mostly limited to the same thematic area, in some cases facilitated by the same partner being member of multiple partnerships. The competitive nature of the policy instruments, the reality of each SP working with their own specific ToC/results framework and the absence of dedicated resources for coordination explain the limited coherence among SPs. The *power of learning initiative* could have helped but took off late and primarily serves a joint learning rather than programmatic coherence purpose. Coherence of the **SPs with the EKN** varies per SP, caused by the SP programmes not being systematically aligned with the EKN’s multi-annual strategic plan and the EKN not being clearly positioned in the SCS policy framework. Besides, varying personal interests on the side of both the EKN and SPs play a role. Coherence **with local government agendas** at both the national and district levels is highly dependent on the nature of the work of the SPs. **Donor coordination** in Uganda related to CS strengthening is relatively weak, especially after the demise of the DGF, although attempts to revive donor coordination are mentioned albeit still at an early stage, with little visible impact.

## Practices and progress towards Effectiveness

The practice of applying gender transformative approaches is widespread among the SPs, illustrating the effectiveness of making this a clear requirement under the policy. Similarly, practices to ensure the inclusion of marginalised groups are demonstrated by almost all SPs, through either partners directly representing or partners supporting these groups.

The MTR observes reasonable to significant progress towards the SCS policy's five main outcome areas (*enhanced power and legitimacy of CSOs, strengthened social movements, meaningful youth participation, empowering marginalised groups and empowering and equal participation of women and girls*). While progress in CS strengthening is described above, the extensive efforts to strengthen more informal networks/movements also show positive results at the individual, community, national and international levels. This ranges from increased individual competencies to initiatives being better connected and more confident and visible in engaging with authorities. Similarly, the MTR found multiple signs of progress towards meaningful youth participation, with the majority of SPs consulting and informing youth in the design and implementation of interventions. The empowerment of marginalised groups, women and girls has progressed even further, as demonstrated by signs of increasing involvement in decision-making and leadership positions taken up by these groups.

The effects of gender transformative approaches are also visible in signs of systemic change, whereby SPs deliberately address changes at the individual, institutional, legislative and society levels. The results show how women (and girls) having taken on leadership positions and entered formerly male-dominated professional spaces, due to increased personal awareness, changed attitudes of those in charge, changed procedures and regulations and (a first) change in public opinion.

In examining explanatory factors, the majority of the ten contribution cases identify the creation and stimulation of CS networks/collaborative structures, the strengthening of capacities and the tangible (financial) support in advocacy work as significant factors, reconfirming the validity of the ToC. A significant rival/external contributing factor relates to the strong intrinsic motivation, leadership and volunteerism demonstrated by many of the SPs met, while more case-specific factors include the presence of other donors or the collaboration of local government in community-centred SPs. These rival factors do not lead so much to alternative hypotheses but illustrate the value of *alternative resources* and the importance of considering a **complementary pathway** that describes when, where and how the government fits into the picture. Overall, the most significant hampering factor relates to the shrinking civic space, in particular at the national level. Moreover, in a few cases the collaboration did not result in a united voice and approach, which then became a significant impeding factor.

## Efficiency

The available data on budget execution illustrates that the implementation of activities has been efficient. Qualitative analysis showed that the design of the partnership instruments is overall fairly efficient, particularly due to (1) the flexibility in the use of funding, and (2) the relatively long funding window of five years. Tasks are generally efficiently distributed among tiers, although partnerships could leverage more on national CSOs, especially those experienced in managing large funds. Based on a review of financial data from a selection of SPs, we see that roughly 50–70% of the partnership budget reaches local partners (and 70–80% in the case of VOICE and the LFS funds). Despite the apparent overhead costs, it is likely that this is more efficient than direct project funding to all individual consortium partners, while a comparison with the efficiency of the EKN managed delegated funds is difficult as the overhead/indirect costs for this are unclear. The involvement of local partners in financial decision-making differs, but high-level financial decisions are usually taken at the international consortium level, which are – with a few exceptions – not clear to local partners. The evaluation did not find significant differences in efficiency between Northern- and Southern-led partnerships.

## Overall conclusion

When assessing the overall value and performance of the SCS policy framework in Uganda, the MTR sees a broad CS-oriented policy framework that complements the complex governmental bilateral cooperation between the Netherlands and Uganda and provides a relevant funding framework to strengthen civil society to operate in a shrinking civic space. The SCS policy framework enables supporting the advocacy work of over 300 CS partners operating in various sectors at the national and sub-national levels. Many SPs include or reach partners representing the marginalised groups that the policy framework aims to support, which together with the use of (gender) transformative approaches prove to be key factors in explaining the progress towards the various policy objectives. The **MTR is therefore positive about the overall performance of the SCS policy framework in Uganda**, especially as it allows capacity strengthening of CS organisations and movements to go hand-in-hand with the provision of direct support to their advocacy efforts. In this way, the policy framework facilitates experience-based learning and growth of CS advocacy efforts.

Besides these successes, the MTR also sees a number of dilemmas and challenges related to:

- reconciling progress in CS management capacity with (increasing) demands for localisation;
- the scope of the framework being experienced as (overly) narrowly focused on advocacy;
- the limited coordination and coherence among SPs in a framework that operates through competitive instruments financing individual entities in the pursuit of collective results;
- ensuring that the design and implementation of (core) advocacy efforts are more convincingly based on (objective) evidence from adequate research and M&E processes; and
- securing the sustainability of strengthened capacities and cooperative arrangements enabled by an externally funded framework with an uncertain future beyond 2025.

## Recommendations

Suggestions and ideas in addressing these strategic dilemmas were discussed with SP representatives during two validation workshops. The results of these discussions in combination with the MTR conclusions lead to the following recommendations directed at MFA/EKN. **Recommendations for more immediate action** for the remainder of the current policy framework include:

### 1. Stimulate addressing gaps in capacity development

Emphasise the systematic production and analysis of evidence to make more credible advocacy claims and the sustainability of strengthened advocacy capacity and collaborative arrangements as important priorities for capacity strengthening within and across SPs, including an acceleration of the joint L&L processes in these areas.

### 2. Maintain a transformative policy framework

Consolidate the widespread use of gender transformative approaches as one of the more important success factors of the current SCS framework

### 3. Start working towards more deliberate localisation

Start taking initial steps towards a gradual localisation process by encouraging international (lead) partners to initiate deliberate efforts to facilitate this process, e.g. by allocating resources for coaching/mentoring, secondments, etc.

In the longer run, it is recommended to *develop more deliberate localisation processes, pursuing a gradual transfer of management responsibility and accountability to local partners demonstrating predefined progressing maturity levels.*

**Recommendations for longer-term/future SCS and related policymaking** include:

### 4. Enrich the overall ToC

Enrich the ToC by 1) being more explicit about (resources for) the minimal safety and security conditions/precautions that would allow CS to engage in advocacy without causing a risk to themselves or the people around them, 2) recognising that the most marginalised groups who are meant to be the primary beneficiaries of this policy face acute limitations in time or resources to engage directly in advocacy activities, 3) being more elaborate about the causal connections between the different pathways by shifting emphasis to a more experiential learning cycle (= plan, do, reflect and act), and 4) being *more explicit about the international dimension* of advocacy efforts and results, including the positions of the embassy.

## **5. Protect the scope of the policy framework**

Maintain restraint in broadening the scope of the policy framework and retain its advocacy focus to hold government and private sector accountable for their decisions and actions. Limit a possible widening of scope to addressing safety and security conditions as part of a deliberate process to overcome specific risks that prevent particularly vulnerable/marginalised groups from taking part in advocacy efforts.

Moreover, emphasise the importance of building in/seeking connections to complementary efforts directed at the capacity of the government (and private sector) to engage with CS. Besides, seek complementarities with more service-oriented (livelihood) programmes/funding windows that help set the preconditions for CSOs to engage in advocacy.

## **6. Ensure complementary policy instruments**

Ensure that future policy instruments recognise and reflect the real diversity of implementation modalities, which would include at least:

- a) Local fund(s) to support specific projects for the benefit of marginalised communities that can be obtained through relatively simple processes managed by empathic (in-country) fund managers who understand the challenges and context of the targeted beneficiaries.

Country-specific SP funds with an emphasis on advocacy results at the country level, aligned with the embassy's MACS. International partners can still play a role in this, as we envision that one partnership can still cover several countries.

*N.B. EKNs would have to have the necessary capacity to play a central role in the management of this instrument.*

- b) International SP funds in support CS advocacy efforts with a clear international dimension, dealing with issues where multiple governments, inter-governmental institutes and/or international firms are involved.

## **7. Create a professional architecture around partnerships**

Consider working through an alternative architecture around partnerships that facilitates their successful performance in achieving and demonstrating effective advocacy. This means allowing partnerships to concentrate on the planning, management and realisation of their (direct) capacity strengthening and advocacy results, supported by prequalified (local) service providers that could undertake relevant research, periodic outcome-level monitoring to inform strategic steering and/or facilitate coordination across partnerships.

*N.B. this recommendation requires careful thinking about how best to deal with the different coordination and accountability arrangements needed for such a different architecture.*

## **8. Pursue coherence and collective results at the country level**

Develop a joint country-level ToC including all SPs operating in the country before embarking on the implementation of a next programme phase. Ensure that this joint ToC aligns with the EKN's MACS and specifies collective results and the individual contributions of SPs, Funds and the EKN.

*N.B. We recognise that this entails an extra step in the funding cycle that may delay implementation, while it also requires mobilising additional capacity for cross-partnership ToC facilities.*

Subsequently, this ToC should be used as basis for a joint, complex-aware actor-oriented M&E framework to assess meaningful progress towards collective results and account for individual contributions. This arrangement should be supported by a dedicated fund manager, SP network facilitator and M&E service provider.

## **9. Mainstream sustainability in future policy cycles**

Besides the earlier mentioned immediate intensification of attention for sustainability, pay more deliberate and systematic attention to sustainability in a possible future policy cycle, insisting on the inclusion and implementation of sound sustainability plans and exit strategies.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose and scope of the Mid Term Review

In 2020, the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs developed the Policy Framework for Strengthening Civil Society (SCS), which serves as overarching funding instrument for Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) from 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2025. A total of 42 partnerships with activities in 65 countries have been funded under this framework, of which 25 partnerships are active in Uganda<sup>1</sup>. In addition, the framework finances interventions through three specific funding instruments: Leading from the South, the Civic Space fund, and Voice.

In early 2024, the implementation of the SCS policy framework in Uganda is subjected to an external mid-term review (MTR), to be complemented by an end-line evaluation in 2026 with the overall objectives<sup>2</sup>:

- To provide transparency and accountability on the allocation of ODA-funds;
- To evaluate the quality of policy implementation by the partnerships and MFA's role in the partnerships and formulate lessons learned and
- To formulate lessons for future Strengthening Civil Society & thematic policymaking, funding mechanisms and policy implementation.

This MTR specifically takes stock of:

- the continued relevance of the SCS policy framework and its underlying Theory of Change (ToC),
- the (advocacy) capacity of the participating Strategic Partnerships (SPs) and CSOs,
- (contribution of) progress in capacity development, inclusiveness, and gender equality, and
- the coherence and efficiency of policy implementation.

Based on this, the MTR has formulated recommendations for the remaining period of the policy framework and the development of future policy and funding frameworks aiming to contribute to strengthened civil society.

In conducting this policy evaluation, the MTR team collected and analysed information about the experiences and achievements of the partnerships and interventions funded under the policy framework active in Uganda in the period 2021- 2023. The MTR used this information to draw lessons at an overall policy level and not for assessing the performance of individual partnerships and / or interventions. This meant that all inputs were anonymised, and no explicit references are made to individual partners or partnerships.

## 1.2 Ethics and limitations

Given concerns related to the sensitivity of issues addressed by the policy framework and the ensuing security of participating organisations, the TOR mentioned a set of **ethical / safety requirements** that the MTR should comply with. In the practice of this MTR, this meant the following measures were taken:

- From the outset, the MTR constantly communicated that participation in any part of the MTR (survey, interviews, validation workshop) was strictly voluntary and under guarantee of anonymity in any of the MTR's deliverables and confidentiality related to both the individual participant and the organisation they represented.
- The survey-link was shared with targeted respondents in different ways. For most, we used e-mail addresses provided by the SPs, but when preferred the links were shared with the SP coordinator, who then shared it with relevant members of the SP.
- Some of the SPs were met by International MTR members only and/or in safe spaces like the Dutch embassy.
- The MTR members used VPN during their visits to Uganda to ensure inaccessibility of electronic data to outsiders.
- Individual partnerships and partners were coded before collating findings related to their capacity and performance to ensure anonymisation of findings.
- No pictures were made of any people participating in the MTR.

Overall, the MTR could largely be implemented as designed and planned during the inception process, although some **limitations** were encountered. This concerned the fact that the concept of 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and

<sup>1</sup> Under the Power of Voices, Power of Women, SRHR, and Women, Peace and Security windows.

<sup>2</sup> Terms of Reference of Mid Term Review (and End Evaluation) Strengthen Civil Society Policy Framework in Uganda.

3<sup>rd</sup> tier partners is not commonly practised among all SPs, which complicated the survey that had different questions per tier. An additional complication was that various organisations at all tiers are taking part in multiple SPs. Also, the fact that SP membership is not fixed for the duration of the policy framework complicates getting a full and reliable overview of the SP compositions. A further complication concerns the geographical spread of the 300+ partners. By using an online survey combined with personal visits inside and outside Kampala, the MTR aimed to ensure maximum coverage, but the MTR does recognise an overrepresentation of the Kampala based members in data collection. The MTR team feels, however, that given the large number and diversity of respondents to survey and interviews, a reliable insight in the functioning of the SCS policy in Uganda could be obtained.

Finally, given the absence of a baseline at the start of the policy framework, we acknowledge that the capacity related MTR findings collected in early 2024 will serve as the only basis for comparison with the endline evaluation to be conducted in 2026. This most likely will affect the nature and scope of change that will be found during the endline evaluation.

### **1.3 MTR Coordination arrangements**

The assignment was commissioned and contractually administered by the Department for Social Development (DSO) of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with the DSO Monitoring Evaluation and Learning Advisors acting as the primary client contact person. Through weekly coordination meetings, a smooth running of the overall MTR was ensured. In addition, the EKN in Kampala, advised, facilitated and supported the in-country MTR activities, which included offering referrals to relevant external resource persons, advising on practicalities related to data collection, making office space available, and mobilising participants for the validation meetings.

Finally, as mentioned, personal connections were established with the coordinators of individual SPs and Funds to facilitate data collection by helping to organise and mobilise adequate participation of relevant SP representatives in MTR visits.

### **1.4 Structure of the report**

This evaluation report first summarises the contextual background, facts and figures of the SCS Uganda Policy Framework (chapter 2), including the MTR team's understanding of the generic Theory of Change / Results Framework and related thematic results frameworks that will be used as frame of reference for this assignment. Subsequently, chapter 3 elaborates on the methodological approach and work plan of the MTR. In chapter 4, we present our findings, structured according to the evaluation criteria applied in this MTR. When addressing effectiveness in chapter 4, we first describe key practices, followed by progress towards outcomes and systemic change, while completing this part with a synthesis of the case study results illustrating the main contributing factors that explain the reported progress. Ultimately, in chapters 5 and 6 we present our overall conclusions and recommendations.

## 2 Description of SCS Uganda Policy Framework

### 2.1 Background to the SCS policy framework

The SCS Policy framework is the second Dutch policy designed to support civil society in their role of lobby and advocacy. The SCS policy framework includes various instruments that offer opportunities for funding to CSOs working towards realising human rights for marginalised groups. The framework supports various thematic areas in which a strengthened role of CSOs in Uganda is seen as a priority, including Women Rights and Gender Equality (WRGE), Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR), LGBTIQ+ rights, Climate, Food & Nutrition Security (F&NS), Water, and Security and Rule of Law (SRoL).

Implementing the SCS policy framework in Uganda, commenced at a time that the country is implementing its third national development plan (NDP III) for the period 2020/21 to 2024/25, whose main goal is to improve the quality of life and average household incomes of citizens. The country has also progressively implemented programmes aimed at realising its targets towards SDGs in Uganda, although there are concerns that there is slow progress towards the achievement of targets.<sup>3</sup> In 2021, the country held its presidential and parliamentary elections under tense conditions which included the blockage of access to internet services and significant accounts of violence.

At the same time, Uganda, like other countries has been experiencing the political and socio-economic effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. These effects have included restrictions in political campaigns on account of restricting public gatherings. Likewise, when a lock down was imposed for several weeks, work opportunities were lost, and business processes were affected. One of the measures adopted by the government was a shutdown of schools for nearly twenty-two months. This prolonged shutdown of schools interrupted the learning opportunities for many children in the country, by reversing gains made in their learning, and making it more difficult for those who had transitioned to informal work for survival to return to the classroom. The prolonged shutdown also exposed several of these children to gender based violence.

Civil society organisations (CSOs) are recognised as stakeholders of the government of Uganda in implementing the NDP III and realising SDGs. However, to meaningfully participate as stakeholders in the transformation of the country, CSOs still require the appropriate organisational capacity support to enable them to contribute to addressing some of the most pressing challenges encountered by marginalised groups. The challenges that CSOs seek to address include historical regional imbalances in development, which may account for gaps in service delivery, poverty being more pronounced in certain regions, gender-based inequality, deeply held socio-cultural beliefs, inadequate access to justice, health services, and climate change. These aspects are further elaborated upon in Annex 6.

The country has a rapidly growing population which is predominantly youthful. Despite the youth being a majority, their participation in decision-making and economic activity is still low. Likewise, women remain under-represented in governance at national and sub-national levels, and their participation in economic activity is primarily at the lowest level of value chains and employment.

The country's attempts to diversify its economy have opened interest in the agro-export and extractives sectors. This has, in turn, contributed to resettlement of communities and tensions over land ownership and a context in which informed consent is requested and given for the extractives sector. With a final investment decision made in 2022 for Uganda's oil and gas projects, there has been increased activity in resettling rural communities to complete infrastructure works required for the industry, amidst concerns of human rights violations. Value addition in traditional cash crops such as tea and coffee has been enhanced together with the non-traditional horticultural products.

The context in which CSOs work towards implementing programmes that contribute to addressing these factors is limited by funding and skills gaps, institutional challenges, all of which are further exacerbated by a continuously shrinking civic space marked by a clampdown by the Uganda government on the activities of some CSOs. During the period of implementing this SCS Policy framework, the Government of Uganda has enacted new legislation and enforced several other legislations which appear to have constrained the work of CSOs. The Anti Homosexuality Act which was enacted in 2023 seeks to further penalise those who identify as LGBTIQ+ and organise as communities. The Non-Governmental Organisations Act's compliance standards have been enforced more strictly, with some organisations

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<sup>3</sup> UNECA, Macroeconomic and Social Developments in Eastern Africa 2023, page,34.

being closed down for failure to comply with the legislation, and others being denied long term operational licences.<sup>4</sup> The enforcement of compliance requirements of the Anti-Money Laundering Act has also affected the operations of CSOs in Uganda.<sup>5</sup> In 2020 and 2021, several CSOs engaged in human rights advocacy encountered office break-ins, extra judicial searches and seizures of computers, and freezing of bank accounts on account of government's attempts to track their sources of funding. Subsequently, for some of these CSOs, their executives were arrested and prosecuted for money laundering related offences.

Enforcement of guidelines relating to public gatherings under the Public Order Management Act has also affected the way CSOs enjoy civic space and the extent to which these organisations can access physical spaces for mobilisation. Even though CSOs had successfully challenged the constitutionality of aspects of the legislation, in practice the need for police and the executive's permission to bring together communities to engage in public discourse has remained. This has limited the advocacy strategies that are available for CSOs. Permission is frequently granted or withheld depending on how the Police and Presidential representatives at district level perceive the purpose of engagement.

Skill gaps within CSOs which sometimes impact the work of CSOs may explain the limitations faced by CSOs across the country. Some CSOs have more access to financial resources and are better able to develop their human resources. The CSOs have attempted to address capacity gaps through training. CSOs have also relied on loose formations to allow fluid and agile organisation among the CSOs. However, these loose formations were banned by the government, for CSOs involved in electoral democracy lobby and advocacy. CSOs are often dependent on financial support for their programming. The limitation for CSOs relates to short term programming often lasting 2-3 years and structured around the available funding support. This may also explain why some CSOs may have a high staff turnover.

All in all, CS in Uganda continues to face a shrinking civic space, be it less severe in some sectors than others. This explains and justifies the purpose of the Dutch-funded SCS policy framework in Uganda, while also other development partners (Sweden, Denmark, Ireland, UK, USA, EU), the UN system<sup>6</sup> and various private philanthropies (e.g. ELMA foundation, IZUMI foundation) continue working in this space. Most of these interventions have, however, a more specific focus (i.e. strengthening particular local CSO partners as means towards a more specific thematic objective), in comparison with the SCS framework that has CS strengthening at its core and covers a much wider variety of CSOs. Before 2021, much of the bilateral CS support was channelled through the Democratic Governance Facility (DGF) that was then closed down by the government of Uganda. This has affected donor coordination and cooperation though efforts are made to develop new joint programmes, but this remains work in progress.

## 2.2 Facts & Figures of the SCS Policy Framework in Uganda

In this section we provide a factual description of the way the SCS Policy Framework has been operationalised in various instruments that were used to finance the strategic partnerships and programmes to strengthen civil society in Uganda.

### 2.2.1 Objectives and principles

**The main objective of this Framework is to strengthen civil society** and its role in lobby and advocacy, especially in countries in the focus regions (West-Africa/Sahel, Horn of Africa, Middle East and North Africa (MENA)), as well as countries listed in the BHOS Policy Document that have a development cooperation with the Netherlands.<sup>7</sup> SDGs and human rights approaches are key elements of the framework. As achieving SDGs is a global goal, but many problems occur at a local level, the Policy Framework sees cooperation among countries and regions as crucial. While the Framework targets different themes (see section on Policy Instruments), it has a special focus on the realisation of women's rights and gender equality (WRGE).

SCS builds on the previous Dialogue and Dissent Policy Framework and includes lessons such as the need to strengthen southern leadership, have a stronger focus on civic space, integrate gender equality from the start and manage expectations about the partnership relation with MFA.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> In 2021, 54 CSOs were shut down for failure to comply with the NGO Act. <https://ngobureau.go.ug/en/news-and-notice/operations-of-54-ngos-halted>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSL8N2J428Q/>

<sup>6</sup> Transformative and inclusive governance is one of the UN's thematic priorities in Uganda.

<sup>7</sup> See note 5.

<sup>8</sup> Summary Theory of Change SCS framework 2019.

## 2.2.2 Policy instruments

The SCS policy framework consists of two grant funds: 1) Power of Voices (PoV) and 2) SDG5 fund. The former consists of three grant instruments, namely Power of Voices, VOICE, and the Civic Space Fund & Flex Fund (which replaced the Accountability Fund). The latter consists of four grant instruments Leading from the South (LFS), Power of Women (PoW), Women Peace and Security (WPS) and the SRHR partnership fund. The seven different grant instruments are listed in Table 1, and it is specified to what extent they are operational in Uganda.

Table 1: Overview of size, structure, and regional focus of the grant instruments of the SCS Policy Framework

Grant instrument	Instrument type	Total budget (EUR mln)	Active in Uganda (yes/no)	Budget Uganda (EUR mln)	Nr of Partnerships (global)	Nr of Partnerships / funds active in Uganda
Power of Voices (PoV)	Partnership fund	825	Yes	43	22	16
Power of Women (PoW)	Partnership fund	64	Yes	6	6	4
SRHR Partnership Fund (SRHR)	Partnership fund	315	Yes	27	7	5
Women, Peace and Security (WPS)	Partnership fund	40	No	0	7	0
Leading from the South (LFS)	Funds	80	Yes	0.6 <sup>9</sup>	4	2
Civic Space Fund & Flex Fund (CSF)	Funds	50	No	0	N/A	0
VOICE	Programme	12	Yes	5.5 <sup>10</sup>	1	1

The **VOICE programme**<sup>11</sup> is a grant initiative managed by Oxfam and Hivos. It commenced in 2016, under the Dialogue and Dissent policy framework and is currently in a second/extension phase, which is nearing completion by end of 2024. In Uganda, the VOICE programme is managed by Oxfam and between April 2021 and March 2024 it has provided 71 grants to right holders and groups facing marginalisation or discrimination to exert influence in accessing productive and social services and political participation. The MTR mainly reviewed the coherence, effectiveness, and efficiency and made a comparison between the effectiveness and efficiency of the Voice programme in comparison to the other SPs<sup>12</sup>.

**Leading from the South** is a feminist global Southern-led consortium conceptualised and managed by four leading women's funds. Two out of the total four LFS Funds<sup>13</sup> are active in Uganda, FIMI (also referred to as IIWF) and ADWF. The other two focus on Asia or Central America. The funds had a first phase (2017-2020) and are currently implementing a second phase (2021-2025). They directly fund small indigenous women organisations (IWO), FIMI has so far supported 3 IWO in Uganda. Meanwhile, ADWF has supported 10 grantees in Uganda, 5 of those received an additional flexible top up fund of € 5000 for 6 months to mitigate the 2022 cost and impact of Covid19.

Apart from the VOICE programme and the two LFS funds, **25 strategic partnerships are currently active in Uganda**, funded by three different grant instruments. All 25 partnerships are also active in other countries. The Power of Voices grant instrument takes the lion's share in terms of number of partnerships in Uganda (16 partnerships); the Power of Women has 4 partnerships active in Uganda, and the SRHR Partnership Fund has 5 partnerships active in Uganda (see Annex 5).

The **total budget allocation for the 25 partnerships in Uganda was EUR 76.5 million**, out of a total budget for the global partnerships of EUR 1.24 billion. Power of Voices had the highest budget allocation (> EUR 40 million), in line with the number of partnerships, followed by SRHR and PoW. On average, each

<sup>9</sup> ADWF Annual Report 2022; the figure only refers to ADWF, as no data were available for FIMI.

<sup>10</sup> <https://voice.global/country/uganda/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://voice.global/about-us/who-we-are/>

<sup>12</sup> Given the different (informal) nature of organisations receiving Voice funding and the small size of projects under Voice, an organisation and efficiency assessment of a representative group of Voice fund recipients would not be feasible and not lead to insights that would be comparable to the other funding instruments.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.leadingfromthesouth.org/>

partnership in Uganda had a budget of about EUR 3 million, with differences among partnerships (see Annex 5). Partnerships are mostly led by organisations located in the global north (80%), and the thematic focus is mostly on WRGE and SRHR, while only a few focus on trade, climate and FNS (see Annex 5). The **Women Peace and Security, Civic Space Fund and Civic space flex fund** do not have activities in Uganda, hence are not part of the scope of this MTR.

### 2.3 Governance / management arrangements of the SCS Policy Framework

In this sub-chapter we describe the governance and management arrangements of the overall policy framework and the partnerships operating under the framework. This explains the role of MFA (DSO and embassy) vis-à-vis 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> tier partners.

**MFA is the driving force and financier of the SCS policy framework**, and as such responsible for the transparent and accountable allocation of funding to the implementing partners / partnerships. This also implies MFA's role in overseeing the adequate use of funds, and monitoring progress towards the intended objectives of the policy framework, including the commission of this MTR. However, MFA aspires to be more than a donor by actively supporting the work under the policy framework through a) diplomatic support b) access to international networks; c) access to knowledge, expertise and government information; d) facilitating MEL; and e) facilitating annual strategic policy dialogues. Most partnerships and programmes are supervised and supported by policy officers of the Department of Social Development but given their nature some fall under the purview of IGG and DDE. Complementarily, the DMM and DSH have a supervisory role. Even though the SCS policy framework is centrally funded, the Netherlands embassy in Uganda plays an important role in coordinating and supporting strategic partnerships active in Uganda.

The Framework encourages partnerships where local organisations have ownership and control, because it enables them to a) be more independent in the implementation of the activities; and b) it increases the effectiveness and sustainability of their interventions. A condition for receiving the partnership grant is that “the role of local civil society organisations should be made visible with a description of the roles and responsibilities of these partners in formulating and implementing the programme and in decision-making processes within the consortium”.

**Strategic Partnerships were formed in response to the MFA's call for proposals in 2020** after which 42 SPs started their programmes in 65 countries, of which 25 SPs are active in Uganda. Around half of these 25 SPs are continuations or combinations of existing partnerships, whereby international and Ugandan partners that had a history of working together joined hands in developing a joint proposal. The other half of SPs are newly formed, whereby in response to the stricter conditions about the prominence of Southern partners, international partners reached out to their international network to mobilise Southern partners as formal consortium partners. Beyond these so-called 1<sup>st</sup> tier consortium partners, SPs expanded to include more local partners (2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> tier, see below), whereby two practices emerged. In most cases, promising local CSO partners were mobilised from existing networks already during the proposal stage. In other cases, SPs would issue calls for proposals during the inception phase, whereby local CSOs would respond and be selected for inclusion in the SPs. Over time the composition of SPs at local level has changed somewhat, with new local partners coming in as they emerged as useful allies in the CS landscape, while other local partners dropped out, because they stopped operations or could not live up to the expectations / requirements of SP membership.

**In design, the policy recognises three tiers of partners.** First tier partners include the lead partner of the consortium and the alliance members that are considered equal partners jointly responsible for the performance of the overall partnership. The lead partner<sup>14</sup> is the grant recipient, and as such, responsible for the compliance with the regulations of the policy framework, including planning, monitoring, reporting and financial accountability. First tier partners offer international connections and connect the partnership to relevant international lobby efforts and are responsible for the implementation of agreed programmatic interventions, including capacity strengthening of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> tier partners. To stimulate Southern leadership, at least one alliance member must be from the Global South, while some instruments also require the presence of at least one organisation from the Netherlands.<sup>15</sup> Most partnerships active in Uganda have 2 to 4 consortium members (Figure 2). The remaining partnerships have between 5 and 9 consortium partners.

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<sup>14</sup> A lead partner of a consortium cannot usually be lead partner of another consortium within the same instrument; however, it can be lead partner of a consortium under a different grant instrument.

<sup>15</sup> PoV and SRHR. See grant instruments at [Policy Framework Strengthening Civil Society | Policy note | Government.nl](#)

**Second tier** partners concern contractual partner organisations that the consortia work with, at the national or sub-national level. These organisations take a central role in lobby & advocacy efforts at the national level, and coordinate / link with 3<sup>rd</sup> tier partners that are generally active on specific issues at the sub-national level. The number of 2<sup>nd</sup> tier partners vary. Some partnerships have one while others have up to four 2<sup>nd</sup> tier partners. In the latter, each 2<sup>nd</sup> tier partner leads a specific pathway under the partnership theory of change and directly links with 3<sup>rd</sup> tier partners working under that pathway. Most 2<sup>nd</sup> tier partners are registered NGOs, well established with a central office in the capital city and work on policy and advocacy at national level. They often also have regional offices/branches that are contact points with the Local Governments and the 3<sup>rd</sup> tier partners working at sub-national level.

**Third tier** partners are connected to the community they represent and are often referred to as grassroots or community-based organisations. They consist of small volunteer-led community-based organisations with between 3 – 15 staff members. Their activities/programmes are implemented by local activists, community leaders, students, target groups such as women, youth, LGBTIQ+ individuals. They operate from premises provided by the community e.g. by the local government, school, the church or spaces partitioned from residential houses/homes. Some 3<sup>rd</sup> tier partners are network organisations of between 60 – 150 individual activists or community-based organisations at regional or national level. In some cases, however, one coordinating organisation (per country) is referred to as 2<sup>nd</sup> tier partner, whereas the contractual partners receiving grants are referred to as 3<sup>rd</sup> tier partners. Thus, the definition of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> tier varies among partnerships.

**Southern-led vs northern-led partnerships.** A distinction is made between partnership whose lead partner is located in the “Global North”, referred to as Northern-led partnerships, and partnerships whose lead partner is located in the “Global South” referred to as Southern-led partnerships. The majority of the partnerships, 20 out of 25, is Northern-led.

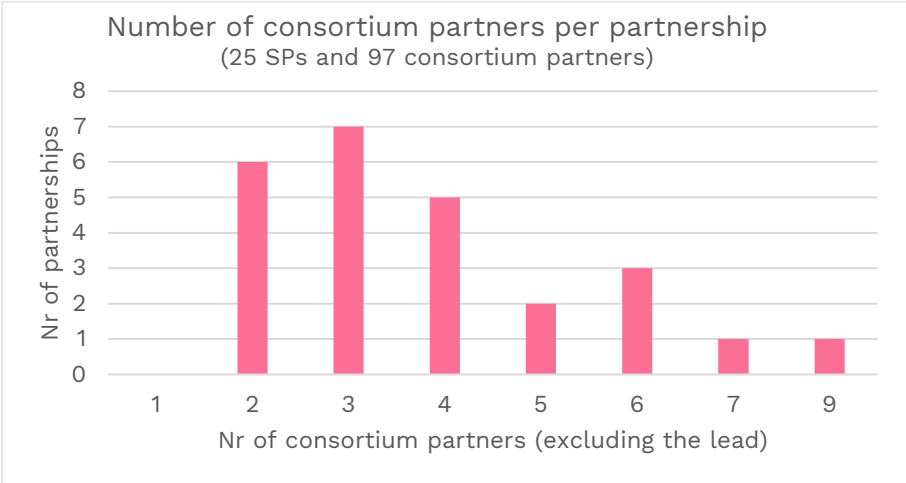


Figure 2: Number of consortium partners per partnership. Source: MDF training and consultancy, based on ToR MTR SCS Uganda. Note: the number refers to the consortium partners (1<sup>st</sup> tier), excluding the lead partner.

In line with the logic of mutual capacity development, all tiers of altogether 300+ partners stand to benefit from participation in the SCS policy framework. However, given their enormous variety, ranging from well-established INGOs with hundreds of professional (paid) staff working in multiple countries to small local organizations run by a handful of volunteers working on a particular issue in a particular community, makes that capacity status and needs vary widely. This means that generalisation and synthesis of findings has to be done with caution.

**2.4 Theory of Change and Results Framework**

In this section, we present our understanding of the overall Theory of Change / Results Framework of the Policy Framework and how this relates to the various thematic results frameworks (WRGE, SRHR, SRoL, Water, FNS, Climate as annexed to the ToR). This chapter also highlights on which result areas and assumptions the MTR has focused.

**Overall SCS Theory of Change and Results Framework**

As part of the SCS policy framework an overall ToC was developed (see Figure 3), including a results framework with basket indicators to monitor progress. This ToC illustrates the MFA’s conceptual

thinking that peaceful and just societies (ultimate goal) requires that all people have equal access to rights, services and opportunities (long term impact of inclusive and sustainable development). This in turn demands that government, private sector, and CSOs work together to adopt, improve and maintain inclusive laws, policies, norms and practices that address the concerns of all marginalised groups in society (medium-term impact).

For this cooperation to happen successfully, a transformation is foreseen, whereby Civil Society<sup>16</sup> is actively engaged with government and private sector in policy / decision-making processes. This requires CSOs having the capacity and legitimacy to engage, while government, private sector and other societal groups are able and willing to engage. In other words, the aspired outcome (sphere of influence) of the SCS policy framework is a transformational shift in the cooperative dynamics between CSOs, government and private sector as reflected in the agenda setting, framing and procedures that shape inclusive policy and decision-making processes.

The SCS policy framework funds partnerships and programmes to contribute to this outcome through a combination of three interconnected intervention strategies<sup>17</sup>:

- 1) Directly supporting and collaborating with local CSOs in their advocacy activities,
- 2) Strengthening the capacity and legitimacy of CSOs to engage in policy influencing, and
- 3) Addressing / protecting the civic space that allows CSOs to engage in policy processes.

The direct results of these intervention strategies are referred to as intermediary outcomes that are within or close to the sphere of control of the partnerships and programmes funded under the SCS policy framework.

The MTR assessed the effectiveness of the SCS policy through validating the causal link from what is referred to as intermediate outcomes (i.e. CSOs having more capacity or support, hence close to the sphere of control) to outcome (i.e. the effects of using the increased capacity / support in the sphere of influence) level results. This was done in several contribution case studies to examine if and how the three intervention strategies applied by the funded partnerships and programmes made a visible and meaningful contribution to the desired societal transformation towards more inclusive policy/decision-making processes. The contribution cases give an impression of how the main intervention strategies adopted by the SPs fit within the overall ToC, and whether these strategies – separate or in combination – contribute to the anticipated transformational change.

### **Thematic Results Frameworks**

Some thematic results frameworks link to the logic of the overall SCS results framework while others reflect another logic of results reporting. The WRGE results framework closely links in both formulated results and indicators to the SCS results framework, the SRHR and Security and Rule of Law frameworks are broader than CS strengthening and directly link in one impact area (SRHR – impact area 4, SRoL – impact area 3) and partly in another (SRHR – outcome 1A, SRoL – outcome 1.1.3). The results frameworks of Water, Food & Nutrition Security and Climate has little to no direct link to the SCS framework, as they do not focus on CS strengthening in their intervention logic. The MTR focused on the main ToC of the SCS policy framework and on results from thematic result frameworks that are clearly linked to the overall framework.

Each partnership was asked to develop a ToC, to fit the reality and priorities of the SPs, while enabling adaptations based on changes and emerging insights.<sup>18</sup> The MTR focused on the relevance of the main ToC and on whether its assumptions proved valid in the Ugandan context. In addition, for the sample cases, the strategic partnerships' ToCs and the adaptations made have been reviewed.

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<sup>16</sup> MFA employs an organisational perspective on civil society, the concept encompasses formal and informal CSOs, professional NGOs, CBOs, social movements, associations, faith-based groups, and alike. Source: Summary Theory of Change SCS framework 2019.

<sup>17</sup> This distinction of three interconnected pathways was made by the MTR to simplify and facilitate discussions with individual SPs and partners. This distinction is not made by the MFA as they consider the first two pathways as one combined pathway.

<sup>18</sup> Source: Summary Theory of Change SCS framework 2019.

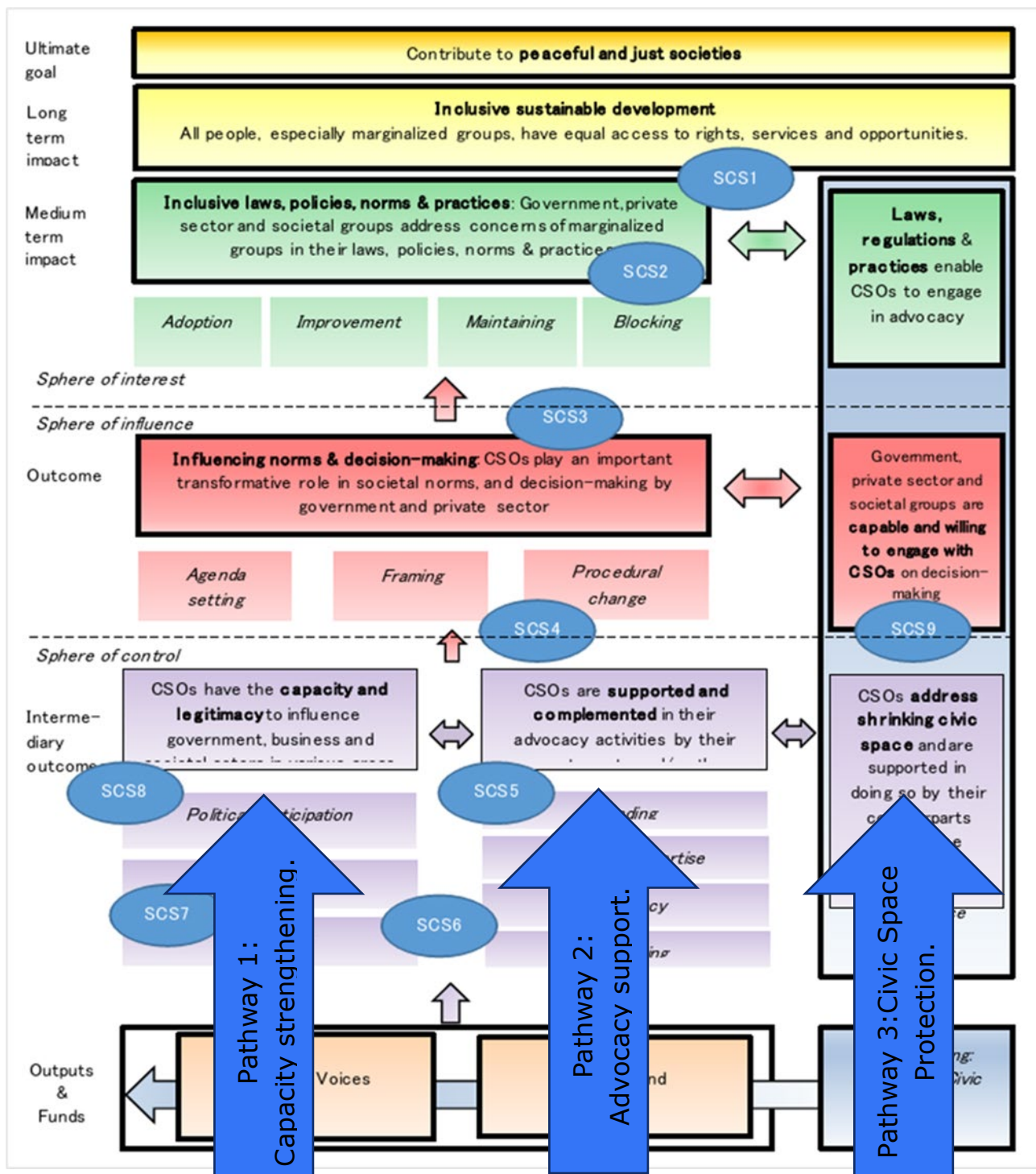


Figure 3: Overall SCS Theory of Change, emphasising its three main pathways of change.

## 3 Methodological Approach

The TOR of the MTR asks for an assessment of the relevance, effectiveness, coherence, and efficiency of the SCS policy framework in Uganda. Under effectiveness, the MTR addresses progress in the organisational capacity of CSOs involved, the inclusiveness of the work being carried out and the contribution of efforts under the SCS policy framework towards higher level results. In the sub-chapters below, the MTR summarises its methodological approach per criteria (combining the capacity assessment with coherence). The detailed MTR design, outlining how the various MTR questions will be answered, can be found Annex 1 (evaluation matrix, with break-down of evaluation questions in sub-questions / indicators, data collection methods and tools).

### 3.1 Relevance

The relevance of the SCS Policy Framework was assessed by examining the needs and civic space of CSOs to meaningfully engage with government and private sector in Uganda on matters of public concern. The assumptions of the SCS Policy Framework were identified from the document review of MFA's policy documents including an Executive Summary of the ToC. The relevance of the policy framework was assessed using a desk review of programmatic documents, other academic literature, survey responses and key informant interviews with internal and external resource persons. During the Organisational Capacity Assessments, respondents reflected on the relevance of the policy framework, the relevance of their own SP ToC, their respective assumptions, as well as the respondents' participation in developing these SP ToCs. During the contribution case analysis, respondents substantiated what had been reported in the SP documents. The findings were validated in the workshops and contribution case analysis.

### 3.2 Organisational capacity of partnerships and coherence

The MTR assessed capacities at both SP and individual CSO level. To establish a mid-term measurement of the organisational capacity of the SPs, we used the Capacity Works (CW) model<sup>19</sup> that distinguishes five success factors for cooperation systems/partnerships: Strategy, Cooperation, Steering Structure, Processes and Learning & innovation. In assessing "advocacy capacities" of individual partners, we used an adapted version of the core advocacy capacity dimensions identified by Elbers and Kamstra (2020)<sup>20,21</sup>. In both cases, a seven-point judgement scale was used from 1 (low) to 4 (high)<sup>22</sup> based on the judgement scales presented in Annexes 2 and 3.

An initial partnership assessment of all SPs took place based on desk-study and survey results. These results were used as basis for a validation meeting with 12 selected SPs (see Annex 4 for the sampling of the capacity assessment cases). In these meetings, participants were asked to describe the existence and functioning of partnership features related to the five success factors using a uniform interview guide (see Annex 10). Based on this, the MTR team members jointly translated the findings in a score for each success factor (see Annex 2 for the judgement scales and annex 15 for the partnership scores).

The MTR intended to adopt a similar approach for the individual capacity assessment, but no documented data was available on this, nor was there certainty that the organisations responding to the survey would be present during the validation meeting. The assessment of the advocacy capacity of individual partners is therefore based on face-to-face meetings with a sample of individual organisations based on a joint interview guide (see annex 10). These meetings immediately followed the joint validation meeting about the partnership assessment to optimize participation and diversity. In these meetings, partner representatives were asked to describe how the six advocacy capacity dimensions are resourced and organised within their own organisations. Based on their responses, the MTR team members assigned a score to each of the six advocacy capacity dimensions using the earlier mentioned judgement criteria (see Annex 3). Ultimately 49 individual partners were assessed (see annex 15 for the individual scores).

Scoring of the capacity assessment results allowed for aggregation and visualisation of the synthesised results and allows this initial measurement to serve as basis for comparison during the endline evaluation scheduled for 2026. The synthesised capacity assessment results presented in this report are therefore based on a combination of desk-study, survey and (group) interview findings related to the 25 individual SPs and 49 individual partners. These synthesised findings were triangulated with the

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<sup>19</sup> Cooperation management for Practitioners, managing social change with Capacity Works, GiZ, 2014

<sup>20</sup> Further details about the use of these assessment models are presented in the inception report.

<sup>21</sup> The eight advocacy dimensions were reduced to six by combining the dimensions on Producing Evidence and Analysing the political arena, and the dimension on Inspiring trust and Build rapport with power holders.

<sup>22</sup> Allowing half-point scores of 1.5, 2.5 and 3.5.

more generic perceptions of 10 independent external resource persons representing various external actors that are not involved in the operations under the SCS policy framework nor stand to benefit from these operations (see Annex 7 with the data sources).

### 3.3 Effectiveness (inclusiveness and contribution analysis)

The review of the effectiveness of the SCS policy framework is based on the results frameworks and models<sup>23</sup> underlying the overall SCS policy framework. The MTR addresses two main sets of effectiveness questions, the first about gender mainstreaming<sup>24</sup> and the second set about the contribution of the SCS policy framework towards anticipated results<sup>25</sup>. The five result areas were:

- Enhancing the power and legitimacy of CSOs:
- Strengthening / creation of social movements
- Meaningful youth participation
- Empowerment of marginalised groups
- Empowerment of women and girls and equal participation in decision-making

A **two-phased approach** was undertaken in responding to these evaluation questions.

First phase:

- The team mapped progress towards the five outcomes based on reports and documentation provided by MFA, Strategic Partnerships and the Funds. For each outcome, different data sets were used, including existing monitoring data<sup>26</sup> and additional primary data that was not explicitly covered by indicators or partnerships and hence not documented. *Roger Hart's Ladder of Participation*<sup>27</sup> with its eight progressive steps was used to measure progress towards the outcome 'meaningful youth participation'.
- To answer the question around effective gender mainstreaming, the team looked at both the process (how SPs understood the concept and planned to mainstream gender and inclusivity in their interventions) and the reported effects (the progress towards equality and inclusion). The latter part includes an analysis of whether partnerships managed to reach the intended groups<sup>28</sup> and to what extent these benefitted equally and were able to participate meaningfully.
- Key informant interviews with programme staff and external experts enriched this to ensure completion, adequate interpretation, and substantiation of documented data.

Second phase:

- Contribution Analysis (CA) was used to – with the use of external stakeholders - substantiate and validate what has been reported by SPs for a selected number (10) of outcomes under the five result areas, and to assess the contribution of the SPs / interventions under the SCS policy framework in Uganda to these outcomes. CA is a suitable methodology for evaluating causal relations in complex lobby and advocacy and capacity-building programmes. CA sets out to identify, categorise and weigh explanatory factors within and outside the SCS framework by consulting external experts and stakeholders that are not direct project implementers. This analysis results in a plausible contribution claim about the significance of different types of SCS interventions and the SCS framework.

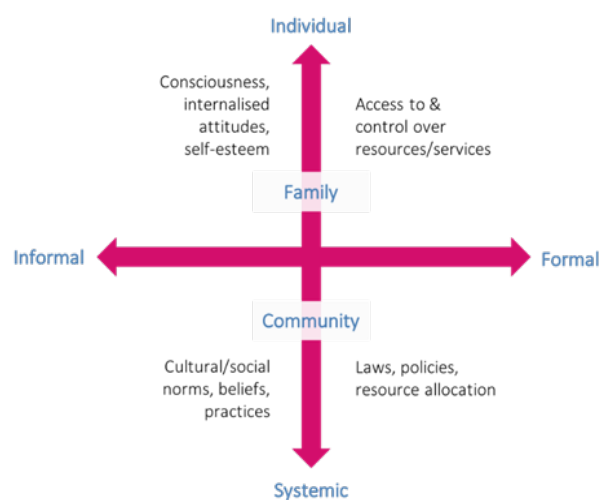


Figure 4: G@W model

<sup>23</sup> TOR annex II: qualitative guidance on results reporting, making sense of the numbers. Supporting tables and figures regarding political roles of CSOs, typologies of advocacy strategies, CSO development stages and core capabilities, types of CSOs and models of participation.

<sup>24</sup> TOR question 9: 9.1 How have gender equality and inclusivity been mainstreamed in the interventions under the SCS framework? 9.2 What has been the progress in systemic change (i.e. benefits) concerning gender equality and the inclusiveness of disadvantaged groups in terms? 9.3 What has been progress concerning the meaningful participation of marginalised / vulnerable groups?

<sup>25</sup> To what extent has the implementation of the SCS policy framework led to (and what activities and outputs contributed to): enhanced power of CSOs and locally embedded legitimacy, strengthened social movements, meaningful youth participation, empowerment of marginalised groups and empowerment of women & girls, equal women participation as decision makers.

<sup>26</sup> Including KPIs measurements by Strategic Partnerships.

<sup>27</sup> p. 14, annex B of TOR

<sup>28</sup> Boys, girls, adolescents, youth, young women and men, adults, people with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ people, religious and ethnic minorities and people in the lowest wealth quintiles.

- The contribution cases also contained an effort to map the effects of gender mainstreaming, inclusivity, and participation. For this we used - besides Hart's participation ladder - the *Gender@Work (G@W) Model*.<sup>29</sup> The G@W model measures progress in systems change, related to gender equality and inclusiveness of disadvantaged groups. It suits the SCS policy framework and its partnerships as it focuses on gender transformation, i.e. systems change. The model's matrix addresses four areas that show what and who is needed to change the system (see Figure 4). The evaluators did not ask the project implementers about their perceptions on how well they covered all the areas in the model, but as gender experts the evaluators were able to make an objective assessment based on observations, interviews with external stakeholders and primary stakeholders (beneficiaries).

MDF used an adapted version of Mayne's approach to Contribution Analysis, through the following steps:

- Before in-country data collection, specific outcomes were selected (suggested by the evaluators), and central causal questions were formulated to reflect the causality being examined, with a conscious integration of inclusion and gender sensitivity.
- During in-country data collection, contributing factors were identified and categorised, including those related to gender equality, social inclusion, and participation. Data was collected from primary stakeholders / beneficiary representatives and other relevant external resource persons and actors, through interviews and focus group discussions.
- After in-country data collection, the data was analysed by the evaluators weighing contributing factors based on their importance and reliability, formulating contribution claims and scores. A synthesis of multiple contribution cases provided insights into key contributing factors, preconditions, rival and hampering factors. This enabled the validation of existing approaches and the formulation of alternative (= new) or enriched (= adapted) hypotheses. These findings were validated and discussed in the sensemaking meetings.

### 3.4 Efficiency

Efficiency was evaluated both in terms of coordination and structure of the partnership instruments, also in relation to alternative ways of funding (i.e. direct funding to local organisations, project-based funding), and in terms of partnership costs (i.e. resources that are not regranted to local partners), and in terms of organisation of financial decision-making is organised within the partnerships; we also analysed the difference between northern-led and southern-led partnerships in a qualitative manner.

We mostly used qualitative indicators to answer these questions, as quantitative data was not available or not directly comparable for most partnerships. The analysis of quantitative data mainly included:

- Comparison of actual expenditures with planned expenditures.
- % of grant funds that were disbursed to local organisations.

We analysed documents for all the partnerships and funds (financial reports, where available; budget, annual reports and annual plans, programme documents, and individual MTRs), to check whether the expenditures were in line with the budget, and what share of the budget is transferred to local organisations.

The stakeholder survey provided information on initial perception of 1<sup>st</sup> tier partners (and for some questions on 2<sup>nd</sup> tier partners) regarding overall organisation and involvement in financial decision-making, as well as efficiency of the disbursement mechanisms. Survey questions were formulated using a 7-level agreement scale, and giving the possibility to add or clarify on these quantitative questions by means of open questions.

In-depth interviews for the organisational capacity assessment and the contribution cases, as well as interviews with external stakeholders were then used to gain a deeper understanding of the funding mechanisms, the advantages and disadvantages of partnerships vis-à-vis funds and project funding, as well as satisfaction of local partners regarding financial decision-making and financial requirements.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Aruna Rao and David Kelleher. 2002. "Unravelling Institutionalized Gender Inequality." Gender at Work, [www.genderatwork.org](http://www.genderatwork.org)

<sup>30</sup> A disaggregation of the quantitative results by policy instrument, and location of partnership lead, was not possible due missing data for partnership instruments.

### 3.5 Sampling, data collection and analysis

To ensure all 25 SPs are covered by the MTR without overburdening individual SPs with multiple MTR activities, we sampled different SPs for the capacity validation meetings and the contribution cases (see Annex 4). In doing so, we used the following selection criteria for distributing the 25 SPs, to ensure both groups are equally representative for the full SP population:

- Spread over the various funding instruments
- Thematic diversity
- Northern and Southern led SPs

From the outset, it was understood that the practical feasibility of covering all 25 SPs would depend on the responsiveness of SP leaders in providing the necessary information and contact details and their ability to mobilise partners to take part. To ensure sufficient representativeness, the MTR managed to go beyond the minimum of eight SPs for both the Capacity assessment validation and Contribution Cases that was set during inception.

As a result, the following **samples** were used to inform the MTR:

- **Sampling of 12 SPs** for validation of the initial capacity assessment (MTR question 4) ensuring coverage of the various instruments of the SCS policy framework, thematic and leadership diversity (both in terms of lead agency and Southern versus Northern-led),
- **Sampling of 3 to 4 individual partners of the 12 SPs selected for validation meetings** (MTR question 4). This purposive selection from among partners present during the validation meeting included both 2<sup>nd</sup> (= national level) and 3<sup>rd</sup> tier (= sub-national level) and considered diversity in geographical and thematic focus as well as the type of organisation. Sampling was, however, limited to the partners that actually took part in the validation meeting, resulting in reduced representativeness (see chapter 3.6 below)
- During inception the MTR aimed to undertake 15 contribution cases, one for each of the remaining 13 SPs, and 2 for the LFS Funds active in Uganda. In practice, the MTR managed to conduct a **sample of 10 contribution analyses cases** (MTR question 10), covering 5 out of 7 SPs operating under PoV, 2 out of 3 under PoW and SRHR and 1 case on the LFS Funds. The reason why some of the foreseen contribution cases did not materialise was, because of slow responsiveness making that the MTR could not include them within its timeframe. Two SP cases fell through due to the absence of staff in Uganda, which hampered the mobilisation of the necessary independent resource persons.

The contribution cases represented seven northern-led SPs and three southern-led and covered themes such as climate, FNS, religious freedom, LGBTIQ+, trade, WRGE and SRHR. Regarding Leading from the South, one project financed through ADWF has been subject to contribution analysis to assess the relevance and relative effectiveness to other cases.

- **Sampling of sufficiently informed external resource persons for the capacity assessments** was done based on references received from the EKN and reference group members. These resource persons were asked to provide inputs on the overall relevance, capacity constraints and performance of CS in Uganda, rather than on individual SPs and partners. Sampling of external resource persons for individual capacity assessment was not undertaken as it appeared infeasible to identify and mobilise external resource persons that are sufficiently informed to provide reliable insights into the internal capacity of an individual SP /partner. Besides, their mobilisation would depend on referrals from the individual SPs and partners themselves, which would affect their independence.
- **Sampling of 3 to 4 external resource persons for each contribution cases** was done in consultation with the individual SPs and Funds involved. It is acknowledged that this would affect their independence. However, given the clear provision that these external resource persons would need to represent the beneficiary group of a particular case, while the line of questioning related to the identification and weighing of contribution factors rather than the performance of an individual SP, the MTR judged the risk of response bias in these interviews to be acceptable.

As can be seen from the evaluation matrix in Annex 1, the MTR relied on **multiple data collection methods for each of the evaluation questions**, which enabled data triangulation to enhance the reliability and depth of findings. To facilitate joint analysis, all MTR team members brought together summarised findings from different data collection methods and sources in a data collection matrix, organised by source and evaluation question (see Table 2 below), where possible using colour-codes to distinguish critical from positive and neutral findings.

Table 2: Data summary matrix

	Source 1	Source 2	....
<b>Evaluation Question 1</b>			
<b>Evaluation Question 2</b>			
....			

The MTR team used this overview to triangulate findings, and **joint data analysis** to formulate initial observations (e.g., seemingly contradictions, dilemmas, strategic questions) and initial conclusions (i.e., preliminary responses to the respective evaluation questions). These ‘processed’ findings were presented and used for discussion during the final **validation meetings** that took place in Kampala on 22 and 23 May 2024, which was attended by representatives of around 20 SPs. The results of these validation meetings were used to inspire thinking and enrich the MTR’s conclusions and recommendations (see Annex 17 for take aways from the validation meetings).

### 3.6 Methodological risks and biases

The MTR was designed to manage and/or mitigate a range of context and process-related **risks** identified during the inception process. The context-related risks primarily concerned safety and security, which were mitigated as described above. The process-related risks included low responsiveness, limited availability of relevant documentation, and various forms of bias (researcher, sample and respondent bias).

The risk of **low responsiveness** to the survey and meeting requests was mitigated by appointing one individual contact person within the MTR team for each of the SPs and Funds operating under the framework. In this way, a direct and personal connection between the MTR team and the desired respondents was created, which helped in ensuring that ultimately 22 of the 25 SPs were actively involved in the MTR, either as part of the capacity assessments or as part of the contribution cases.

This direct connection also helped ensure access to **available documentation**<sup>31</sup>, although the level of documented Uganda-specific information differed a lot among SPs. This is caused by the fact that SPs/Funds work in multiple countries and apply different practices in collecting and aggregating information from the countries they operate in. This means that for some evaluation questions for which we had to rely primarily on available documentation findings are limited to the SPs that had relevant information documented on this (e.g. related to efficiency, slightly more than half of the SPs provided country-specific data related to budget versus expenditure). Where such differences in available documentation were encountered, this is mentioned in the findings to illustrate the representativeness of this information. Moreover, SP documentation contained little to no reference to the advocacy capacity of individual partners, which means that this part of the MTR relies exclusively on primary data collected through surveys and (group)interviews.

The various forms of bias were mitigated as much as possible. **Research bias** was mitigated by making sure that data collection and analysis related to the SPs and Funds were conducted by pairs of evaluators as much as possible, combined with regular plenary exchange / sense-making of findings among MTR team members. **Sampling bias** was minimised by ensuring that (in design) all SPs would be covered<sup>32</sup>, in addition to 49 individual partners of the 12 SPs subjected to a validation of their capacity assessment. Ultimately, we covered almost 90% of the SPs<sup>33</sup>, while 49 (of the approximately 300) individual partners were met separately to assess their individual advocacy capacity. **Selection bias** was mitigated by ensuring that the MTR directly sent the survey link to all partners whenever security considerations would allow. In addition, individual partners were selected by the MTR from those partners present, using earlier mentioned selection criteria. Finally, independent external resource persons were identified and selected in consultation with the EKN and reference group members.

**Response bias** was mitigated by triangulating the results of different data collection methods (desk-study, survey, and visits), which were then subjected to two validation meetings in Kampala to facilitate maximum participation of all SPs and Funds.

<sup>31</sup> All SPs undertook their own MTRs, which were made available and used by this MT as secondary information source during data collection. A meta-analysis of the MTR reports conducted by the SP themselves took place in parallel to this MTR and expressed doubts about the quality of these reports after the draft report of this MTR was finalised. As these MTRs were only used as secondary data and not on their own, this does not change the main findings and results of this MTR, but the reader is cautioned to take this into account.

<sup>32</sup> Substantially covered means being part of the Partnership capacity assessment or part of the contribution cases.

<sup>33</sup> The remaining 3 SPs, either had no staff based in Uganda or did not respond timely enough to be included.

In addition, ample efforts were undertaken to collect data from **external resource persons**. In doing so, it appeared unfeasible to mobilise sufficiently informed and independent external resource persons that could comment on the relevance, capacity and performance of individual partnerships or partners. Instead, using references from the EKN and the MTR reference group, 10 independent external experts were mobilised - representing research-centres, development partners, government, and other NGOs. These external resource persons were asked about the overall relevance of the SCS policy framework and the (capacity) challenges faced by the CS sector in Uganda with the aim to triangulate the overall synthesised findings rather than findings related to individual SPs or partners. In addition, each contribution case included on average 3-4 external resource persons, representing primary stakeholders, local authorities, other NGOs or development partners, journalists or media actors and relevant experts. Only one case had the limitation of only one external resource person.

The mitigation measures as described above helped reduce risks, but given limited resources and a complex context, some methodological risks / biases remain (see Table 3), that need to be considered when reading this report.

Table 3: Remaining methodological risks / biases.

Type of risk / bias	Remaining risk / bias after mitigation.	Effect on MTR results.
<b>Low responsiveness</b>	Despite several attempts, no (timely) response was received from three of the 25 SPs (in one case because of absence of staff in Uganda)	Low, as it concerns a policy evaluation and not an individual SP assessment, hence coverage of 22 of the 25 SPs provides a good insight in the way the SPs have operationalised the SCS policy in Uganda.
<b>Limited documentation</b>	Varying levels of detail in available Uganda-specific documentation for the different SPs.	Limited, as some efficiency findings that are largely based on available documentation are not fully representative, but this only relates to a small part of the overall findings.
<b>Biased documentation</b>	D	
<b>Research bias</b>	Despite the available interview guides and judgement criteria, different team members may still interpret findings differently.	Limited, as the MTR findings are a synthesis of inputs from 25 SPs, so small (mitigated) differences in interpretation of findings related to individual SPs will have had limited effect on the synthesised findings.
<b>Sampling bias</b>	The MTR relied on SPs' cooperation in the selection of limited CA cases and the presence of individual partners to be selected for individual assessments.	Moderate for Contribution Cases as resources do not allow for sample size that provide a fully representative insight in the scale and nature of outcome-level results. Limited for individual capacity assessments, as 49 would be a representative number, and those selected represented significant diversity in size, nature, thematic and geographical coverage.
<b>Selection bias</b>	Not all partners could be connected directly by the MTR, while the SPs leads could have decided to only invite their 'best' partners.	Moderate, as a large majority of survey respondents could be approached directly. Also, a large number of quite varied individual partners were present in the meeting, giving the MTR the impression of fair representation. However, if SP leads would have deliberately left out certain partners there is no way for the MTR to know.
<b>Response bias</b>	No control over which partners show up in SP meetings, making that partners with limited travel time and / or a more than average interest in the MTR will have shown up.	Limited, due to the triangulation of interview results with survey and desk-study findings. Besides, despite their 'self-selection', the total group of interviewees represented a wide variety that may not be fully representative but certainly is illustrative of the diversity of the 25 SPs.
	Much of the SP specific data is collected from SP staff themselves and therefore includes the risk of bias.	Limited, as initial findings are based on desk-study and survey results. These findings were triangulated through validation meetings and contribution cases, in which SP staff were asked to respond to

		descriptive questioned substantiated by examples. Based on this, and the more generic responses of a range of external resource persons, the MTR team members drew their own external conclusions reflected in this report to minimize bias.
	Desk-study findings largely depend on documentation produced by the SPs and MFA that tend to be biased towards positive results.	Limited on the OCAs, as the desk-study was primarily used for the initial (fact-driven) assessment of SP capacity (e.g. does it reflect a joint strategy, clear and inclusive governance arrangements or harmonized procedures). Reasonable on the effectiveness assessment presented in chapter 4.5 as findings related to progress towards the five main results areas (EQ 10) rely largely on documented findings. Findings related to systemic change (chapter 4.6) and contribution (4.7) are primarily collected through the SP visits and contribution cases and depend much less on desk-study.
	Dependence on contribution case owners for mobilisation external resource persons.	Limited, as the line of questioning is about relevant neutral topics (contributing factors) that are less subject to response bias.

### 3.7 Process steps and work schedule

Table 4: Evaluation plan and key deliverables

Phases	Evaluation activities
<b>Inception</b> January- February 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluation Kick-off Meeting with DSO/reference group</li> <li>• Preliminary review of the relevant documents</li> <li>• Detailed methodological design work plan with practical arrangements for data collection</li> <li>• Draft inception report</li> <li>• Meeting with reference group on the inception report</li> <li>• Presenting, collecting feedback from the DSO/reference group on the Inception Report and integrating feedback for final Inception Report.</li> </ul>
<b>Deliverable</b>	<b>Inception Report</b>
<b>Data collection</b> February- April 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Country-level engagement and data collection arrangements.</li> <li>• Develop data collection and processing tools, templates/guidelines (survey design, interview guides, focus-group discussion protocol, etc.)</li> <li>• Thorough desk review of programme information and other documents</li> <li>• Guiding and conducting data collection remote/ in-country: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Quantitative data collection – rolling out the survey among all Strategic Partnerships (February- March)</i></li> <li>2. <i>Qualitative data collection –in-country data collection on relevance, efficiency and capacity assessments (including validation meetings with 12 SPs), Group meetings with selected partnerships to validate capacity assessment (13 April – 8 May 2024)</i></li> <li>3. <i>KIIs in the context of 10 Contribution cases (12 April- 3 May 2024)</i></li> <li>4. <i>KIIs with external stakeholders for assessments of Relevance and Coherence of SPs (13-19 April)</i></li> <li>5. <i>Remote KIIs with international SP leads for Relevance, Coherence, and Efficiency within SPs (May 2024)</i></li> </ol> </li> </ul>

<p><b>Data analysis and Reporting</b> May – June 2024</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initiate analysis to summarise key findings and initial conclusions in preparation for the participatory sense-making workshop.</li> <li>• Hybrid sense-making/validation workshop with programme stakeholders, in Uganda including online sessions to allow remote participation at key moments.</li> <li>• Draft report – presentation and discussion</li> <li>• Collect written responses/feedback to draft evaluation reports with recommendations.</li> <li>• Submission of the final report that includes the Reference Group comments/recommendations.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Deliverable</b></p>	<p>Draft report including Annex with findings from validation meetings Final report MS PowerPoint presentation</p>
<p><b>Communication deliverables</b> (July – August 2024)</p>	<p>To be completed after final report.</p>

## 4 Findings

### 4.1 Relevance

This chapter addresses the following questions related to the relevance and validity of the ToC of the SCS policy framework in Uganda.

- |  |
|--|
| <b>1.</b> What is the current situation/context of the SCS programme with regard to civic space and human rights in Uganda concerning the topics the partnerships focus on?      |
| <b>2.</b> To what extent are the Ministry's ToCs and respective underlying assumptions relevant and valid in Uganda?   |
| <b>3.</b> To what extent are the partnerships' ToCs and respective underlying assumptions relevant and valid in Uganda? Were these ToCs and assumptions adjusted when necessary? |

The **current context of the SCS programme** regarding civic space and human rights in Uganda is evolving and complex. There is confirmation from the various strategic partners of the issues affecting civic space and human rights in Uganda. Overall, CSOs and external stakeholders reported restrictions through laws and policy which constrained CSOs operations and the environment in which the CSOs needed to implement their programmes. CSOs are constrained by overburdensome compliance obligations which sometimes require CSOs reporting to up to nine agencies of government. Restrictive laws include the Anti-Homosexuality Act and the Public Order Management Act. Laws that create overburdensome compliance requirements include the NGO Act and the Anti- Money Laundering Act.

The measures adopted to enforce the covid-19 pandemic restrictions affected the Ugandan context of CSO programming. Restrictions on opening up public spaces and gatherings required different strategies to continue advocacy programmes for those that needed to reach vulnerable communities in physical spaces. Interviews with SPs indicated a restriction on how the CSOs could implement advocacy programming. This was corroborated by external respondents who confirmed the impact of Covid-19 on advocacy programmes in Uganda.

Interviews with SPs indicate constraints emerging from the 2021 election cycle as affecting the context within CSOs operate in Uganda. The desk study of MTR also identified these constraints. Examples given include the incidents of violence before and after the 2021 election, forced disappearance of citizens, mainly youth, remain a concern for those CSOs in the thematic area of security and rule of law. Unlawful detentions of key staff of CSOs have been identified as a factor affecting the context of work for those involved in the climate thematic area. Security of persons and information concerns were raised by the majority of SPs and corroborated by external respondents.

The extent of constraint for CSOs varies depending on the sensitivity / controversiality of the work being done by the SPs. For instance, those CSOs engaging in basic service delivery such as providing knowledge on hygiene or health find it easier to implement within the communities than those who focus on advocacy for human rights within the sphere of property rights, security and rule of law, and sexual and reproductive rights. Within the economic sector, the constraints are nuanced. For instance, SPs engaging in value addition in areas of agro-export and those engaged in implementing programmes related to infrastructure development experienced less constraints.

Based on the responses of some of the external stakeholders and document review, the MTR finds that the context of the SCS policy framework can be explained by the historical evolution of the relationship between the government of Uganda and CSOs and the related trends in civic

space.<sup>34</sup> CSOs have historically been viewed as responsible for bridging the service delivery gap and where the CSOs have evolved beyond this role, they have often been regarded by the Ugandan government with suspicion.

Multiple stakeholders confirmed in interviews that the partnership funding instruments are highly relevant, in particular for informal organisations working with ‘hard-to-reach’ communities. In addition, many partners emphasise they would not be able to formalise their organisations to be credible and legitimate in working with communities of action without the partnership funding. One external respondent corroborated this finding and described the funding challenges as leading to malnourished and vulnerable CSOs beyond the capital city in Uganda. The availability of funding therefore remains a relevant means of keeping them engaged in hard-to-reach communities.

Related to this, external sources confirmed that CSOs are financially dependent and frequently face funding gaps which causing these organisations to be dynamic, weak and fragile. Multiple stakeholders indicated that the Government’s suspension of the Democratic Governance Facility (DGF) basket funding mechanism had limited sources of funding to bilateral funding from development partners, which was not always adequate to address programming needs of the CSOs.

External respondents indicated that institution capacity gaps within CSOs sometimes impact their advocacy and lobby programmes. External respondents indicated that CSOs in Uganda that are engaged in the security and rule of law thematic area had attempted to ally through loose formations. Loose formations were regarded as more fluid and agile arrangements which would enable these organisations to advocate and lobby for law and policy reforms in the electoral laws of the country. However, these loose formations were banned by the Government prior to the 2021 election cycle.

The MTR found through desk study and interviews with CSOs that youth, being the majority of the Ugandan population, have capacity strengthening needs relating to the thematic areas of the SCS Policy Framework. Small grants provided to youth-led groups were seen as vital to establish formal and functional governance systems. An example of this was funds made available for formal registration of the organisations which enabled these organisations to comply with the NGO Act requirements. The small community-based organisations that advocate and lobby at the community level can implement programmes and learn due to the financial support provided by the implementing partners.

Despite being an advocacy framework in design, the MTR found through document review and key informant insights that the SCS framework also allows for flexibility to accommodate rapid response grants, which support those most at risk of losing their livelihoods as a result of being structurally excluded and criminalised. Within a restricted context for protecting human rights, the flexibility of funds provides a chance to protect these most vulnerable members of the communities.

Regarding **the relevance of the overall ToC** of the SCS policy framework, multiple stakeholders confirmed a continuing need for capacity development for the CSOs irrespective of how long these organisations have been operating in Uganda. The CSOs confirm that as communities, context and technology evolve, the capacity needs and roles of CSOs evolve as well. These transformations present continuing opportunities and demands for strengthening the appropriate capacity within the country. The CSOs recognise that, while there is a broader need for capacity building of civil society towards movement building, the individual CSOs also require capacity building to be able to collaborate and cooperate in such movement building.

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<sup>34</sup> John De Coninck, Uganda’s Civil Society- An Overview of Issues, in John De Coninck and Arthur Larok (eds), Uganda’s Civil Society History, Challenges and Prospects, chapter 1, page 5

The desk study and key informant interviews with SP leads, illustrate the diversity of CSOs in themes / topics, and maturity level. This implies different capabilities and advocacy needs for CS in Uganda. The advocacy needs, which typically change and vary depending on context and maturity, are well-addressed under the SCS policy framework. The ToC is dedicated to supporting partner CSOs in the implementation of their advocacy activities, and a substantial part of resources are used for that. This illustrates recognition of the increasing maturity level of partners (i.e. enhancing both capacity and resources), which also leads to an increasingly loud call for a more deliberate localisation process.

The ToC is relevant under the current context, given that it aims to address shrinking civic space to encourage both governments and the private sector to engage with civil society. In interviews, external resource persons, however, voiced the opinion that this cannot only be done by a SCS policy framework that works with civil society only, questioning the assumption that there is continuing willingness of government to work with civil society, particularly in some thematic areas. They stress the need for complementary efforts directed at government, especially as government performance is not only a matter of political will but also of capabilities and resources. This suggestion is met by some opposition with CSOs questioning how a development partner can justify supporting CSOs fighting for rights while also supporting a government that is violating those rights. In this context, it is important to note that the EKN at present does not engage in direct government-to-government development interventions.

The desk study and key informant interviews indicate that the Ministry's ToC remains valid although not all thematic areas have found the government willing to engage with CSOs in decision-making. Desk study and key informants from some of the thematic areas indicated that the CSOs working in thematic areas related to sexual and reproductive health have had mixed experiences with working with the government. An example given was being able to participate in national planning processes in the health sector yet at the same time, being restricted by laws related to sexual minorities. SPs indicated that this could be attributed to the social-cultural norms related to sexual orientation.

The second aspect of the relevance of the ToC relates to **the extent to which the underlying assumptions of the SCS Policy framework are relevant and valid in Uganda**. This MTR provides an overall analysis against each of the assumptions documented by the MFA.

**The SCS Policy framework assumes that CSOs play a crucial role in changing power relations.**

The external respondents confirmed that CSOs still play a vital role in changing power relations at national and sub-national levels more so in an ever-changing political context. Across the thematic areas, the SPs that participated in the OCA indicated that they are required by the NGO legislation to engage with holders of power at national and sub-national level because the organisations cannot operate without consent of the NGO Bureau and cannot implement programmes in an area without a Memorandum of Understanding with the specific local government. Beyond the statutory requirements, SPs claim that they are engaging with powerholders to influence decision-making. Examples include at sub-national level, CSO influencing the district's budget allocation; women local council leaders tabling bills for bye-laws in the district councils. At national level, civil society engagement with Members of Parliament or ministries (ministry of health, ministry of gender labour and social development) through advocacy efforts, such as presenting positions, influencing policy formulation which has contributed to reforming clauses in laws enacted in electoral processes and SRHR.

The contribution cases confirm that CSOs put pressure on power holders and thereby change the power relationships; examples include CSOs ensuring participation of women at all levels, including decision-making in politics; supporting community groups to hold regular meetings with local authorities, and even challenging (the monopoly of certain) private sector actors.

The policy framework **assumes that CSOs perform 4 types of political roles to change power relations**. These include Educational (internal & external); Communicative (linking state & society); Representational (voice & resistance) and Cooperative (subsidiarity & coordination) roles. The MTR finds confirmation of all 4 types of roles;

**Educational:** Responses from SPs indicate that the CSOs working under various thematic areas include relevant aspects of knowledge sharing among their programme activities. There was reference to internal knowledge sessions particularly on provisions of the law, within the organisations. Key informants provided examples of learning together as thematic groups on contextual issues such as requirements for compliance with Uganda's NGO legislation and Computer Misuse legislation and digital safety. In addition, the external educational role is demonstrated by many participating CSOs, primarily focused on awareness / knowledge building of their own constituencies, not only by informing them about but also how to 'get' their rights.

**Communicative:** Key informants from SPs and external respondents confirmed that programme activities included development of knowledge briefs which were essential tools for CSOs to engage with the government institutions, hence linking state and society. However, an added comment an external respondent was that in many instances this was not extensive and primarily based on own experience rather than independent institutional research.

**Representational:** Key informants participating in the OCA confirmed that the 3<sup>rd</sup> tier community-based organisations are usually led by individuals who belong to the target community, in many instances youth or women. As indicated in section 4.5 of this report, CSO recognition has improved, they have increased their reach and regularly meet with their constituency. Contribution cases confirm that CSOs organise those who they represent, collect their views and represent them when advocating for change.

**Cooperative:** In many instances, key respondents from SPs indicated that they worked cooperatively with other CSOs in the thematic group. An example is regional networks and national women networks that bring together CSOs to provide platforms for the CSOs to engage with power holders. However, in a few instances there were stakeholders that felt that their work did not relate much to the work of other CSOs supported by the same SP. An example is an SP that had a broad coverage for economic empowerment among women, given the diversity of vulnerable women.

The SCS policy framework ToC **assumes that different roles require different organisational forms (i.e. formal/informal), capacities and different forms of legitimacy**. The CSOs which were grantees were all formal organisations that complied with the NGO laws of Uganda, but they work with a range of community based and informal organisations, which have diverse capacities (to mobilise communities, understand the social context, manage resources, document evidence, and advocacy). However, an external respondent claimed that this assumption was valid given the shrinking civic space where CSOs had devised informal means of collaborating through loose formations which could shield individual CSOs from being subjected to punitive measures from the authorities. In addition, the wide diversity of partners operating in different (more or less complementary) ways under the SCS policy framework is testimony of a reality where different organisational forms perform different roles.

The SCS policy framework **assumes that when pressured, informed and/or persuaded by CSOs, states, companies and societal actors change their laws, policies and/or norms, and their practices to be more sustainable, equitable and inclusive**. The key respondents from SPs confirmed this core assumption across thematic areas. During discussions with SPs for the OCA, participants confirmed that CSOs could pressure or persuade the government to change some policies. The contribution cases and consultation of external respondents confirmed the validity of this assumption in the SRHR thematic area, and the agro-processing value chains. In sensitive

thematic areas, the added remark which emerged from external respondents was that there was often a need to recognise the social and cultural norms that were prevalent which could affect the government's responsiveness to pressure to change laws and policies.

A further **assumption/precondition of the SCS policy framework is that CSOs need civic space to perform political roles.** SPs in various thematic areas confirmed and illustrated the validity of this assumption. In their reports and responses they repeatedly confirm that civic space differs per sector, which strongly impacts the ease, risks and effectiveness of their work. Directly addressing the civic space is therefore a logical and valid pathway in the ToC of the SCS policy framework (i.e. civic space is part of the policy design, and not just an assumption). The added remark emerging from key informants in the OCA and the contribution cases was that apart from civic space, there is also still an enormous need for service delivery within rural communities, as a precondition for civil society to collaborate with its constituency in advocacy efforts.

The SCS policy framework had identified that **as a precondition, CSOs need to be locally rooted, strong, legitimate and autonomous to perform political roles.** Key respondents and external respondents confirmed the assumption to be valid. The contribution cases show that indeed certain factors, that include strong actors, had been a precondition for the changes that took place. Key respondents and the external respondents confirmed that locally rooted CSOs have better knowledge of the local context, which can be useful for adapting advocacy strategies. On the other hand, SPs claimed that the partnerships provided opportunities for learning lessons from CSOs in other jurisdictions. The MTR finds this assumption to be partly valid.

External respondents confirmed the need for flexible, long-term funding to strengthen the CSOs, as a precondition for a policy framework to strengthen civil society in Uganda. An example given was a dependence on donor support for the majority of CSOs implementing programmes in the national and sub-national levels, and an ever-changing context which requires flexibility in re-allocating financial resources.

Altogether, the MTR finds the **Ministry's ToCs and underlying assumptions largely relevant but somewhat incomplete.** Supporting civil society's capacity for lobby and advocacy will enable civil society to effectively execute their advocacy work and advocate for better service delivery and accountability of the Government of Uganda and that the CSOs will be able to protect/ enlarge the civic space. At the same time, undertaking advocacy work brings experiences about what works and does not work, which when adequately captured, can feed into reflection and exchange processes that result in a more intrinsic and cyclic process of capacity building of Ugandan civil society.

In terms of gaps in the ToC, the main issue brought up relates to the possibility of complementing advocacy support with other types of support (notably service delivery / economic empowerment). A significant number of SPs indicate that there is usefulness in accompanying lobby and advocacy with service delivery, especially if this concerns putting the preconditions in place for engaging in advocacy (i.e. having the necessary time, income, and safety). Those CSOs that are able to reach the lowest level of community-based organisation, find that the service delivery need is more urgent than the need for lobby and advocacy.

Another 'gap' in the ToC was seen to be in the absence of a clear link to international advocacy processes. The ToC focuses on strengthening civil society at the country level, but given that SPs include international partners, there are reportedly links whereby national advocacy efforts and experiences are used to strengthen international advocacy efforts and the other way around. Also, the relevance of international advocacy and advocacy directed at inter-governmental organisations on issues related to international investments (oil pipeline, large agricultural investors) was mentioned by some SPs as a missing element of the current ToC.

In examining the **ToCs of the SPs themselves**, documentation and interviews included multiple references to more or less regular **reviews of the partnerships' ToCs and respective underlying assumptions in Uganda by the majority of SPs**. The SPs implementing in Uganda were expected to adapt the ToCs to the context in which the partnerships were operating. The SPs indicated in interviews that the choice of programming and strategies was often guided by alignment with the overall ToC. One example relates to the activities implemented in the thematic area of climate to include youth and women in specific geographical locations; health thematic area to include adolescent girls from specific geographic areas.

Document review also indicated that the SPs had conducted baseline studies and MTRs which validated the partnership-specific ToCs. At the 1<sup>st</sup> tier, desk study shows that a review of the ToCs was done after the confirmation of grant awards and at the start of implementation in the shape of inception reports. At 2<sup>nd</sup> tier, SPs interviews affirm an ongoing review of the ToCs. In the majority of instances, the 3<sup>rd</sup> tier did not actively engage with ToCs but regularly provides information about contextual factors which would incentivise or disincentivise programme implementation. This information is then documented and included in the ToC review by the 2<sup>nd</sup> tier partners.

In addition, the **partnerships' assumptions** are, when necessary, refined and adjusted. There is consensus on the need to adjust with the passing of legislation which would impede/penalise stakeholders for implementation of activities in some thematic areas. The adjustments relate to how the CSOs implementing programmes in Uganda can continue to work and influence social norms and policies. This indicates that even where there are adjustments in the assumptions, these remain aligned to MFA's ToC. One question that kept coming back, however, is related to the role of the EKN in contributing to the ambitions of the ToC, which by many SPs was felt to be less clear.

The MTR finds that the **SPs had relevant ToCs** which were in most cases adapted to the Ugandan context. Examples from the OCA and contribution cases confirm that the SPs continually assessed their operating environment to refine the assumptions. Moreover, the MTR finds that the **assumptions underlying the SPs ToC were also valid** when contextualised in Uganda, with the added remark that the civic space context is often dynamic in Uganda and engagement with the government is likely to shift with the changes in context.

## 4.2 Capacity

In this chapter, we address the following evaluation questions related to the capacity development of partnerships and individual partners.

<b>4.</b> What is the current level of organisational capacity of partnerships under the policy framework as a whole and of CSOs across the three tiers, active in Uganda under the SCS policy framework?
<b>5.</b> How is organisational capacity strengthening conceptualised by MFA, EKN Kampala, partnerships, alliance members and among/by CSOs across the three tiers and what differences between these conceptualisations can be identified?
<b>6.</b> What activities were undertaken to strengthen organisational capacity, across all three tiers, and what subjects/topics were dealt with? Do gaps in training needs/learning requirements, among training participants, exist and, if so, what were these gaps?
<b>7.</b> What organisational capacity strengthening activities and subjects were deemed the most- and the least successful and useful.
<b>8.</b> Did the implementation of the policy framework, and especially organisational capacity strengthening activities, cause unintended/unexpected effects (positive and/or negative) and, if so, what were their causes, implications and/or results?

### 4.2.1 Capacity assessment of partnerships.

The MTR set out to assess the organisational capacity of SPs as a whole and the advocacy capacity of (a sample of) individual partners. The aim of this is to gain insight in the current capacity status of partnerships and individual partners, which could then also serve as basis for comparison with the endline evaluation scheduled for 2026.

The partnership assessments started with an initial assessment of how well each of the 25 SPs scores against the five success factors of the Capacity Works model, based on desk-study and survey responses. Subsequently, validation meetings took place with 12 of the 25 SPs to arrive at a more substantiated capacity assessment. This resulted in the following cumulative scores per SP (see Figure 5 below).

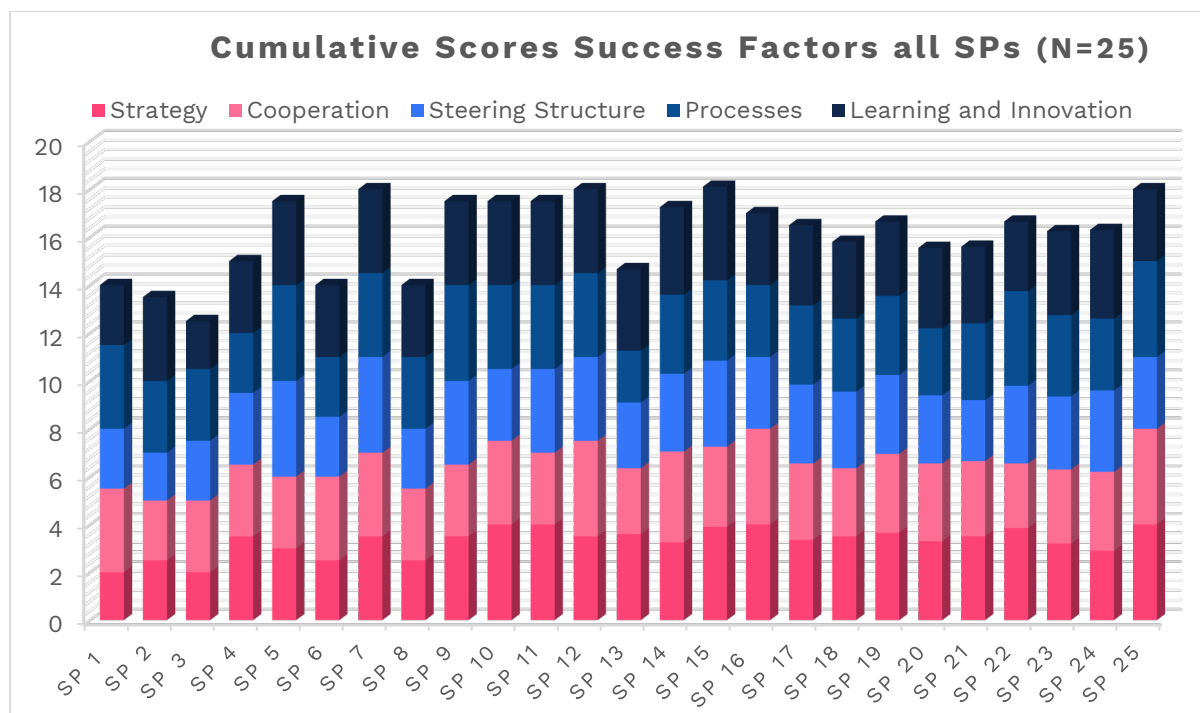


Figure 5: Cumulative partnership capacity scores (the scores for SP 1-12 show the scores following the validation meetings, while the scores for SP 13-25 are based on desk study and survey only).

The first 12 SPs are the ones who subsequently participated in a validation meeting. Interestingly, these 12 SPs demonstrate on average a slightly lower and wider range of scores from 12.5 (lowest) to 18 (highest), from a maximum possible score of 20 for all 5 success factors.

Looking at the overall picture, we see that on all success factors, the SPs score above 3 on a scale from 1 to 4. This illustrates that at the beginning of this 4<sup>th</sup> year of working together, most SPs have developed relatively well-functioning cooperation systems. Not surprisingly, during the validation meetings, new SPs reported more growth since the start of the SCS policy framework than SPs that already existed and functioned before. However, when looking at the current capacity status of the partnerships three years into the framework, we do not see significant differences between new SPs and existing SPs.

In zooming in further on the five success factors, the MTR concentrates its analysis on the 12 selected SPs based on the combined desk-study, survey and validation meeting findings.

### Strategy

In the figure below, we present the distribution of ‘Strategy’ scores. These scores are rather varied, given that responses related to the existence and use of a joint strategy were quite diverse, ranging from being relatively top-down or separate per consortium partner to quite elaborate joint strategic reflection and planning processes.

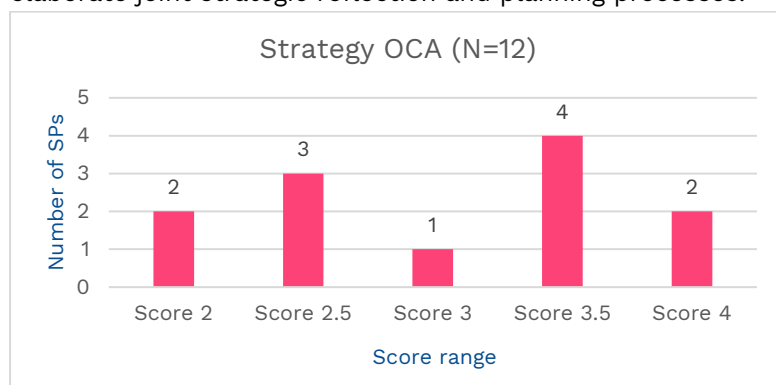


Figure 6: Strategy scores distribution over the 12 sampled SPs for capacity assessments.

Despite these differences, most SPs report experiencing a trend towards increasingly joint strategy development, even though not all made the same progress. A key issue in working towards a truly joint and actively used strategy is the level of inclusiveness, which is determined by the SP leadership but is also affected by geographical spread, number and maturity of individual partners. Another apparent challenge is the extent to which strategic adaptations are based on documented evidence rather than more organic experiences and observations of staff. Examples include, among others, partners adopting more indirect advocacy approaches when direct advocacy became too dangerous, bringing in new partners over time as they emerged, or partners changing their way of cooperation after getting to know each other better.

### Cooperation

In the figure below we present the distribution of ‘Cooperation’ scores. These are less diverse and relatively positive. This is primarily explained by local partners (both tier 2 and 3) describing the quality of cooperation among themselves as constructive, collaborative, while expressing sentiments of being valued and having enough space for autonomy. Even though complementarity among partners was confirmed in most SPs, only few SPs could provide clear examples of such complementarities being deliberately used (e.g., referring to one partner undertaking research to prioritise advocacy issues, another engaging in dialogue on the issue with local authorities, with a third partner available to offer legal expertise when needed).

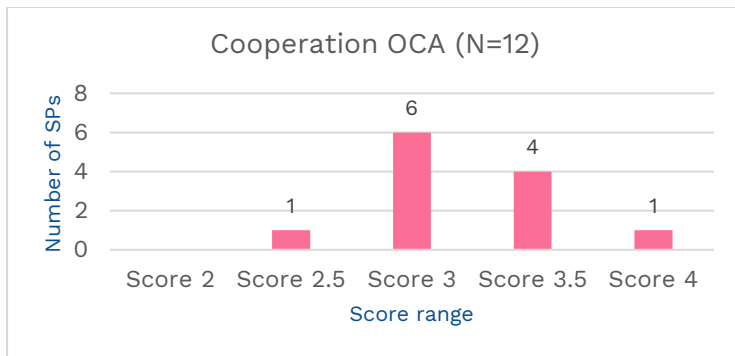


Figure 7: Cooperation scores distribution over the 12 sampled SPs for capacity assessments.

Quality of cooperation is reported by SP representatives to evolve over time, as mutual understanding and trust are mentioned as key elements in cooperation. This suggests that already existing SPs had a head-start in this area. Also, SPs starting out as ‘partnerships’ rather than ‘grant mechanisms<sup>35</sup>’ started from a more equal footing, which facilitates cooperation.

Responses related to the quality of cooperation between international consortium members and local partners were more mixed. The added value of international partners is mostly described as facilitative in fund mobilisation, meeting accountability requirements and learning across countries. However, in several SPs this added value of international partners was questioned in the context of localisation, hinting that fund management can be done locally. The most positive appreciations of international – local cooperation concerned SPs advocating issues with a clear international dimension (e.g. related to international investors) whereby international partners actively contribute to advocacy efforts, targeting actors outside Uganda and/or international actors inside Uganda.

Finally, the quality of cooperation with the EKN as strategic partner received mixed responses. This included examples of the EKN being ‘close and crucial for protection’ - in particular by SPs working on sensitive issues like LGBTIQ+ and land rights - from the EKN ‘shying away’ on issues where economic interests of (international) investors and human rights (e.g. related to land-ownership) might clash. Besides, the intensity of EKN involvement (e.g. taking part in conferences / ceremonies) is reportedly different between SPs, also when working on similar less-sensitive issues like Women’s rights, Youth involvement or Food security. Different explanations were given for this, illustrating that this partly relates to personal connections with / competing priorities of embassy staff and partly to different levels of importance attached to this by the SPs as some are more dependent on EKN involvement than others. In any case, there appears to be no clear protocol or minimum standards for EKN involvement.

### Steering structure

The distribution of ‘steering structure’ scores in the figure below illustrates again variety. This is particularly caused by varying responses related to the connection between global and local steering structures and the extent to which truly joint steering structures at country level exist instead of parallel structures per (international) consortium partner.

<sup>35</sup> Some SPs had preselected local partners, while others selected local partners based on grant applications.

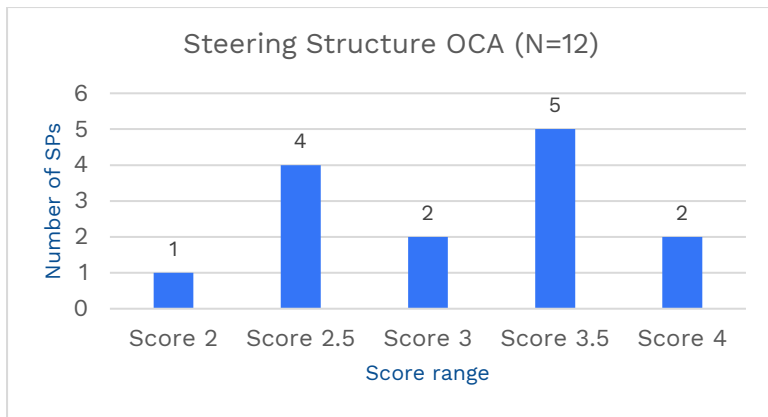


Figure 8: Steering Structure score distribution over the 12 sampled SPs for capacity assessments.

The average and relatively positive score of 3.04 illustrates that in general Steering Structures are seen as clear, functional and increasingly inclusive, though a minority of partners commented on the absence of a Ugandan representative in the global steering structure of their SP. Steering structures are also in majority described as offering sufficient autonomy to individual partners, while various adaptations to local context / existing structures demonstrate flexibility being practised. These adaptations included examples related to the use of thematic CoPs or working groups led by local partners being recognised for their expertise on that particular aspect.

In SPs applying a grant approach, whereby local partners are mobilised through calls for proposals rather than local alliances being forged in preparation of the SP proposal, the inclusiveness of the steering structure is affected. This is caused by the financial dependencies that are built in when working through grants, with one ‘coordinating / grant-making’ partner managing the financial flows to ‘grantee partners’, instead of starting out as equal partners. At the same time, having a local fund manager overseeing and coordinating the use of grants was described as a good practice, especially as ‘grant’ relations evolved in more equal relations.

### Processes

The scoring on processes with an average of 3.29 and the most often provided score being 3.5 is relatively positive and less varied.

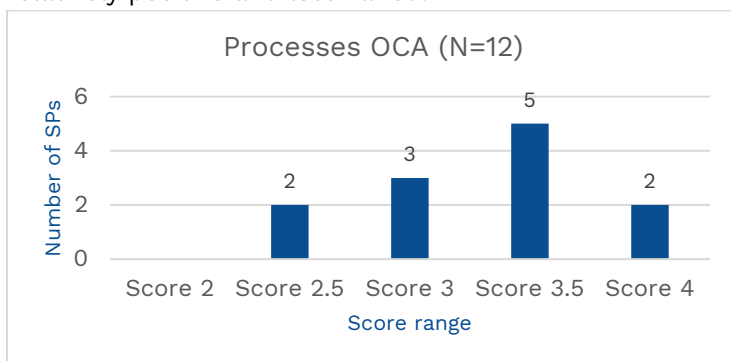


Figure 9: Processes score distribution over the 12 sampled SPs for capacity assessments.

This is explained by SPs reporting varying but, across the board, increasing levels of collaboration in planning and budgeting processes that are clear and offer sufficient flexibility and autonomy to individual partners, mostly within preset indicative budget ceilings. Despite intentions at the start, only few SPs operate with a joint set of financial procedures, due to differences in financial and accountability procedures among consortium members that are not easily reconciled.

SPs show signs of progress towards joint monitoring efforts (e.g. Outcome Harvesting workshops). At the same time M&E frameworks are described as clear but overly complicated and inadequate

to properly capture the real advocacy efforts and results of the SPs. This relates, for instance, to indicators capturing the number of changes in laws or regulations that may take years of advocacy work and result in **one** change being added to the results, which does not do justice to efforts made. Another concern relates to substantial monitoring efforts being made to report on quantitative indicators (e.g. # of actions, etc.) that are seen to be of little use for the strategic steering and learning of SPs. This makes that M&E data collection is seen more as part of reporting requirements, rather than being seen as a management effort to improve steering and learning.

This observation was confirmed by various MTR reports suggesting M&E improvements. It was also consistent with the EKN expressing concerns with having, at most, fragmented insights into some of the accomplishments of SPs but not of the SCS Policy framework as a whole.

### Learning & innovation (L&I)

Scores on L&I are also quite positive with an even stronger most provided score of 3.5. This is consistent with most SPs confirming in validation meetings that ample learning efforts take place, substantiated by many examples of adapted managerial (i.e. changes in procedures or governance arrangements) and operational practices (i.e. changes in the way capacity development and advocacy activities are carried out). Typical examples include cases whereby (national) steering committees were extended to include more local partners, shifts from ‘expert-driven’ capacity development to intensification of exchange among partners, the application of more indirect / informal advocacy practices when direct / formal interaction with government officials becomes too risky and the widespread introduction of online capacity development and advocacy practices during COVID-19.

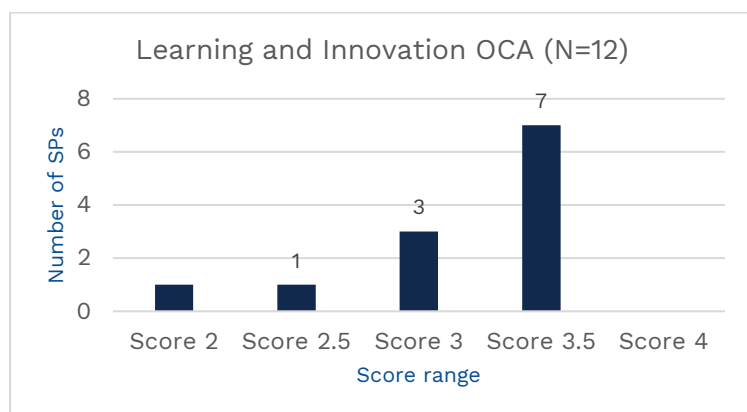


Figure 10: Learning & Innovation score distribution over the 12 sampled SPs for capacity assessments.

Most of these examples are triggered by particular experiences or clear changes in context and appear to be rather organic in nature. Only few SPs reported L&I based on a more formal / systematic approach, e.g. in the shape of a joint learning agenda, dedicated L&L staff or regular recurring learning events. In contrast, the Funds (LFS and VOICE) have more formalised Linking & Learning arrangements, including dedicated staff, budgets, processes and L&L being part of their results framework. This is explained by grantees not operating within a partnership framework and therefore having less interaction and opportunities for spontaneous and organic exchange and learning than the SPs.

Relying on a more organic L&I approach is not necessarily seen as problematic, as it is organised more easily, offering a quicker response to recognisable events or incidents, and therefore resonates better with the partners involved. At the same time, various SPs report constraints in the implementation of lessons learned mostly due to resource constraints as L&I is not (sufficiently) planned and budgeted for.

A further observation concerns the role of international partners in L&I, whereby in most SPs international partners are described as instrumental in facilitating learning across countries. L&I efforts by international partners at country level are most common and valued when related to planning and reporting practices to ensure contractual compliance.

**Difference between thematic areas and Northern and Southern-led SPs<sup>36</sup>.**

The MTR looked at variation of scores for partnership success factors across the different thematic areas (WRGE, SRHR, Trade, Freedom, Climate, FNS, LGBTQ+, and SRoL). However, the sample of SPs is too small and unevenly distributed (maximum of 8 SPs for WRGE, and minimum of one for SRoL) for the MTR to draw fair conclusions based on the relatively small differences.

Similarly, when examining differences between Northern and Southern led partnerships, observations need to be made with caution due to the representativeness of the sample (2 Southern led versus 10 Northern led SPs). While for cooperation and processes the assessment averages are similar (see Figure 11 below), the strategy, steering structure and learning and innovation registered lower scores for the Southern led partnerships. For strategy, this was explained by strategic development and revision processes being described as relatively top-down, while for the steering structure respondents commented on the limited Ugandan representation in the international steering structures. Finally, for learning and innovation, the difference in scores is explained by respondents describing learning practices as more organic than systematic and by (resource) constraints reportedly limiting the implementation of lessons learned. Despite these differences, the MTR considers the sample too small to draw any serious conclusions about the current capacity levels of Northern versus Southern led SPs.

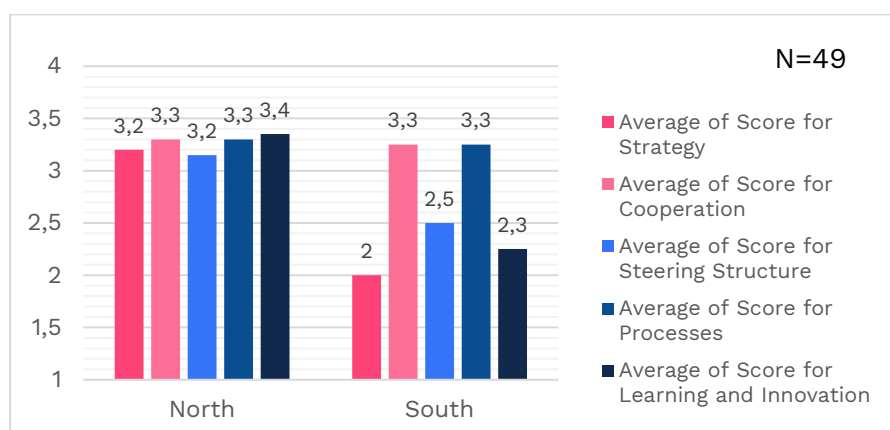


Figure 11: Comparison between Northern versus Southern led partnerships for the 5 Capacity Works success factors

**4.2.2 Advocacy capacity of individual partners.**

In assessing the current (advocacy) capacity levels of individual partners, we have limited ourselves to 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> tier partners, even though various SPs reportedly adopt a mutual capacity development approach meant to benefit all tiers of partners. The MTR understands, however, that the main purpose of the SCS policy framework in Uganda is the strengthening CSOs operating at national (2<sup>nd</sup> tier) and subnational (3<sup>rd</sup> tier) level.

<sup>36</sup>To minimise research bias, only after data collection was completed, scores were disaggregated by thematic area and Northern vs Southern led.

Overall, the MTR had capacity assessment meetings with 49 individual partner organisations (i.e. 2 to 6 per SP), 13 of which are labelled as 2<sup>nd</sup> tier and 36 as 3<sup>rd</sup> tier<sup>37</sup>. In these meetings, six advocacy capacity dimensions were discussed and subsequently scored:<sup>38</sup>:

1. *Capacity to produce evidence and analyse the political arena*
2. *Capacity to inspire trust among and build rapport with power holders*
3. *Capacity to represent constituency interests*
4. *Capacity to produce tailored messages*
5. *Capacity to work collectively*
6. *Capacity to adapt to changes in context.*

After aggregating the scores of the 49 partners, the following picture emerges with average scores per capacity dimension (max score = 4):

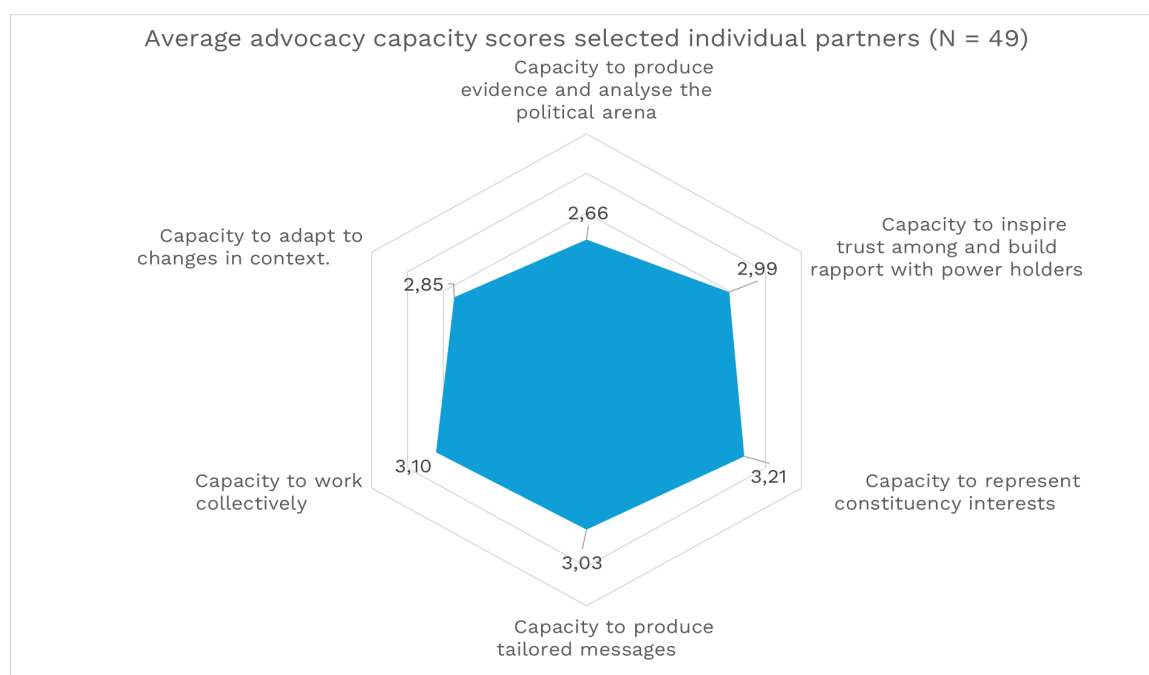


Figure 12: Average scores advocacy capacity of 49 individual partners.

These scores indicate that individual partners are most advanced in their capacity to represent constituency interests. Many of the partners are led and staffed by representatives of the specific constituency they represent. Another substantial group adopts community-centric approaches, meaning that regular consultations with their constituencies are part-and-parcel of their approach. Partners are therefore quite confident and convincing in the way they represent their constituencies. Challenges related to this capacity dimension are primarily found when partners work with broad constituency groups that are geographically dispersed (e.g. youth in general). These partners are also actively engaged in constituency consultation, but their reach is limited.

The scores furthermore indicate that the (advocacy) capacity to produce evidence and analyse the political arena is least advanced. This is explained by many partners traditionally focusing on

<sup>37</sup> SPs use the 'tier-terminology' in different ways. Most SPs consider partners working at national level and contracted to perform a partnership lead / coordination / fund management role as 2<sup>nd</sup> tier. This means that SPs working with country-level grant mechanisms consider grantees as 3<sup>rd</sup> tier, even if the grantee is working at national level, while other SPs work with networks of community-level organisations at district and/or national level. In distinguishing 2<sup>nd</sup> from 3<sup>rd</sup> the MTR has followed the logic of most SPs, meaning that 2<sup>nd</sup> tier partners operate at national level and mostly have a leading / coordinating role in the country.

<sup>38</sup>Simplified version of the eight advocacy capacity dimensions identified by Elbers & Kamstra (2020): how does organisation capacity contribute to advocacy effectiveness?

service delivery, with advocacy efforts playing a less central role than what is being pursued by the SCS policy framework. As a result, the vast majority of partners reportedly rely on the experience and readily available contextual knowledge of their staff in justifying and shaping the underlying arguments of their advocacy efforts. Only few partners confirm having dedicated research staff, or making regular use of the evidence produced by a credible (research) partner. The importance to produce and analyse evidence to strengthen advocacy efforts is widely acknowledged, but deliberate efforts focusing on this particular capacity dimension remain, relatively, limited.

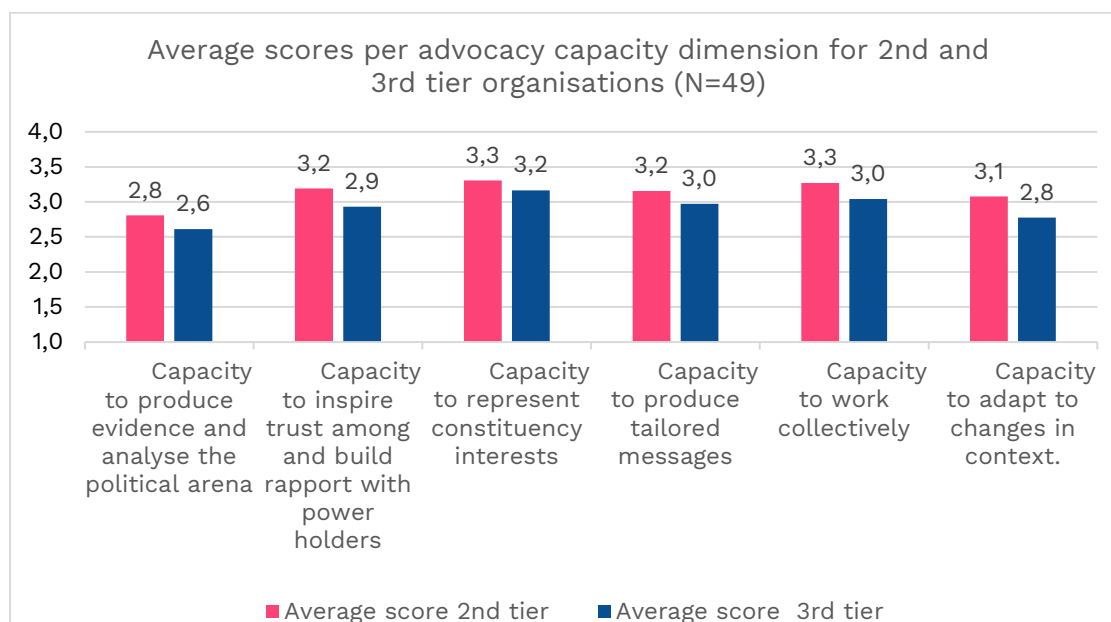


Figure 13: Average advocacy capacity scores for 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> tier organisations comparatively.

Looking separately at the individual assessments of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> tier partners (see Figure 13 above), it appears that overall 2<sup>nd</sup> tier partners score around 10% higher across the six dimensions. This, relatively small, difference reflects that on average 2<sup>nd</sup> tier partners are usually larger and more established organisations with a longer track-record in advocacy work.

Zooming in on how the scoring per advocacy capacity dimension is spread (see Figure 14 below and Annex 15 showing the spread of scoring for 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> tier partners separately), we observe the following concerning:

- Producing evidence and analysing the political arena:

Overall, 60% of partners scores 2.5 or less, indicating scope for improvement in this dimension among a majority of partners. When looking separately at scores of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> tier partners, we see a peak with 55% of the 3<sup>rd</sup> tier partners scoring 2.5, while the scores for 2<sup>nd</sup> tier partners are more spread, illustrating that there are certainly a few 2<sup>nd</sup> tier partners demonstrating advanced capacity in this dimension.

- Inspiring trust among, and build rapport, with powerholders:

This capacity dimension is quite spread, with 33% of the partners scoring 2.5 or less, and 31% of them scoring 3.5 or higher. This illustrates the varying levels of difficulty when dealing with more or less controversial, or even illegal, issues. Organisations with a community centric approach are used to work closely with local leaders, which is facilitated by having a joint development interest. Organisations working on land or LGBTIQ+ rights face a vastly different situation, whereby the safety of their own staff / volunteers is a key concern, requiring them to remain distant / invisible to powerholder by working via others or under the cover of other less vulnerable organisations (e.g. academic institutes).

- Representing constituency interests:

Here we see a vast majority of 90% of both 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> tier partners scoring 3 are more, illustrating that constituency representation and consultation are well integrated in the set-up and approach of many partner organisations.

- Tailoring messages:

In this dimension, a majority of 61% of the partners scores around 3 – 3.5, illustrating a reasonably advanced capacity level in tailoring advocacy messages. This capacity was demonstrated by many examples, including the deliberate selection of communication channels (direct vs. indirect, online vs offline), choice of spaces where advocacy takes place (e.g. online platforms during Covid, Universities to reach youth) and communication modalities (photos / videos instead of text). At the same time, participants in the validation meeting confirmed that only few organisations employ or use dedicated communication professionals.

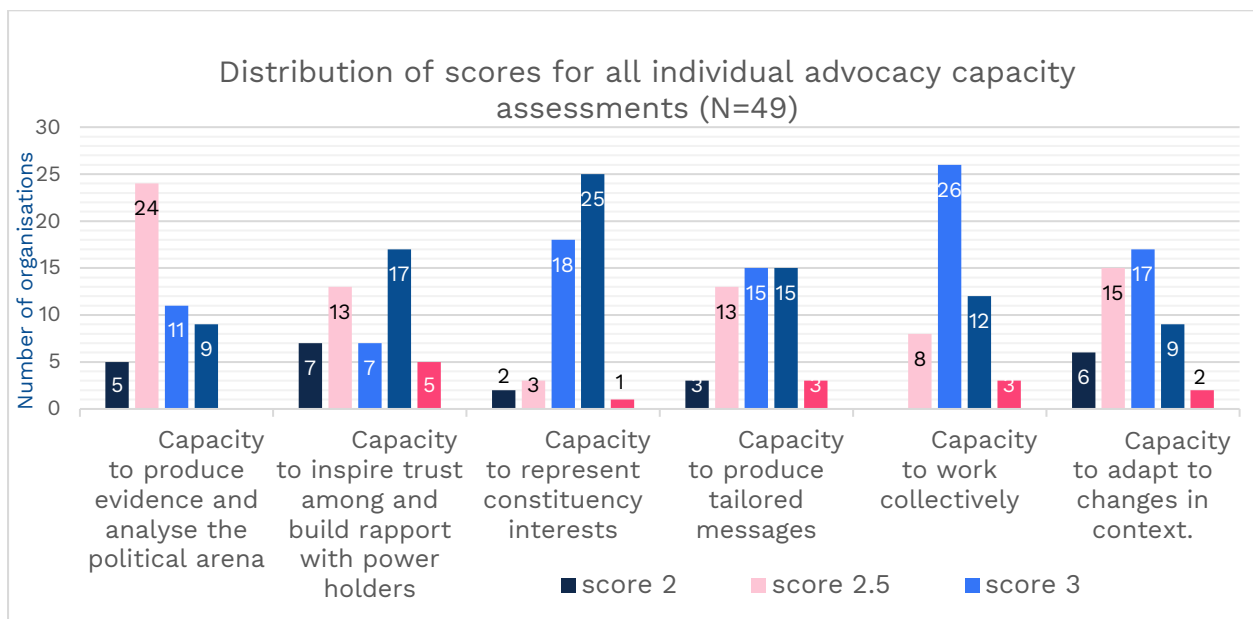


Figure 14: Frequency of scores per capacity dimension for both 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> tier partners.

- Working collectively:

Overall, we see 84% of the partners scoring 3 or higher illustrating reasonable to well advanced capacities in working collectively. This capacity is by design stimulated by the SCS policy framework that makes working through partnership a must. However, several partners mentioned the creation of ‘exclusive’ partnerships (collaboration focused on those who are in) and the sustainability of connections relying on external funding as risks. The MTR also encountered a few SPs where deliberate efforts were made to identify and use the varying qualities of partners. Besides, the complementarity between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> tier partners, specifically in terms of 2<sup>nd</sup> tier partners using the evidence and results of 3<sup>rd</sup> tier partners in their national-level advocacy efforts was demonstrated occasionally, while recognised by several partners as something that deserves more attention.

- Adapting to changes in context:

In this dimension, we see 43% (= 21) of partners scoring 2.5 or less, more or less similar for 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> tier partners. However, significant differences were found at the higher end of the scores with 46% of 2<sup>nd</sup> tier and only 17% of 3<sup>rd</sup> tier partners scoring 3.5. This illustrates a more general scope for improvement among 3<sup>rd</sup> tier partners, while among 2<sup>nd</sup> tier partners this differs from partner or partner. Many examples of adaptations to context were cited, including the introduction of safety protocols, the adoption of different / less confrontational approaches, working remotely / online, changing language, working less directly, linking up with others for protection, adopting new management methods, and so on. These adaptations were mostly

triggered by experiences, incidents or observations rather than systematic MEL efforts, while also quite some examples were given of adaptations that could not be realised due to financial or practical reasons (e.g. reaching elderly people online during Covid).

### 4.2.3 Practices and progress in capacity strengthening of CSOs.

The previous sections describe current capacity levels of SPs and individual partner, which can serve as basis for comparison in the endline evaluation in 2026. As the MTR cannot rely on a baseline measurement to compare the current capacity levels with those at the start of the SCS policy framework, we use the desk-study, survey and interview findings to come to a more qualitative assessment of practices and progress in capacity strengthening to date.

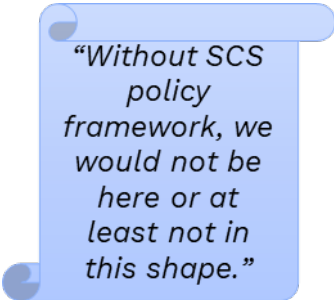
Looking at the **conceptualisation of capacity strengthening**, we notice that the results framework of the SCS policy as developed by DSO (and used by EKN) refers to various concepts and tools<sup>39</sup> as possible guides for pursuing and measuring progress in capacity development. When reviewing SPs' documentation, we see that the issue of capacity strengthening at the outset is being addressed in many different ways. Around half of the SPs limit themselves to a definition and a description of the basic principles in their capacity strengthening approach. This results in some distinguishing hardware from software, while others emphasise an approach of mutual capacity development over a more top-down (expert-driven) approach. Yet other SPs refer to the thematic focus of capacity strengthening (YGW or feminist approach) or mention capacity strengthening as a cross-cutting means towards the end of improved advocacy efforts.

A minority of the SPs refer to using more systematic approaches, including setting a mutual capacity development agenda, tools for an initial capacity assessment that would serve as basis for identifying capacity priorities or developing a capacity baseline. Another minority of SPs limits itself to stressing that capacity strengthening efforts will be needs-based, adopting a more organic approach addressing capacity concerns when they emerge.

This makes that also in the reporting of progress and achievements in capacity strengthening there is little uniformity among the SPs, despite the existence of an overall SCS results framework with basket indicators. Reviewing documented progress illustrates primarily that SPs take capacity strengthening serious and invest a lot of time and efforts in undertaking a wide variety of capacity strengthening activities. Capacity strengthening efforts are mostly organised broadly, covering multiple local partners in response to expressed needs or interests, without clearly distinguishing 2<sup>nd</sup> from 3<sup>rd</sup> tier partners. In other words, in general no significant differences were encountered in addressing capacity needs of 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> tier partners, as maturity of partners and expressed needs / interests were the main determinants for shaping capacity building efforts.

However, little is documented about how this influences the advocacy performance of partners, let alone that this is done in a way that allows for aggregation.

At the same time, when asked about **progress in strengthening the (advocacy) capacity of individual partners**, ample, clearly explained and therefore convincing examples are provided at both national and sub-national level across thematic areas. This ranges from local initiatives that started out as informal voluntary movements now being formalised and operating as recognised legitimate CSOs, to national network / umbrella organisations that successfully unite and coordinate multiple CSOs and are regularly consulted by government. These successes are most obvious in less-controversial areas (women's rights, youth participation, malnutrition, WASH), but also in more



*“Without SCS policy framework, we would not be here or at least not in this shape.”*

<sup>39</sup> Referring among others to different political roles of CSOs (Kamstra 2014), CSO development stage and core capabilities, dimensions of effective advocacy (Elbers & Kamstra 2020), Sources of legitimacy of CSOs (Bossuyt & Ronceray, 2020), and the ladder of Participation (Hart, 1992)

sensitive areas many partners confirm that the SCS Policy framework allowed them to get better connected and resourced to undertake more effective advocacy, while staying (relatively) safe.

External resource persons confirm this overall picture of progress in various ways, for instance, by referring to the increased readiness for accelerated localisation, the demonstrated resilience of CSOs in dealing with an increasingly repressive civic space, and the need to pay more attention to sustaining the improved capacity. At the same time, they are not able to specify the significance of the contribution of the SCS policy framework to this progress but do confirm in more general terms the relevance and importance of a funding window through which resources for capacity strengthening are made available and accessible.

Moreover, external resource persons also acknowledge that progress is not the same in all dimensions of advocacy capacity, confirming that the capacity to produce (objective) evidence and (professional) tailoring of messages remain challenges in the CSO sector. Furthermore, they describe capacity to build relations with powerholders and to work collectively to differ per sector (more developed in less sensitive sectors), while the capacity to adapt varies depending on the type of adaptation (e.g. less in technological adaptations, more in adapting approaches).

**Capacity strengthening efforts take many shapes** including (online and offline) training courses, workshops, technical advice, research, conferences, study visits, communities of practice, clinics, and peer reviews, addressing both management and advocacy capacities. No particular capacity strengthening modalities were singled out by SPs or external informants as most or least effective, as this depends on the subject, existing capacity levels, type and geographical spread of the target group and so on. However, modalities that rely on exchange and peer learning among partners (within and across countries) were most frequently mentioned as positive examples when advocacy capacities are targeted, while trainer/expert centred approaches were deemed more useful when it concerns the explanation of management and reporting systems and procedures. This is in line with the main underlying strategy of the SCS framework of mutual capacity strengthening of CSOs<sup>40</sup>.

Capacity strengthening efforts are described by most SPs as need-based. Given diverse needs and priorities that makes that **a wide variety of capacity dimensions is being addressed**, ranging from financial management, leadership, safety and security, networking, modern communication (social media) and so on. The main topics that repeatedly came up as deserving more attention were the capacities to undertake credible research for evidence-building and how to strengthen the sustainability of partnerships and individual partners.

In addition to the above, in quite a few of the validation meetings the **connection between capacity strengthening and localisation** was raised. Having a policy framework that is explicitly dedicated to strengthening civil society, especially in a post-Covid era, triggers questions among the larger / more established partners about whether and how capacity strengthening, and localisation processes should go hand-in-hand. In the validation meetings it was widely acknowledged that this has to be a gradual process, while most participants agreed that the SCS policy framework does not pay enough attention to localisation and that pace of localisation is not in line with the progress in capacity strengthening.

In terms of **unintended consequences**, both positive and negative have been reported by the partnerships, while 8 SPs did not report any unintended outcomes.

For the positive developments, singular examples included:

- youth empowerment to enter public spaces, influence community structures, and mobilise others towards issues of interest (for example HIV/AIDs);

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<sup>40</sup> Executive summary SCS Theory of Change, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, December 2019.

- lobbying spillover with the government and private sector against the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP);
- institutional development resulting in diversified funding and better prospects for sustainability;
- economic empowerment through promotion of savings and loans schemes during existing convening spaces/regular meetings;
- expanding public spaces through creative expression (for instance, resulting in diminished violence against sex workers);
- unexpectedly positive mobilisation of support and engagement for the cause of persons with disabilities;
- influence of the CS capacity strengthening events beyond the primary target group.

Negative effects reported include:

- repressions of peaceful advocacy activities resulting in arrests where the intervention of EKN was necessary, while this was further mediated through advanced digital security training,
- backlash from CSOs' activities towards constituencies was reported including violence against LGBTIQ+ community and allies,
- gaps in capacity of the public and private sector becoming more apparent while not identified in the design of the policy.

Besides a few MTR reports described examples of unintended consequences including:

- embassy engagement to potentially perpetuate systems of power, due to lack of awareness of barriers that are preventing structurally excluded groups from participating in meetings,
- convening spaces for multiple stakeholders in the partnerships not always accounting for sufficient safety concerns.

Another example relates to the (informal) network between (groups of) LGBTIQ+ people has grown stronger since the Anti-Homosexuality Act was introduced, displaying innovative ways to get together, exchange, and collaborate to ensure their safety.

The examples illustrate the occurrence of unintended consequences of capacity strengthening efforts, varying per intervention but mostly positive and some negative. Besides, these examples give the impression that certain groups (i.e. youth, persons with disabilities and sex workers) seem to have experienced more positive unintended consequences, while the LGBTIQ+ community share more examples of negative unintended experiences. However, the examples are too fragmented and small in numbers to allow the MTR to distinguish clear patterns or draw conclusions on this.

In conclusion, serious and commendable efforts were made to develop an M&E framework in support of the SCS policy framework that would guide and support strategic implementation partners in a uniform and concerted planning and reporting of CS capacity strengthening efforts. Various results frameworks and tools were developed and made available to recognise the diversity of SPs and variety in outcomes to be pursued. In practice, this means that many and diverse capacity development approaches and modalities have been used, benefitting over 300 CSOs in Uganda, impacting targeted groups in various positive and negative ways. These effects are largely confirmed in more general terms by external resource persons.

### 4.3 Coherence

This chapter addresses evaluation questions related to coherence, whereby the MTR looks at coherence within SPs/Funds, between SPs and with (local) government<sup>41</sup>.

Coherence
<p><b>12.</b> What is the level of coherence in policy implementation and coordination:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Between different partners (across the three tiers) within partnerships active in Uganda;</li> <li>- Between the strategic partnerships and funds;</li> <li>- With other actors (e.g. national government, (I)NGOs, other donors etc);</li> <li>- With the MFA and its Missions.</li> </ul> <p>Do perspectives on coordination between stakeholders differ between EKN/MFA stakeholders and across all three tiers of CSOs? And, if so, how?</p>
<p><b>13.</b> Were contextual factors (such as relationships and/or different views held by partners/partnerships and/or the Ugandan national/local context(s)) of effect on the level of coherence in the implementation? If so, to what extent and how?</p>

#### Within SPs / Funds

**In Uganda, coherence levels vary but are overall reasonable and gradually increasing.** The range spans from working in silos to the deliberate use of complementarities (e.g. networks of organisations focusing and collecting data on different districts on the same topic; different LGBTIQ+ organisations focusing on different target groups of the LGBTIQ+ spectrum; women’s organisations focusing on empowerment of girls and young women to advocate for their SRHRs, whereas other have more expertise in litigation; organisations taking advantage of each other’s expertise and capacity to research and analyse particular topics; different organisations using the contacts, relationships, and rapport they have in different districts to expedite their engagements). In other cases, partner strategies are aligned but approaches differ, whereby in at least two instances different partners in a SP described using different advocacy approaches (e.g. more vs less confrontational). Overall, survey results indicate that partners have an overall positive perception about collaboration and coherence within their SP (Figure 15).

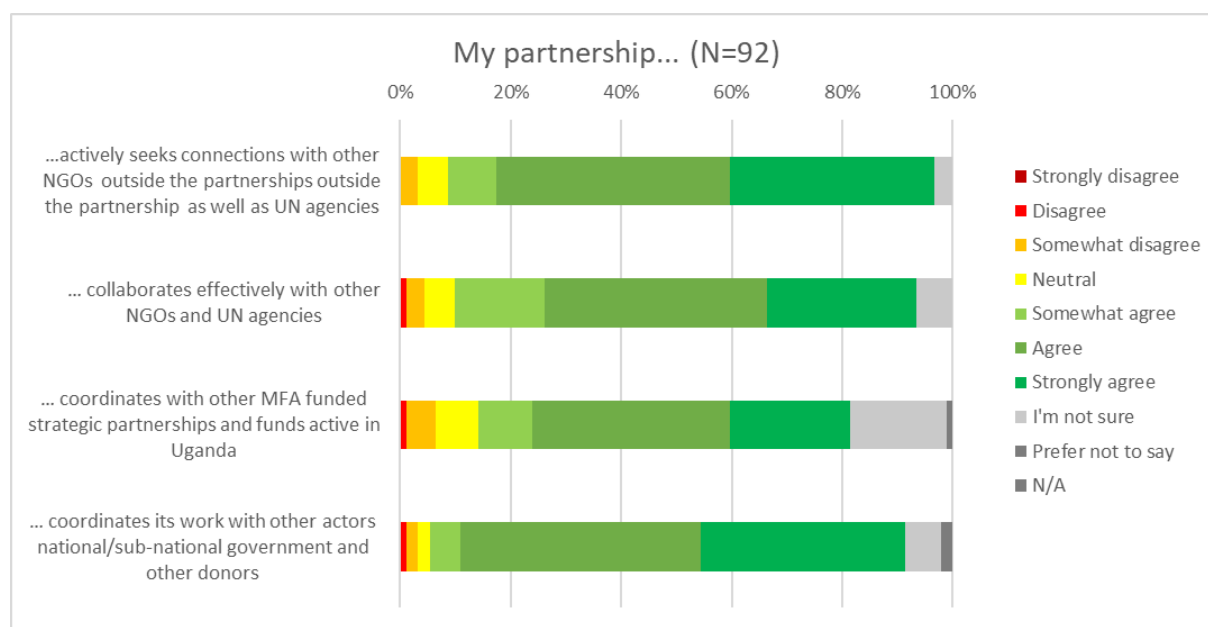


Figure 15: Survey results of tier 1 and 2 perceptions about coordination among partners

<sup>41</sup> Under Coherence, the TOR calls for an overview of which CSOs are involved in the implementation of the SCS policy framework and where (EQ 11). This overview, to the extent possible, is presented in a separate annex to preserve the anonymity of partners in the main MTR report.

Most partners recognise the value of steering/coordination structures (e.g. thematic committees/working groups) that involve all 3 tiers within partnerships to improve coherence. These working groups were present in most cases, but in some were not fully participatory. While close cooperation among partners is by design less important for Funds than for partnerships, Funds do display deliberate linking and learning efforts, which help ensuring coherence within their portfolio.

Organisations pointed out the presence of a 1st tier partner in Uganda (or in a neighbour country) as playing a significant role in enhancing coherence, as well as the presence of well-established networks or consortia among local partners. Longevity of the partnership (i.e. whether the partnership was pre-existing) might have played a role at the start of the funding framework, but no significant differences in practising coherence with the newer ones were observed at this point in time.

Coherence between national and international partners is perceived as mixed but most evident when the thematic area has an international dimension, such as engaging with international investors, deliberate linkages to global advocacy agendas or exchanges across countries.

### **Between SPs**

**Coordination and coherence among SPs are limited to the same thematic area** (SPs working under the same theme e.g. SRHR) and somewhat dependent on the presence of partners that are members of multiple partnerships. Coordination among different thematic areas is low. The partnerships came together at one event organised by EKN, but this did not result in further coordination. This sporadic coordination highlights the need for structured steering and coordination mechanisms, SPs working under the same theme e.g. SRHR are highly coherent as human rights thematic areas and solutions are interrelated, as well as the need for a regional platform for linking and learning, not just within Uganda. However, these wider coordination mechanisms are hindered by the political context, especially after the approval of the Anti-Homosexuality Act in May 2023. For example, LGBTIQ+ organisations do not always feel safe in participating in meetings/workshops with non- LGBTIQ+ organisations in Uganda, due to widespread anti- LGBTIQ+ sentiment, and the fear of being (also involuntarily) outed. Another factor that hinders coherence is the absence of dedicated time and budget for coordination activities, with no entity mandated to stimulate collaboration within a competitive framework.

### **With EKN / MFA**

The relationship and coherence of SPs with EKN/MFA as strategic partner presents a **mixed picture**. Some SPs describe close relations, regular contact, and successful cooperation and protection, while others report no meaningful alignment of action. For example, some partnerships have contact persons at EKN and regularly receive information through a newsletter. Partners particularly appreciated the swift intervention by EKN in at least two instances in which organisation members were arrested for their advocacy activities, noting how EKN was key in their release. In another case EKN and international partners were key in connecting local organisations to MFA, explaining the need to redirect funding to safety and security, although not initially foreseen in the initial plan. A notable good practice from one partnership was integrating EKN as a partner and defining their role in the partnership's Theory of Change (ToC). However, the role of EKN in SPs remains largely undefined, contributing to varied experiences of coherence.

### **With national and district-level government**

Coherence with local government, both at the national level and at the district-level, is highly dependent on the nature of the work. Areas like food security, SGBV or health related issues tend to experience smoother cooperation and coherence, with organisations having high reputations in key Ministries (e.g. Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, Ministry of Health or Ministry of Education and Sport). In many cases partner organisations are part of working groups within the Ministries; furthermore, there are MoUs in place between partnerships

and local or national government. However, more controversial areas such as LGBTIQ+ rights or land rights face significant challenges, as they are perceived as “neo-colonial” (LGBTIQ+ rights) or “anti-development” (land rights): LGBTIQ+ topics are sometimes perceived as imposed by the Western agenda, whereas land rights might hinder the implementation of projects that generate revenues for the Ugandan economy (e.g. oil pipelines). Some SPs point out that there is a contradiction of MFA/EKN collaborating with government institutions that violate rights, while CSOs fight to promote and protect these rights. This, in particular concerns MFA support directed at the Justice, Law and Order Sector (JLOS)<sup>42</sup>, which has been implicated in human rights violations. According to the EKN, this type of collaboration has been ended.

### **With other donors, NGOs**

While the survey indicated that partners reach out to other NGOs, collaboration with other donors is done on ad-hoc basis, rather than systematically for the overall framework. This is partly due to a general environment that does not foster coherence. Embassies of donors active in the same domain did not mention collaboration with partnerships from the SCS policy framework or were not aware of it. Previous attempts of substantial donor coordination failed so far. For example, the Democratic Governance Facility (DGF), the major effort of donors to coordinate efforts related to Strengthening Civil Society in one bucket, was closed down by the government in 2021. This has also led to a decline in donor coordination and coherence in strengthening civil society, although the Danish embassy is developing a new multi-donor programme with the EKN as one of the partners, but this is yet to become operational.

A general issue that touches collaboration within partnership, among different organisations and relation with the government is staff turnover both in partners organisation as well as in government, which brings the need to develop strategies or systems to institutionalise results and maintain cohesion beyond individual staff members and between different institutions. The well-established organisations are already aware of the need to form relations with structures, rather than single individuals.

The **different levels of coherence as described above can be explained by external (contextual) and internal factors**. The higher levels of coherence among SPs working on the same thematic area are partly caused by changes in policy / legislation (particularly the Anti-homosexuality act or legislation/policies related to EACOP) that provide a common incentive to organisations to connect and increase coordination and collaboration. At the same time, reaching out to other networks working on the same topic comes more naturally as there is a more obvious common interest without fear for their own safety as they are dealing with like-minded people.

Similarly, coherence with the embassy and government is, reportedly, dependent on the sense of interdependence (e.g. community based CSOs depending on local government to make progress, or CSOs perceiving their connection with the EKN as adding legitimacy and / or safety to their work). External factors clearly influence this sense of interdependence and drive to work coherently. E.g. negative changes in legislation and human rights violations that contribute to a shrinking civic space stimulate collaboration and coherence with like-minded international development partners, but at the same time inhibit coherence with government.

A final hindering factor that was often mentioned concerned the limited dedicated resources (staff and budget) within the SPs for inter-SP coordination, which makes pursuing coherence of secondary priority to the implementation of the SP’s own programmes.

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<sup>42</sup> Justice Law and Order Sector is a sector wide approach adopted by the Government of Uganda to bring together institutions with closely linked mandates of administering justice and maintaining law and order and human rights, into developing a common vision, policy framework, unified on objectives and plan over the medium term

## 4.4 Practices in gender mainstreaming and inclusiveness.

This section addresses evaluation questions related to practices in gender mainstreaming and inclusiveness,

### Practices in gender mainstreaming and inclusiveness

**9.1** How have gender equality and inclusivity been mainstreamed in the interventions under the SCS framework?

**9.3** What has been progress concerning the meaningful participation of marginalised / vulnerable groups?

### 4.4.1 Gender mainstreaming through a transformative approach

In understanding how SPs practice gender mainstreaming, the MTR looked at signs that illustrate the application of a ‘gender transformative’, rights-based, inclusive, and intersectional approach; with ‘gender transformative’ meaning that it addresses the status quo (power relations and benefits), not just equal participation. The MTR found in the desk review that all SPs include gender equality in their programmes to some extent, which was confirmed by their MTR reports describing that the vast majority of SPs (90%) make specific efforts to include gender equality in their programmes. Only 3 SPs present a more limited degree of gender equality in their programmes without a deliberate investment or strategy. The same relation was confirmed in the contribution analysis of the 10 contribution cases (all work with it, but one in a limited degree – see section 4.6).

During the validation meetings, the present SPs (80% of the 25 SPs working in Uganda) agreed that the strict requirement of the SCS policy framework to include transformative gender mainstreaming as a criterion for financing contributed to the high percentage of gender transformative programmes. Results of the contribution analyses (see also section 4.7) show that indeed a high percentage of the SPs achieves gender transformative results, due to significant efforts made.

The way in which SPs address gender equality is varied. Due to the specific gender equality-focused grant instruments, 60% of SPs working in Uganda consist of organisations who often represent women or minorities and are deeply convinced of the need for transformative change on gender equality, including for LGBTIQ+ women. The main objectives of their programmes are directly related to the rights of women and other gender groups. They have a clear concept of how they look at gender equality and how they believe change can be reached. They, for example:

- strengthen individuals on feminist and/or inclusion principles and leadership capacities,
- work with women’s or LGBTIQ+ groups to create social movement,
- focus on the direct support to women and girls to enter or stay in leadership roles and decision-making positions.

The SPs dealing with mainstream issues (e.g. climate change, food security) work with several approaches. For example:

- a gender transformative approach as cross-cutting strategy – including specific gender analysis tools, gender-related (awareness raising) workshops and trainings, a clear learning agenda, making activities accessible to marginalised groups including women.
- a twin track approach – combining gender mainstreaming with specific women empowerment actions (e.g. special funds for women, recruiting women in non-traditional professions or roles),
- a technical partner who brings in the gender and social inclusion expertise

This group of SPs (75% of the SPs in the contribution analysis sample) in majority confirms using a more strategic approach to gender mainstreaming triggered by the SCS policy framework. This made them start to recognise the value of the gender and inclusion lens to the programme. In interviews, they describe with pride the results and changes taking place, and about how effectiveness increases.

#### 4.4.2 Efforts by SP to ensure Inclusion of marginalised groups & intersectionality

When looking at meaningful participation of marginalised groups, the MTR observes a deliberate effort by the SPs towards increased meaningful consultation and engagement. An analysis of the partnerships' proposals, annual reports and mid-term reviews, indicates that about 60% of the partnerships directly work with groups and/or organisations led by marginalised communities, that concern LGBTIQ+, persons with disabilities (PWDs), ethnic minorities, and/or vulnerable women and girls. The SPs ensure participation of marginalised groups in two main ways. First, by directly working with networks of these communities as 2nd tier partners and providing them direct grants. Second, where these groups are at the 3<sup>rd</sup> tier, they also receive sub-grants and /or participate in programme activities. A majority of partnerships also provide training to CSOs on gender and intersectionality.

Where SPs support the groups and/or organisations representing marginalised actors *directly*, this includes direct grants, institutional development support, as well as capacity building in advocacy and other issues that they prioritise. In some cases, it concerns an umbrella organisation that passes on the granting to their members, in other cases SPs pass on grants to these groups directly. This goes for organisations working with persons with disabilities who are discriminated, key populations that suffer from the Anti-Homosexuality Act, sex workers whose work is criminalised, indigenous women's groups, young women, women with disabilities, women living with HIV, grassroots women and farmer groups, and small-scale producers and cooperatives who usually do not have the support required to access markets.

Where the SPs do not provide direct grants to groups led by marginalised communities, individual programme partners, particularly at the 3<sup>rd</sup> tier, either work directly with marginalised groups and/or support them. This engagement with marginalised groups and/or communities includes capacity building through training, peer learning and other methods, mobilising the groups and facilitating advocacy activities, as well as linking/connecting them to strategic allies, including government agencies.

Through literature review, interviews with 3<sup>rd</sup> tier partners and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with communities, the MTR notes that a majority of partnerships adopt an intersectional approach and/or lens to their work. This has enabled specific targeting even within marginalised groups, of individuals and/or groups that face multiple forms of discrimination and vulnerability because of their gender and sexuality for instance women living with disability, trans and LGBTIQ+ individuals. Even so, based on desk review (annual reports and MTRs of SPs), interviews with 2<sup>nd</sup> tier partners and contribution cases with external stakeholders, the MTR notes that around 10% SPs working on specific actor groups like youth or persons with disabilities do not work intersectionally, by not linking gender equality and the marginalised group the programme focuses on.<sup>43</sup>

Overall, from the various data sources used, it is apparent that at least 60% of the SPs are fully focused on marginalised groups. The other 40% make efforts to have both representation and participation of these groups in their activities. While this section covered the approach SPs have taken to pursue inclusion and meaningful participation, the next section includes an analysis of the effects of these efforts in terms of progress towards meaningful participation (using Hart's ladder, especially considering youth).

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<sup>43</sup> It was confirmed by some partners during the validation workshop, that they could be more deliberate in applying an intersectional lens to their work.

## 4.5 Effectiveness - progress towards result areas

Following the partnerships' practices as described above related to capacity strengthening (section 4.3.3), gender mainstreaming and inclusiveness (section 4.4), this section presents MTR findings related to observed progress towards five main policy result areas as listed in the table below. This part of the report first zooms in on the quantitative data that was made available by the SPs to assess progress, then it provides an analysis of the progress per result area, based on documented qualitative data, interviews with CSOs and validated through contribution cases that each rely on several independent external informants and the analysis of the MTR members themselves.

To what extent has the implementation of the SCS policy framework led to:
<b>10.1</b> enhanced power and legitimacy of CSOs?
<b>10.2</b> strengthened and/or created social movements?
<b>10.3</b> meaningful youth participation?
<b>10.4</b> empowerment of marginalised groups?
<b>10.5</b> empowerment and equal participation of women & girls/ in decision-making?

As is typical for these types of programmes, more evidence was available regarding outputs and less for outcomes. The MTR initially looked for signs of progress in (annual) reports of the SPs, particularly zooming in on the measurement of basket (sub-)indicators to provide quantitative data on the various programme outcomes. It appeared, however, that the reported indicators (e.g. # of youth-led or women-led CSOs with increased L&A capacities) primarily referred to the completion of, and participation in, capacity strengthening and support activities rather than providing an indication of the effects of these activities.

An in-depth assessment of a sample of progress reports showed that SPs report (over)achievement on the (output related) indicator targets. This suggests that most SPs manage to deliver on the planned capacity strengthening efforts and reached or even exceeded the targeted number of CSOs. This information confirms that most SPs met their 'contractual' expectations in terms of delivery of outputs. This is an important step towards outcomes but does not provide insight in the effects of these outcomes (= progress to outcomes). A further complication in using documented monitoring data to assess progress towards outcomes in Uganda relates to the fact that the SPs work in multiple countries and report consolidated global numbers as requested by MFA. Only a part of the SPs was able to provide Uganda-specific data.

Therefore, the achievements reported in this chapter are mostly based on desk review, interviews and the contribution cases with external resource persons, primary stakeholders and experts.

### 4.5.1 Enhancing the power and legitimacy of CSOs

The SPs made significant progress in enhancing the power and legitimacy of CSOs in Uganda, both at national (2<sup>nd</sup> tier) and sub-national (3<sup>rd</sup> tier) level. Multiple examples are cited for this, ranging from small local volunteer-led CS initiatives to more formal and professional CBOs to national network organisations. Despite shrinking civic space and even in particularly challenging thematic areas (for example LGBTIQ+), the main results (intermediary outcomes in ToC) reported by SPs and validated by external resources during the contribution cases are:

- **Recognition and legitimacy:** civil society organisations are stronger and well-structured, more organised, better able to manage resources and projects, and saw growth and an increased geographical presence and reach to their constituency. The CSOs are recognised by (local) government, decision makers and even other development partners (attracting funding). Evidence of this is that they got invited into formal policy consultations. They have stronger legitimacy, for example grassroot organisations and CBOs formally being registered, are visible in the media and regularly meet with their constituency.

- **Advocacy and policy influencing capacity:** CSOs and community groups have stronger capacity to advocate, influence and engage in dialogue.
- **Collective power:** CSOs join forces and successfully coordinated to enable collective action. These results have also been confirmed by the capacity assessment in section 4.2, where CSOs scored highest on working collectively, representing their constituency and were reasonably advanced in tailoring advocacy messages.

As a result of their recognition, legitimacy, enhanced capacity and collective power, CSOs managed to put pressure, resulting in significant policy changes and the implementation of new laws and policies, across thematic areas and geographical levels (outcome level changes in ToC). Some examples include National Acts around teenage pregnancies and child marriage, domestic violence and FGM, coffee and tea sector policies, enactment of local bylaws on child protection, inclusion of thematic or gender issues in district programming and budgeting, and blocking regressive regulations, environmental degrading practices or private sector monopolies. Effectiveness and progress in this result area are hindered by contextual challenges and despite efforts, the legitimacy of some CSOs remains low due to the challenging political and legal environment (see further in section 4.7.4).

#### 4.5.2 Strengthening / creating social movements

SPs report extensive efforts to increase the presence and performance of informal networks that rely on the time and commitments of volunteers/activists in pursuing a particular interest, i.e. fostering social movements.<sup>44</sup> Mobilisation is a critical part of movement building, particularly in a context where there is more interest in addressing direct livelihood/survival, and also where space is restricted. Progress towards this mobilisation is seen in both formal and informal spaces at different levels:

- **Individuals** mobilised around a common interest, for example girls and young women got connected in mentorship programmes and supported in safe spaces, signalling the potential for a feminist movement. For example, one SP facilitated engagement between young women from various backgrounds and enabled them to identify how they could support each other in their various leadership pursuits.
- **Local and community-based** volunteers and activist groups conducted campaigns on specific challenges, engaged local authorities, sought support from the media and set up support and safety structures (to protect activists). One specific example was a number of community groups that were facilitated to hold regular meetings and develop collective advocacy strategies to challenge a powerful private sector player.
- **National civil society groups** and coalitions represent significant national movements united around a theme/sector. For example, movements that are coordinating their advocacy engagements towards SRHR/HIV services, promoting the inclusion of people with disabilities, or defending the rights of key populations and oppose discriminatory legislation. For the latter, a specific LGBTIQ+ founded and led coalition exists that strongly opposes the Anti-Homosexuality Act (AHA).
- **Regional and international networks:** CSOs seems to have found broader strategic alignment through NGO alliances and coalitions such as: the Pan-African movement against water privatisation; an international network promoting tax justice; a regional programme to tackle environmental issues such as the detrimental effects of the extractive sector (oil exploitation in the east African region), and efforts to bring together African indigenous women groups.
- **Online social movements** have also been noticed. Social media has been used to create awareness and/or galvanise action on specific issues. Examples include online campaigns to draw regional and global attention about thematic issues.

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<sup>44</sup> Annex B of the TOR page 14, Table 5.

Challenges mentioned in making progress towards this result related to the shrinking civic space. It is particularly unsafe for some organisations working on contested themes to convene in physical spaces, forcing organisations to work below the radar, limiting their visibility and reach. While movements have shown resilience, sustaining momentum and ensuring continuity remains challenging. A further challenge relates to fully integrating marginalised communities to ensure broad representation.

### 4.5.3 Meaningful youth participation

The policy framework has encouraged SPs to adopt a deliberate youth focus in advocacy, enabling SPs to recognise the importance of working with young people, in a context where youth programming tends to focus on social issues and/or livelihoods. However, by the time of the MTR, SPs still had varying degrees of youth involvement in their programmes.

Using the Roger Harts' ladder of participation, the following results became clear from desk research, interviews and validation during contribution cases with external stakeholders:

- Most SPs engaged youth on rung 5; consulted and informed.** Organisations and community structures created or strengthened often have representation of youth in their membership or staff. Even though these youth may not be in the driver's seat, they are engaged and consulted. Programmes often adopt a consultative approach, inviting youth to share their needs. Initiatives of the SPs that worked on rung 5 included organising youth conferences and connecting youth from different communities, capacitating them to advocate or strengthen skills.
- Two SPs reached rung 6 or 7; youth initiated and (or shared) decisions.**<sup>45</sup> SPs that managed to promote youth being in control and in the driver's seat, put deliberate effort in building youth specific structures and connecting young people to decision-making spaces. A main approach to ensuring this level of youth participation was through providing specific grants, targeting youth led organisations and letting youth determine their own priorities, i.e. self-select and express interest, indicate preferences and engage in activities they are passionate about.
- Two SPs did not clearly focus on youth** as a specific primary stakeholder. Even though CSOs recognise youth to constitute a large part of the population and therefore should play a role in shaping various policies and preserving the environment, this same recognition led some SP to take youth for granted '75% of the population is under 35, so they are included', without specifically looking at different needs of youth or suitable approaches to engage them. It was also noted, that even with a focus on youth, an intersectional lens is not sufficiently considered to reach young women, young people with disabilities, from ethnic minorities, and young people within the LGBTIQ+ community.

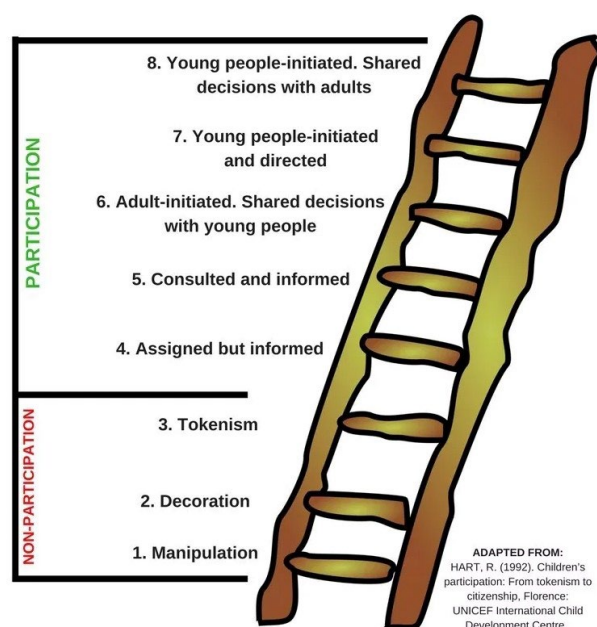


Figure 16: Harts' Ladder of participation.

Reasons provided by SPs for not yet going beyond consulting and informing youth include that it takes time to build the capacity of young people to take initiative and that meaningful youth

<sup>45</sup> Based on the contribution cases, there were 2 specific cases on youth participation, and it was confirmed by the evaluators that these ensured meaningful participation at rung 6 or 7. But evaluators conclude based on what is reported/documentated by all 25+ partnerships (desk review) that there is less significant progress towards meaningful youth participation.

participation is limited by the small number of well organised youth led CBOs. In addition, youth are more interested in projects with ‘tangible’ results like economic empowerment. Advocacy activities do not have any direct economic benefit for them, so it is difficult to get their interest and full commitment. A gap in projects was mentioned, being a lack of inclusion of young women, suggesting that SPs require a more tailored approach to engage different groups of youth.

#### 4.5.4 Empowering marginalised groups

As described in section 4.4.2, SPs and Funds used a combination of direct and indirect approaches to empower diverse marginalised groups such as sex workers, people who inject drugs, LGBTIQ+ individuals, people living with HIV, persons with disabilities, (rural) women, indigenous women, young women and girls, minority faith groups, as well as small holder farmers.

Out of the 10 contribution cases, 5 were assessed by the evaluators as having been able to ensure a high level of meaningful participation of marginalised groups (rung 6/7). Through this analysis, which was fed by external actors, combined with the desk review analysis of the other SPs and their *approach* to empower marginalised groups, we can identify progressive levels of participation or ‘empowerment’ (in general most cases were at the first level of progression, and only exceptional cases reached the last level):

- **Rights are promoted** (passive): marginalised groups accessed (legal) support or services (for example national identity registration), saw the recognition of their rights during campaigns against discriminatory laws/acts, and participated in and benefitted from livelihood and economic development initiatives.
- **Raise their voices:** marginalised groups convened, shared their opinions, views and needs, to help shape advocacy and influencing messages - often combined with increased awareness about rights and platforms to report violations. Examples include the SP actors that collect and present positions and inputs to influence regulations and policies.
- **Active participation:** marginalised groups pro-actively mobilised within safe spaces to confidently influenced change, interacting and negotiating with authorities/duty bearers. One example comes from a SP that successfully influenced officials the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development to commit to provide services and increase local investments into GBV prevention and response.
- **Leadership and ownership:** individuals from marginalised groups took on (political) leadership roles in their communities or became part of decision-making bodies/governance structures, or they joined forces under a common cause, fostering a sense of agency to self-organise and lead advocacy efforts.

Despite efforts to build inclusive programmes (section 4.4.2), there are still challenges in ensuring that all members of marginalised groups – the most vulnerable - benefit from the programmes. Cultural norms and societal attitudes, as well as economic stance, continue to pose barriers to the participation of marginalised groups. The most marginalised face challenges in accessing resources, support, positions and opportunities to express their voices. In addition, involving these groups without proper representation in decision-making leads to superficial participation. During the validation meeting, participants stressed that, in particular for marginalised communities, (economic and safety) conditions need to be created that enable their effective participation in advocacy efforts.

#### 4.5.5 Empowering and equal participation of women & girls / in decision-making

As mentioned in section 4.4.1, most SPs applied a strategic gender transformative approach to support the participation and empowerment of women and girls in Uganda to effectively engage in advocacy efforts. SPs that had a specific focus on promoting women’s rights and gender

equality made more progress in this regard since it was part of their planned results. The MTR found signs of the following progressive levels of change:<sup>46</sup>

- **Awareness and knowledge:** The first level of change is visible in most of the cases, seeing an increased level of awareness around equal rights and potential for women to participate in demanding for services and to engage in decision-making processes. Signs of this increased awareness are WYG who participated in training expressing they understand the concepts of feminism, can explain what obstacles they face in accessing positions and what prevalent gender roles are. Besides the awareness, the contribution cases showed that individual women and young girls gained the capacity and skills to get into leadership positions, as a result of which women feel more confident and capable to take on decision-making roles.
- **Demanding and creating space:** after having become more aware and capacitated, almost half of cases show WYG engaged in advocacy towards actors, facilitated by SP programmes through collective activities to increase space for women in decision-making structures. Examples include organising consultation forums to influence policies – like a National Women Association – active in a certain agricultural sector; pushing for the establishment of gender committees; or by collaborating with male champions. These interventions created spaces for women to engage in policy discussions, advocate for their rights or engage with decision makers.
- **Women taking leadership positions:** At an even higher level of change (self-empowering), a few of the contribution cases show that women (even from the most marginalised groups) are pro-actively taking leadership positions, contesting for political roles at national and local levels, and organise their own collective engagements in decision-making spaces. An example of this was the project that served as a catalyst for the formation of the Inter-Party Women Platform.

The above progress markers illustrate a pattern whereby progress in ‘awareness and knowledge’ (being the 1<sup>st</sup> and easiest marker) is visible in the majority of cases, while the signs of more advanced / difficult progress (the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> progress marker) become less frequent. This illustrates initial progress is made widely, while more advanced / ambitious progress, where increased awareness and knowledge are translated in action (demanding space) and lead to systemic change (more women in leadership positions), remains work in progress for most SPs. While for the first and second level of change, the contribution of the programmes has been crucial, for this 3<sup>rd</sup> level, the contribution is reasonable. This is logical, as many actors play a role in supporting and allowing women taking positions.

Progress in this result area has been limited mostly by resistance resulting from traditional gender norms, cultural and social barriers. Despite progress in capacity of women there is a continued need to sustain and scale the first two levels of change and to work on the enabling environment to see wider change in the third level. Moreover, it was found that the economic positions of women influence the potential to take up roles, hence some programmes included a specific livelihood component (for example VSLA) to prepare the ground for women to make the first steps towards more equal participation.

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<sup>46</sup> Based on the document review of the 25 partnerships and the two LFS funds, triangulated with interviews and contribution cases with external sources.

## 4.6 Systemic change concerning gender equality and inclusion

This chapter addresses the evaluation questions that relates to the extent SP results benefitted the targeted groups in a more sustainable way by having contributed to systemic change.

### Systemic change

**9.2** What has been the progress in systemic change (i.e. benefits) concerning gender equality and the inclusiveness of disadvantaged groups in terms?

**Systemic change** is change that concerns current power relations and/or influencing the status quo (current situation). For gender equality and social inclusion this relates to changes in access to resources, benefits and decision-making for women and girls, just as marginalised groups. When a programme addresses systemic change, it looks at the strategic gender interests of women and girls, or the strategic social interests of marginalised groups. Strategic gender interests always relate to the root causes of gender inequality. When a programme mainly addresses equal participation, without change in the access to resources, benefits and decision-making, the focus is on practical gender or social needs. Addressing practical needs is helpful (and necessary in the way towards systemic change), but by itself it will not bring outcome change in the long run.

The MTR measures the progress of systemic change along the social change matrix of Gender@Work. Of the ten contribution cases the MTR completed, SPs vary on the number of areas of change they deliberately work on (and show relevant results). To attain systemic change, something needs to happen on all four areas of change of the matrix. If one of them does not change, the change in status quo and/or existing power relations does not fully take place. In the contribution cases the MTR identified the areas of change that are addressed by the programme and thus can see to what extent the programme aims for systemic change. The stories of change show the extent to which systemic change happens.

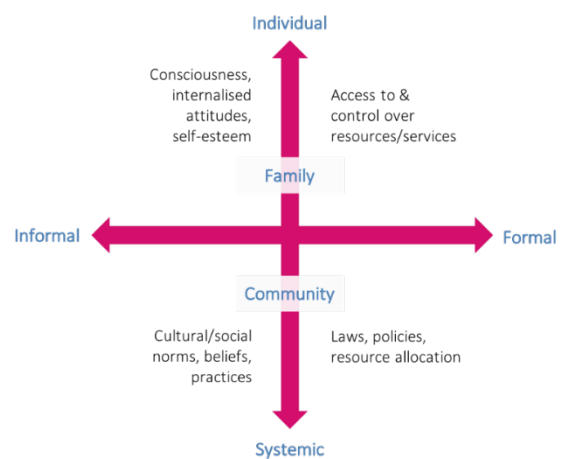


Figure 17: G@W model

Of the 10 contribution cases, six make clear progress on systemic change (working deliberately on 3 or 4 change areas), while three have a moderate impact on systemic change (working deliberately on 1 or 2 change areas), and one has no systemic impact as they use a practical gender approach (this concerns one SP not working with gender transformative mainstreaming). Interestingly enough, these numbers coincide with the percentages identified in the desk study on how many SPs apply a deliberate gender transformative approach in their programme.

90% of the contribution cases work on the *Informal-Individual change area* (individual awareness raising and capacity strengthening), which relates well to the emphasis on capacity strengthening in several SCS policy framework instruments. The MTR noticed that women-led partnerships (focusing on women's rights) look at the personal capacity strengthening on rights and leadership of individual women and girls as the most important change area. They experience and state that if a woman becomes personally and deeply aware of and capacitated on her rights, situation, and possibilities, she can stand strong and start a process of change in her own context. Examples of women who received intensive leadership training and then started changes in their personal space in a great variety of contexts – from the marketplace, the university, up to parliament – confirmed this conviction. The same goes for (male) champions who became allies: when male champions become aware and strengthen their capacities, they start to back up women's initiatives and push for change.

Other (not women-led or specifically women-focused) partnerships view the investment in the individual awareness raising and capacity strengthening also as necessary, but value it at a more equal level of importance with the other change areas. Even though in these cases systemic change for gender equality was not the main objective, these SPs still promoted a strong participation of women at all levels, including in decision-making. The participation of women in for example advocacy interventions around climate, value chains and land rights, ended up influencing how women were generally perceived and creating more opportunities for women's voices to be heard.

The change area least addressed throughout the SPs, is the *Informal-Systemic change area* (deliberate awareness raising and norm change at society level – e.g. general awareness raising campaigns, working with communities in general on awareness of rights): in 70% of the cases SPs do not work at this change area directly. This does not mean that they do not work on norm change, as norm change happens also via the other change areas. However, most SPs do not address society norm change on gender equality in a direct way. An important reason for a limited focus on informal-systemic change relates to the challenging societal environment/context. This goes especially for the organisations that work on societally sensitive issues, like the ones related to LGBTIQ+. They face society's overall negative attitudes towards LGBTIQ+ persons and direct judicial persecution if they express themselves at society level. So, in these cases, even if they have a specific focus on women, focus on informal systemic change is dangerous and shifts in this area are limited, as they experience strong limitation of their civic space to influence this change area. Another reason for the low percentage of SPs working on Informal-Systemic change may relate to the fact that the SCS policy framework emphasises capacity strengthening and policy change, changes that are more directly linked to the Informal-Individual, Formal-Individual and Formal-Systemic change areas (the majority of the contribution cases - 70% and 60% accordingly - works directly on the Formal-Individual and the Formal-Systemic change areas).

Even so, the MTR noticed that SPs working on three change areas (and not dealing with a dangerous society context) discovered during the visit the need to also move to the Informal-Systemic change area. As they address already three change areas, the gap of the fourth area becomes clearly visible. This manifests itself for example in one SP by women in communities not supporting women at municipality level when they take on leadership roles - while individual women are strengthened (Informal-Individual), councillors of local institutions are capacitated and supportive (Formal-Individual) and procedures are in place for equal participation (Formal-Systemic). In another programme, the society does not support women in national political positions, while for the other three change areas everything is now in place. These SPs addressing three change areas clearly identified the need to directly address the public opinion in communities and at national society level to come to a full systemic change.

The outcome results on gender equality of the contribution cases SPs who work on 3 or 4 of the systemic change areas are more impressive than those of the partnerships working on less change areas. In some cases, the quantitative effects are stronger: i.e. a larger increase in the number of women and girls having access to resources, benefits or (formal) leadership positions. In other cases, stronger qualitative effects are demonstrated: i.e. the positions taken up by women are more significant (e.g. women entering in higher formal decision-making positions or being recruited (as a group of several women) into a male-dominated profession).

Overall, the MTR notices the first signs of real systemic change: women and girls having improved access to 1) resources (e.g. remuneration, information, capacity strengthening), 2) benefits (e.g. more safety, better food) and 3) decision-making (e.g. capacitated women in political and professional decision-making positions and in boards of farmer associations). Most of the SPs start to create change in status quo and existing power relations in favour of gender equality. Only one SP primarily relies on the practical yet limited gender approach of equal participation.

## 4.7 Contribution towards outcomes

In this chapter, we present the synthesised results of 10 contribution cases to examine the validity of causal relations that are assumed in the ToC of the SCS policy framework. More specifically, we address the following evaluation question.

Contribution
<b>10.6</b> To what extent did the various activities / outputs under the SCS policy framework in Uganda contribute to the five outcome areas?

The MTR undertook the 10 contribution case studies with the aim to gain insight in how the main intervention strategies adopted by the SPs fit within the overall SCS policy framework, and whether these strategies – separate or in combination with other factors – contribute to the anticipated transformational change. See Table 5 for an overview of the cases.

Table 5: Overview of contribution cases and claims.

Instrument	Result area	Pathway: causal link to intervention (ToC)	Contribution claim
PoV	Social movements	Capacity: through mobilisation	Crucial
PoV	Social movements	Advocacy: provided with technical expertise	Crucial
PoV	Youth participation	Capacity: supported with funding	Crucial
PoV	Enhancing power of CSOs and youth participation	Capacity: through mobilisation	Crucial
PoV	Enhancing power of CSOs	Advocacy: technical expertise (evidence)	Good
PoW	Women in decision-making	Advocacy: supported with technical expertise (training) Capacity: political participation	Crucial
PoW	Women in decision-making	Capacity: supported with technical expertise (training)	Crucial
SRHR	Enhancing power of CSOs	Capacity: supported with funding	Reasonable
SRHR	Youth participation	Capacity: funding, expertise (training)	Good
LFS	Women in decision-making	Capacity: political participation	Reasonable

Overall, the majority of the ten contribution cases (six out of ten) the evaluators arrived at the conclusion that a crucial contribution was made by the SP to the outcome level changes reported. This conclusion was reached through a detailed analysis of different factors; distinguishing primary contributing factors, preconditions, rival contributing factors and hampering factors, which is presented in this part of the report.

- Primary contributing factors: those that are within the scope of the programme (interventions or activities implemented by the SP).
- Preconditions: factors outside the scope of the SPs that were in place before the programmes started.
- Rival factors: external rival factor/actor that pushed in the direction of desired change at the same time as the SP (i.e. offering alternative explanations of change).
- Hampering factors: external factor/actor that opposed or pushed for different kind of change.

For each contribution case, these explanatory factors were identified through external experts and stakeholders (not project implementers), categorised and weighed (by the evaluators), arriving at a contribution claim and score.

A synthesis of the 10 cases provided insights into the relative importance of the various factors, illustrated in Figure 18, including: primary contributing factors (green box in figure below), preconditions (blue box), rival factors (pink box) and hindering factors (yellow box). The numbers that are indicated next to the factors highlight the number of cases this factor was mentioned in. For example, the *establishment of groups and structures* (green box) was mentioned as a significant primary contributing factor in 7 out of the 10 cases.

In cases where preconditions were strongly present, the contribution claim of the projects is somewhat reduced. Nonetheless, the frequency of examples of factors being mentioned that fall under this category is lower than the those of the contributing factors. Rival factors are fewer in numbers as they are more case-specific (e.g. the contribution of other grants and funding from other donors or support from other NGOs is mentioned in 4 out of the 10 cases). Finally, hampering factors are seen as strongest factors, reducing the contribution claims of the SP. See Annex 13 for the methodological guidance note that was used to generate the contribution cases, and Annex 14 for a table with contribution case details.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> In line with anonymity, confidentiality and privacy declarations we agreed upon with the SP prior to their participation, we have refrained from mentioning the specific SPs and names organisations.

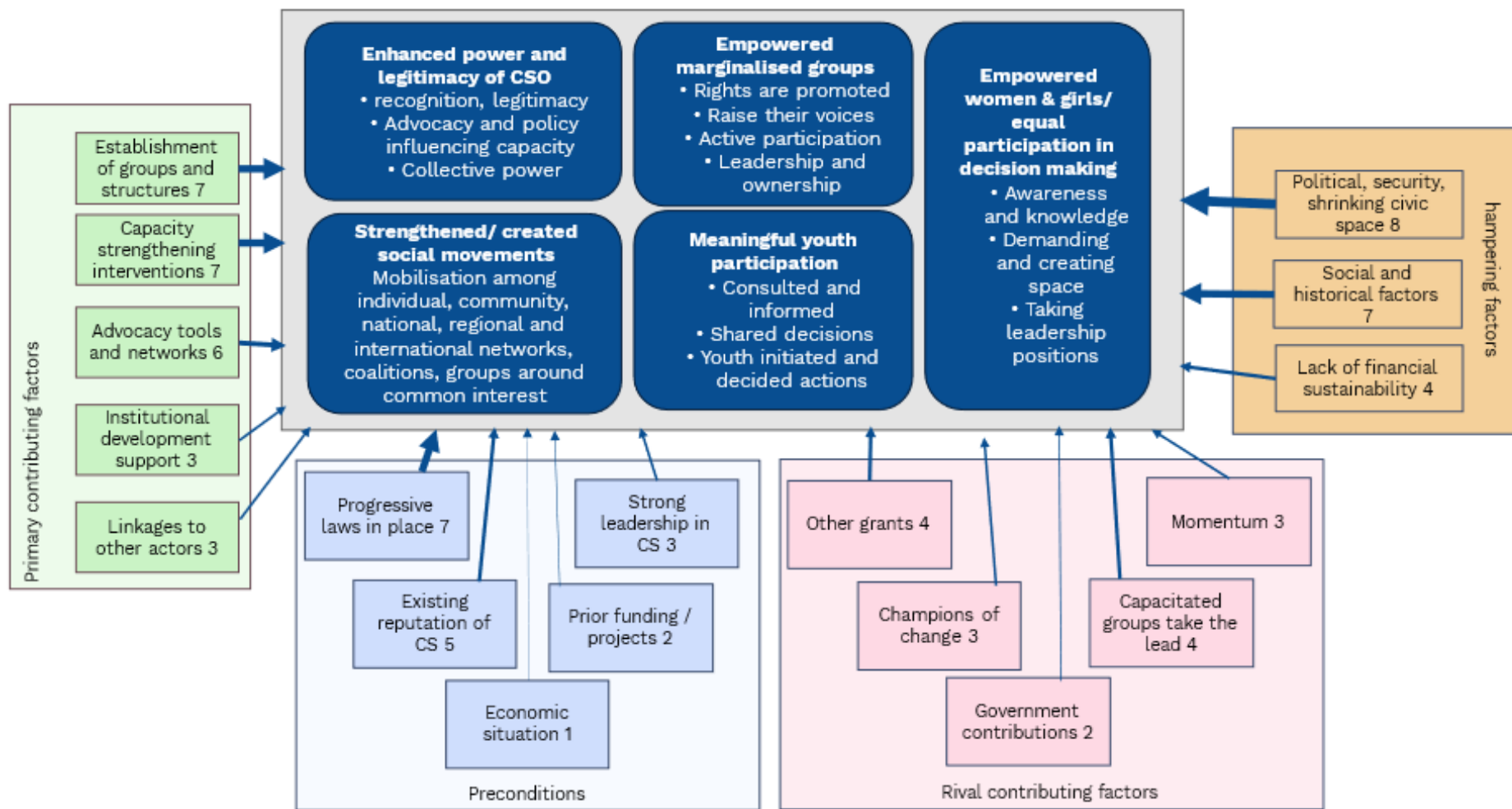


Figure 18: Contributing factors level of influence on the result areas.

#### 4.7.1 Primary contributing factors

The factors that are within the scope of the partnerships' programmes/projects were:

- **Establishment or revitalisation of civil society structures or community groups:**  
One of the main recurring type of factors that contributed to the changes has been the strategic establishment of networks, coalitions, platforms, and community structures by the projects. These initiatives were well-aligned with existing community frameworks and processes, enhancing their legitimacy. The projects facilitated interaction, exchange, engagement, and collaboration among stakeholders through various means, including meetings, workshops, conferences, media, and online tools. This approach fostered inspiration and cooperation.
- **Capacity strengthening interventions**  
Projects organised a variety of capacity development initiatives, including training and mentoring activities for primary stakeholders, civil society structures and community groups to enhance knowledge, awareness, skills and mindset. In some cases, this training was the most significant contributing factor for civil society to set their own agendas, conduct research, and engage in advocacy. It has also been instrumental for women leadership. In other instances, while not the most critical factor, it still played an instrumental role.
- **Advocacy interventions, tools and networks**  
Projects utilised an evidence base by doing research, developing and publishing reports, using the media to amplify voices, and organising dialogues or meetings to advocate and influence. Additionally, projects employed tools to organise advocacy events, and tools such as scorecards (for disability inclusion), MoUs (between CSOs and local authorities or between political parties), digital tracking tool, and alike, which reportedly contributed to changes. SPs also facilitated engagement at regional and global levels, such as forming alliances with international organisations, supporting CSOs to participate in international conferences or to join advocacy in global forums.
- **Institutional development support**  
A couple of SPs and the LFS funds provided grants to primary stakeholders and CS groups (including youth) to implement their own projects. These grants offered core funding to some CSOs, significantly aiding their institutional development. Programmes have also supported the registration of organisations, which was instrumental to build their legitimacy and recognition. The commendable aspect was that SP partners supported change led by primary stakeholders in society, primarily facilitating processes without occupying space themselves.

Some factors that were less often mentioned or indirectly extracted from the contribution cases, triangulated by desk review and interviews were:

- **Linkages to other actors:** Projects initiated or promoted collaboration between their primary stakeholders and other actors, such as media, other NGOs, or government actors working on specific themes or advocacy issues. Through these connections primary stakeholders could expand their network and connect with key influencers. Consequently, the SP shared its contribution to the results with these actors (see rival factors under section 4.7.3), but its role in generating this shared contribution is still highly valued.
- A gender transformative approach **used by SPs contributed significantly to results related to promoting women's rights and social inclusion (intersectionality), for both the** contribution cases specifically promoting women rights and other mainstream cases. The gender transformative approach ensures that SPs pay attention to gender and inclusion of women and girls in all processes, hence bringing their voices and perspectives into formal policy making spaces and structures, and community group/CSO structures. For SPs that already have their core focus on gender mainstreaming, it enables them to have a wider reach, adopt an intersectional lens and be more consistent in their efforts towards women and girl's empowerment. Notably, SPs use the approach to enhance the power of CSOs and social movements, deliberately focusing on the participation, roles and positions of men and women in generating the change. (see related section 4.6)

#### 4.7.2 Preconditions

The main preconditions, were:

- **Existing reputation:** The NGOs, CSOs, CBOs, and community groups often had strong reputations, visibility, community backing, and experience in activism or advocacy, due to their volunteerism, networks, resilience, shared vision, and teamwork. However, their inconsistent access to resources limited their reach and consistency. The SP provides resources to enable CSOs to have more consistent activities, have more regular interaction with communities, have evidence-based discussions with policy makers, strengthen skills and tools on advocacy and gender (intersectional approaches), and improve the quality of their work. Hence, the reputation is the precondition, and the SP primary factors enabled CSOs to enhance their credibility.
- **Strong leadership:** Some CS groups already had strong leadership in place. CSO or group leaders had been capacitated before their SP engagement, and developed capabilities in networking, activism, with ambition and vision, outspoken voice, having built trust and reputation. For the contribution cases that focused on women, it became clear that some of the women targeted by the project interventions already had held (local or national, political) leadership positions before. It was mentioned by external stakeholders, that in these cases, the role of these women was significant in establishing the results of the SP interventions, but their leadership cannot be attributed to the projects.
- **Prior funding/programmes:** previous MFA policy framework funding and prior collaboration between SP members was mentioned in a few cases, having allowed for outcomes to materialise in current programmes.
- **Progressive laws in place:** in some cases, policies around affirmative action and inclusion aided the advancement of women and people with disabilities.<sup>48</sup>
- **Economic situation:** a secure livelihood of primary stakeholders was a precondition for their participation in advocacy. Economic empowerment was essential for community member involvement. Some projects included livelihood components to enable participation.

#### 4.7.3 Rival / alternative contributing factors

Besides the project and programme contributions to the changes that took place, other factors can claim part of the contribution:

- **Other grants:** outcomes have been realised through funding from other international donors (for example USAID, UNWOMEN) and support of other (I)NGOs (not supported by MFA). These other organisations have supported CSOs and community groups, providing training or advocacy capacity.
- **Government:** districts and other local authorities have contributed by establishing structures, working groups, committees, or by putting mechanisms in place to promote change (development plans, land titles registration, special funds).
- **Capacitated groups take the lead:** While SPs often contribute to the initial formation and capacity building of groups, these groups independently progress without further SP intervention. Thus, outcome-level changes result from the initiatives of the empowered groups themselves undertaken outside the scope of the SCS policy framework.
- **Momentum:** Apart from actors contributing to change, the 'right moment' i.e. the right circumstances and energy in the environment was also a factor in a couple of cases, i.e. political will, awareness or community interest for a solution or demand for change.
- **Good examples and champions of change:** women and men in communities who set good examples and raise awareness also inspired change. For instance, women in Uganda taking leadership roles and men promoting women's nominations in politics have shown that change is possible. These champions inspired primary stakeholders to change.

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<sup>48</sup> The Ugandan Constitution, promulgated in October 1995, includes provisions for gender balance and fair representation of men and women in all public sectors. Article 32:1 provides for affirmative action in favour of marginalised groups (Republic of Uganda Constitution, 1995). Uganda has a National Gender Policy since 2007. The Constitution also includes provisions to protect and enhance the rights of persons with disabilities, as does the Revised National Policy on Disability in Uganda 2023. (for the latter, source: <https://mglsd.go.ug/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/FINAL-REVISED-NATIONAL-POLICY-ON-PWDs-2023.pdf> )

#### 4.7.4 Contextual, hampering factors

Apart from the positive contributing (primary and rival) factors, the MTR identified several contradicting factors in Uganda that prevented the change from taking place or from being far-reaching. These factors can be categorised as follows:

- **Social and historical factors:** Negative social and cultural perceptions, regressive customary practices (solving problems in traditional ways that go against progressive laws to promote for human rights/women empowerment), and stereotypes (pro-patriarchy/male supremacy, as well as stigma around PWD or people from a specific religious group) hinder women's rights and participation, with community members often unaware of pro-women rights and resistance from both men and women. Additionally, issues like unequal pay (women not equally compensated or rewarded), restricted financial control (women not having access to finances or allowed to make decisions on expenses), and unfair judgements of female leadership persist. Broader societal and economic challenges, such as drug abuse, sexual harassment, unemployment, and poverty, further marginalise certain groups, including youth involved in crime. Anti-rights groups also oppose progressive policy changes, exacerbating these issues.
- **Political environment, security and shrinking civic space:** The legal and regulatory environments with strict compliance requirements<sup>49</sup> and related crackdowns on organisations limited the power of CSO and their ability to freely operate. The restrictive NGO legislation constrains civic space and instils a fear of speaking out. Meanwhile, government agencies as well as the private sector often resist progressive policy changes. Misinformation and misconceptions propagated by the media, police harassment, threats, and a negative political culture of rivalry and violence are signs of the hostile environment that CSOs have to work in, bringing with it serious safety and security concerns, limiting CSOs to effectively promote progressive change.
- **Challenging internal SP/CSO dynamics:** during the learning event, additional hampering factors were shared, including CSOs lack of cohesion, often failing to speak with one voice or take harmonised positions in advocacy matters. CSOs do not yet apply systematic approaches to analyse and leverage primary data for research and evidence. Power dynamics and competition for resources among CSOs, along with rigid institutional rules within CSOs and their partnerships, further impede progress. Furthermore, CS strengthening strongly relies on external (foreign) funding that is (increasingly) insecure, which in turn affects the sustainability of cooperative structures and results.
- **Lack of financial sustainability** is a key concern raised for the above results. It is indicated that the initiatives and the related changes these bring about rely heavily on external support, for example the power of CSOs is not yet based on independence and sustainable funding models. Without financial sustainability, the CSOs are hampered in producing far reaching results, remaining at activity and output level, not having longer term or enough funding to continue promoting the change processes.

#### 4.7.5 Implications for the validity of the overall ToC / alternative hypothesis.

When linking MTR findings related to the progress towards result areas and the analysis of the contribution factors to the ToC, we see the causal relation between Intermediary outcomes and outcome level - crossing the border from sphere of control to influence - is largely confirmed. The cases confirm that capacity strengthening, providing resources and support for advocacy efforts are significant complementary primary contributing factors, explaining progress at outcome level.

In addition, the revitalisation of informal civil society networks or community groups and their subsequent formalisation into civil society structures, is a primary contributing factor that enabled this causal change. Even though the framework explicitly requires the building of strategic partnerships as a condition for funding, reflecting an implicit assumption that

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<sup>49</sup> Non-Governmental Organisations Act, 2016.

collaboration is needed for better results, the establishment of civil society network structures and social movements is not yet explicitly mentioned in the SCS framework ToC in the pathways of change.

Contributing factors like the expansion of advocacy alliances beyond the SPs and the adoption of meaningful inclusive / gender transformative approaches could be considered assumptions that enhance the chance of success. At the same time, a number of preconditions for change (i.e. reputation and leadership) relate to the capacity of the CSOs and can therefore be considered to be part of the existing ToC as they concern issues to be addressed when shaping and strengthening partnerships.

Another precondition (i.e.. legislative framework) relates to a contextual factor, which, together with various hampering contextual factors, demonstrates the validity of the aspired change related to the promotion and protection of civic space. Other preconditions found (i.e. access to other resources, economic situation, financial sustainability) illustrate that the ToC may need to be more explicit in its assumptions about the extent to which the necessary conditions are in place for civil society - particularly marginalised groups - to invest time and efforts to take part in advocacy activities and to do so in a way that avoids overdependence on external resources.

Although the contribution cases largely confirm the validity of the existing ToC, while offering suggestions for enrichment, a number of rival/alternative factors were identified as well that could be seen to suggest **alternative causal pathways / hypotheses**. These factors show, for instance, that where government and civil society have a common interest and find the right moment to work together (see rival factors; government and momentum), these joint efforts contribute to progress. This illustrates that a SCS policy framework that aims to contribute to inclusive sustainable development needs to consider a **complementary pathway** that describes when, where and how the government fits into the picture, especially when it concerns civic rights related to more sensitive / controversial topics.

Other rival / alternative factors relate to initiatives financed through other grants, prior or parallel to the SCS policy framework, and initiatives by CS that are perceived as going beyond the SP engagement (see rival factors; other grants and capacitated groups). These initiatives, however, assume causalities that are similar to the SCS policy framework but financed / undertaken by alternative resources. Therefore, this says more about the relevance of the SCS policy framework in light of alternative resources than suggesting alternative hypotheses for change.

## 4.8 Efficiency

This chapter addresses evaluation questions related to efficient use of resources and time and the way (financial) decision-making is organised.

Efficiency
<b>14.</b> To what extent has policy implementation through the different policy instruments with strategic partnerships, LFS funds and the Civic Space funds been efficient in terms of costs, value for resources, logistics and coordination?
<b>15.</b> How are expense flows and financial decision-making organised between organisations and how does this affect efficiency? To what extent is there a difference between Southern led and Northern led partnership in efficiency?

**Despite limited information on expenditures, available data suggests that real expenditure was broadly in line with budget.** Information on budget per country or per pathway is usually reported (for around 2/3 of the partnerships). Partners report by cost centres following guidelines by MFA, but the way activities are classified into cost centres is not uniform (e.g. funds transferred to local partners are sometimes included under specific cost centres and sometimes spread among different cost centres). Data on planned vs realised expenditures was reported by slightly more than half of the partnerships, whereas no data was received in the other cases. Where available, data indicated that reported expenditures were in line with the budgeted amount, and deviations were usually justified. In the validation meeting, some of the partnership representatives pointed out that budget depletion in some cases was triggered by the appreciation of the Ugandan Shilling vis-à-vis the euro.

**The policy instruments under the SCS Policy framework were regarded as efficient, although with room for improvement.** Most survey respondents agreed that the policy instruments allowed for an efficient use of resources (see Figure 19), although in some cases there were reports of delays in the disbursement (as also indicated by a minority of partners in Figure 19).

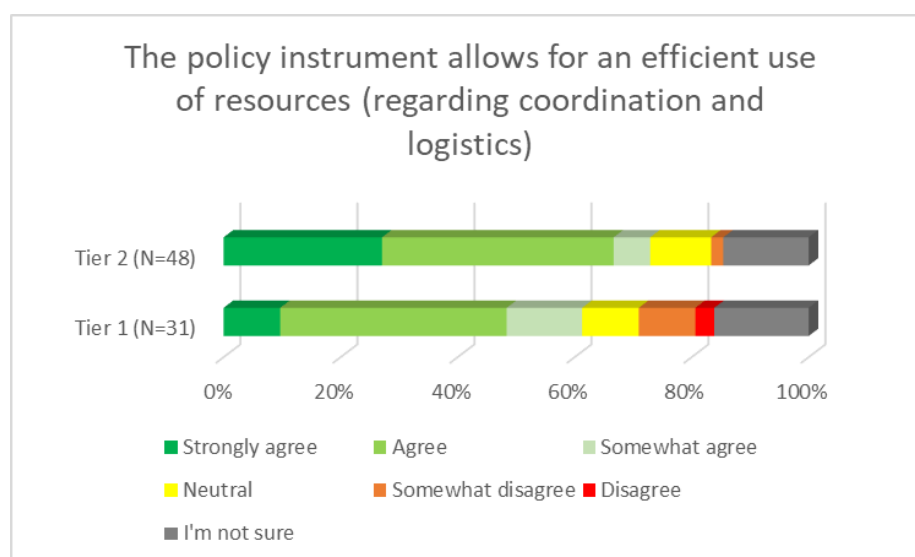


Figure 19: Survey respondents' opinion regarding the efficient use of resources.

In-depth interviews with local partners, international partners and external stakeholders indicated the following positive elements about the flexibility of the SCS framework:

- the low transaction costs and administrative burden for MFA, as they do not have to deal with over 300 individual organisations;
- the flexibility of funding;

- the longer-term funding window;
- fostering cooperation between international and local partners, and among different local partners, although coordination among member organisations, especially for new partnerships, requires time and leads to inefficiencies;
- shared risks among consortium partners and partnerships;
- opportunities to learn from other countries: international NGOs link organisations at the regional/global level to share best practices and lessons learned.

**Flexibility in the use of funding, although in different levels among partnerships and instruments, helped to ensure efficiency.** In most partnerships and funds, when some activities could not take place (e.g. due to security issues), the budget could be used for other activities (e.g. safety trainings). This aspect is of particular importance in the Ugandan context where changes in political environment and shrinking of civic space require adaptability of strategy and activities. Flexibility in the use of funding was highly appreciated in the policy instruments (although with differences among the various policy instruments<sup>50</sup>), in the LFS funds, but less in the Voice programme, where funding is (short-term) project based.

**The funding window of 5 years is an improvement compared to annual project-based funding, although building capacity for advocacy and ensuring sustainability of results would require an even longer funding window.** The necessity to have long-term funding windows for advocacy was highlighted by numerous interviewees, both inside and outside the programme. Working through partnerships that have a five-year funding period was regarded as an improvement by most interviewed partners, compared to project-based funding, although many expressed concerns regarding the sustainability of the capacity building effort, if the funding is not renewed. Moreover, the funding mechanism (and the potential regrants process), is different among different partnerships. While in most cases local partners received multi-year funding, in a minority of partnerships regrants was done on a yearly basis, with some instances when organisations were granted only for the first year. In terms of funds, the LFS funds are cited as a positive example by other international organisations, as they provide grants up to three years, with applications limited to the initial funding period. However, in the case of Uganda, LFS grantees received funding of only 1-2 years, possibly related to their absorption capacity.

**Tasks are generally seen as being efficiently distributed among tiers, although partnerships could leverage more on local CSOs, especially those experienced in managing large funds.** 1<sup>st</sup> tier partners are mainly involved in coordination, financial decision-making and (cross-country) learning, whereas 3<sup>rd</sup> tier partners are generally implementing partners and 2<sup>nd</sup> tier are implementing partners that are in some cases involved in regrants to 3<sup>rd</sup> tier partners. Various international and local partners shared the opinion that local partners often did not (yet) have the (full) capacity to mobilise and ensure the compliant and accountable use of international funds, with all the financial risks attached. However, a number of more established local organisations did consider themselves strong enough to do so.

**Involvement of local partners in financial decision-making differs, but high-level financial decisions are usually taken at the (international) consortium level** (i.e. how to divide the budget among consortium members or among countries). At the country level two main funding mechanisms are present:

- 1) In most cases budget is first divided among each international consortium member (or their local counterparts) and then each consortium member in turn finances local organisations (implementing partners);
- 2) In a minority of cases funds are transferred to country coordinator organisation that in turn regrants to local organisations through (partly) participatory processes.

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<sup>50</sup> Documents and interviewees from one of the PoV partnerships indicated that they were not allowed to use funding for safety as the PoV instrument did not allow so (as opposed to the SRHR partnerships).

Survey responses indicated that local partners are not always involved in financial decision-making (Figure 20) and interviews confirmed that even in the cases where local partners are involved in the planning of activities, they are involved in financial decision-making only at the national level (and not for the partnership as a whole).

As a result, budget distribution and the rationale behind financial decisions at the consortium level are often not clear to local partners, except for the two partnerships where Ugandan organisations are part of the international consortium. Nevertheless, financial reporting guidelines are clear for almost all partnerships that underwent the capacity assessment, and in about half of the cases templates for financial reporting were either jointly designed with local partners, or adjusted following feedback by local partners.

**The evaluation did not find significant differences in efficiency between Northern-led partnerships and Southern-led partnerships.** From available data and documents, it was not possible to compare costs of different partnerships in a meaningful way. Interviews with Ugandan CSOs and partnership leads, as well as survey, did not show differences in efficiencies between Northern-led and Southern-led partnerships. As indicated above, rather than the location of the consortium *lead*, a more meaningful factor to foster the efficiency in terms of financial decision-making is the *presence of a Ugandan partner in the international consortium (tier 1)*.

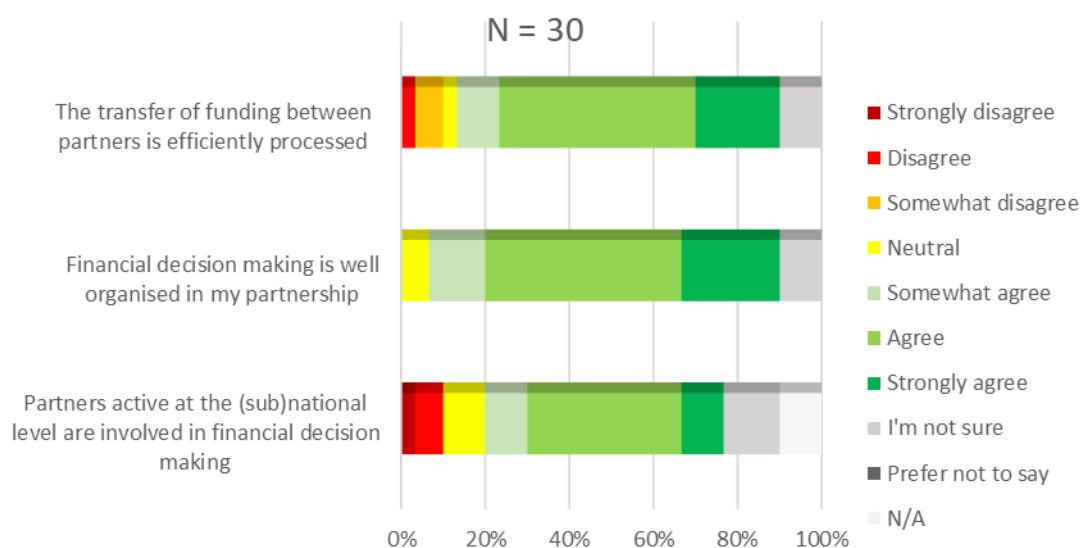


Figure 20: Perception of 1<sup>st</sup> tier survey respondents regarding transfer of funding and financial decision-making. This question was asked only to 1<sup>st</sup> tier respondents.

**As opposed to direct project funding, only a limited share of the original funding in partnership instruments reaches local partners (roughly 50 – 70%).** Although available budget data for most partnerships do not clearly indicate the share of funds that was transferred to local consortium partners, documents for two partnerships, as well as interviews with international consortium leads indicate that the share varies between 50%-70%. This is lower than for Voice and LFS funds (70 – 80%) and most likely also lower than for delegated funding through the embassy, although the indirect / overhead costs to be attributed to direct funding from the embassy is not easily calculated. When comparing to other alternatives, a shared perspective among external interviewees is that providing funding through UN agencies programmes (focusing on civil society strengthening), would probably be less efficient from a cost-perspective, due to higher overhead costs of UN agencies.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Although desk research on similar funds was carried out, no comparable data was found.

## 5 Conclusions

Following the MTR findings, including the results of the two validation meetings, we present our conclusions per evaluation criteria, followed by an overall assessment of the performance of the SCS policy framework in Uganda.

### 5.1 Relevance

Despite differences between thematic areas, **the SCS policy framework remains highly relevant for the context in Uganda**, particularly where it contributes to keeping the government accountable for the protection of civic rights and the quality of public services, especially in remote and vulnerable communities. The pathways of the ToC are valid, and the assumptions made in the ToC remain relevant but incomplete in addressing the preconditions for and sustainability of advocacy efforts, while the link to international advocacy efforts and results is also missing.

The ToC acknowledges that civic space is shaped and protected by both government and CS actors but only addresses the contribution of CS in this, leaving it open whether, where and how the government's role is to be addressed. Besides, the importance of the role of the EKN as a strategic partner is widely acknowledged by the SPs, although the way in which the EKN is positioned in and expected to contribute to the ToC is unclear to the SPs.

SPs have developed their own country-specific ToCs and are regularly updating them through increasingly inclusive consultation processes, illustrating the growing maturity of the SPs in ensuring the continued relevance of their interventions.

### 5.2 Status and progress in CS capacity development

The MTR conducted a capacity assessment at the SP and individual partner level that can be used as a basis for comparison in the endline evaluation in 2026. The results of these capacity assessments at the beginning of the fourth year of implementation were validated for twelve SPs and 49 individual partners, as summarised in the figures below.

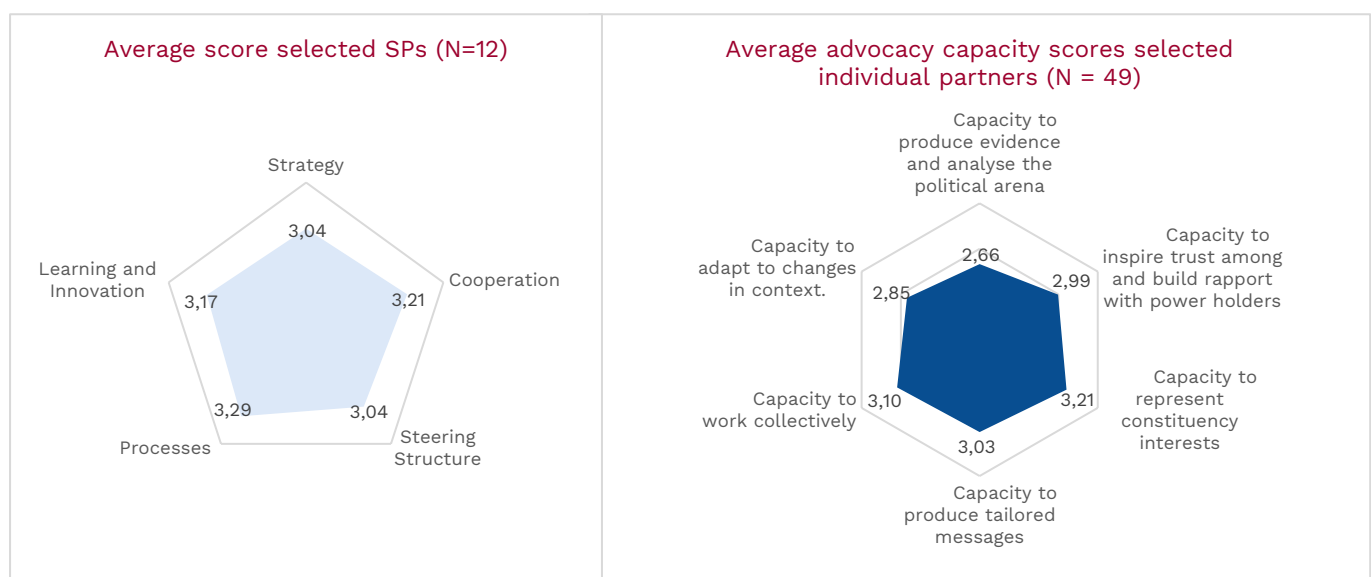


Figure 21: Average scores for partnership and individual assessments.

In the absence of a baseline measurement, no quantified conclusions can be drawn about progress in capacity since the beginning of the SCS policy framework in 2021. At the same time, the MTR measurement illustrates that the vast majority of SPs are functioning reasonably well, which is indicative of progress made in partnership capacity since the start of the policy framework, especially for newly formed SPs. At the same time, the partnerships face challenges in ensuring the sustainability of the established connections and cooperation beyond the policy period. The current individual partner assessments suggest that advocacy capacities are most advanced in terms of constituency representativeness, while the strongest scope for improvement can be found in evidence building and analysis.

From a more qualitative assessment of practices and progress in capacity strengthening to date, we can see that serious and commendable efforts have been made by the MFA to develop an overarching M&E framework in support of the SCS policy framework. This would have to guide strategic implementation partners in managing their CSO capacity strengthening efforts and enable reporting that would provide insights into the overall performance of the policy framework. In addition, various (thematic) results frameworks and tools were developed and made available to recognise the diversity of SPs and variety in outcomes to be pursued. However, in practice this has meant that many and diverse capacity development approaches and modalities have been used involving over 300 CSOs in Uganda alone. SP documentation shows that it has already been a challenge to gain a manageable overview of the scale and diversity of these efforts, let alone a comprehensive picture of the effects of all such efforts.

Nevertheless, SP representatives in majority confirm that capacities have been strengthened at both the partnership and individual CSO levels. They cited many examples to substantiate these claims that were confirmed in more general terms by external informants. This leads the MTR to conclude that **the SCS policy framework has contributed to a stronger, more vibrant and diverse civil society sector in Uganda**. This has been accomplished by allowing sufficient flexibility and autonomy within SPs to identify and shape capacity development interventions fitting their own specific situation. While no particular capacity strengthening modalities can be singled out as the most or least effective in this, it is clear that there is an increasing preference for exchange and peer learning over expert-driven training or advice, illustrating the growing confidence and maturity of partners. Given this progress, the MTR understands and supports the call for more attention and efforts to connect capacity strengthening with a deliberate localisation process. Besides, the MTR observes that many uncertainties remain about the sustainability of the strengthened capacities beyond this policy framework. The issue of sustainability is acknowledged and part of the country-wide Linking and Learning efforts, but with less than two years to go the MTR is not convinced that the SPs – including MFA as a strategic partner – share the necessary sense of urgency for this.

### 5.3 Coherence

**Coherence *within SPs* is overall reasonable and gradually increasing**, spanning from working in silos to the deliberate use of complementarities, whereby the presence of a prominent national lead partner (often a 1<sup>st</sup> tier representative) helps. Coordination, and through that **coherence, among different SPs is usually limited to the same thematic area** and becomes easier with the same partner being a member of multiple partnerships. The competitive nature of the policy instruments, the reality of each SP working with their own specific ToC/results framework, and the absence of dedicated resources for coordination across SPs explain the limited success of attempts made by the EKN to stimulate coherence among SPs. The *power of learning* initiative was meant to stimulate exchange and joint learning that could bring SPs closer together, but does not have the necessary priority and prominence among SPs to stimulate programmatic coordination and coherence.

**Coordination and coherence of the SPs with the EKN as strategic partner is mixed**, ranging from frequent to no contact. This is caused by various factors, including the fact that the SCS policy

framework and the EKN MACS are not systematically aligned. Besides, varying personal attitudes on the side of both the EKN and SPs mean that the perceived importance and thus the reality of collaboration and coordination with the EKN differs for each SP. The absence of a clear and specific position of the EKN in the ToC of the SCS policy framework also does not help in this respect.

**Coherence with local government agendas at both the national and district levels is highly dependent on the nature of the SPs' work.** SPs in areas such as food security, SGBV or health-related issues tend to experience smoother cooperation, whereas areas like LGBTIQ+ rights or land rights often encounter outright opposition. Collaboration with other donors and NGOs is undertaken on an ad-hoc basis, rather than systematically for the overall framework. This is partly due to a general environment that does not foster donor coordination and coherence, especially after the demise of the DGF. Attempts to revive donor coordination are mentioned but remain at an early stage, with limited visible impact.

#### **5.4 Practices and progress towards Inclusiveness and Effectiveness**

The practice of applying **gender transformative approaches is widespread among the SPs**, illustrating the effectiveness of making this a clear requirement under the policy. This is shown by practices extending well beyond striving for equal numbers, which include the application of gender analysis tools, focus on strengthening feminist principles and female leadership, adopting a deliberate gender and inclusion lens in programming, etc. Similarly, practices to ensure the **inclusion of marginalised groups are demonstrated by almost all SPs**, with around 60% fully focused on supporting marginalised groups. This happens directly by including partners in the SPs that are staffed by members of the targeted community and indirectly. In such cases, interventions are channelled through third-tier partners that represent and support the interests of a particular marginalised group that is not (yet) in a position to advocate for themselves.

The MTR observes **reasonable to significant progress towards the SCS policy's five main result areas** (*enhanced power and legitimacy of CSOs, strengthened social movements, meaningful youth participation, empowered marginalised groups and empowered and equal participation of women and girls*). Progress in CSO strengthening is described above, while the extensive efforts to strengthen more informal networks/movements also show results at the individual, community, national and international levels. This ranges from increased individual competencies to initiatives being better connected and more confident and visible in engaging with authorities. These efforts are constantly challenged by shrinking civic space, in particular when it concerns sensitive topics, although many signs illustrate the SPs' resilience and adaptive capacity.

Similarly, the MTR found multiple signs of progress towards meaningful youth participation and empowerment of marginalised groups, with most SPs demonstrating ample efforts to consult and inform their constituents. Only a few youth-oriented SPs show further progress with youth being actively involved in decision-making and even represented in leadership positions, illustrating scope for growth. This type of progress is more widespread when it concerns the empowerment of marginalised communities. However, the challenge remains for SPs working with a specific marginalised group other than (LGBTIQ+) women and girls to adopt a strong intersectional approach combining gender equality with a target group such as youth or persons with disabilities. The effects of the earlier mentioned gender transformative approaches are most strongly visible in progress towards the empowerment and equal participation of women and girls. Multiple signs of progress were found, ranging from increased awareness about rights to women increasingly taking on leadership positions.

The MTR observes **clear signs of systemic change in relation to gender inequality**, as a result of the SPs deliberately addressing changes at the individual, institutional, legislative and society levels. The results show how women (and girls) gain access to resources, benefits and decision-making. The clearest examples are of women taking on leadership positions in professional,

political and community contexts or entering formerly male-dominated professional spaces due to increased personal awareness, changed attitudes of those in charge of decision-making structures, changed procedures and regulations and (a first) change in public opinion.

From the ten contribution cases, the MTR extracts a range of factors that explain the above signs of progress, which are partly internal and partly external to the SCS policy framework. The most important internal factors include the creation and stimulation of CSO networks/collaborative structures (seven cases), the strengthening of capacities (seven cases) and the tangible (financial) support in advocacy work (six cases), which confirm the validity of these pathways in the ToC. A significant rival (external) contributing factor relates to the strong intrinsic motivation, leadership and volunteerism demonstrated by many of the SPs met, which is instrumental in systemic change and an encouraging sign of the vibrancy and self-reliance of the civil society. Other rival factors offering alternative explanations for change were more case-specific, including the presence of other donors (four cases) or the collaboration of local government in more community-centred SPs (two cases). However, these cases do not lead to alternative hypotheses for change, as other donors appear to rely on similar causalities, offering alternative resources rather than hypotheses. The government-related rival factors illustrate the importance of considering a *complementary pathway* that describes when, where and how the government fits in, especially when it concerns civic rights related to more sensitive/controversial topics.

Overall, the most significant hampering factors relate to the shrinking civic space (eight cases), in particular at the national level, reflected in increasingly restrictive rules and regulations. This is (at least partially) rooted in broader societal norms and values, which reconfirms the continuing relevance of the SCS policy framework in Uganda. Moreover, in cases where collaboration did not result in a united voice and approach, caused by lack of unambiguous evidence, rigid internal rules and procedures or different ideologies, this was perceived as a significant impeding factor.

## 5.5 Efficiency

The available data on budget execution suggests that the **implementation of activities has been efficient**, although quantitative data was not available for all partnerships. Qualitative analysis showed that **the design of the partnership instruments is overall fairly efficient**, although there remains room for improvement in some partnerships. Two factors that make it efficient are (1) the flexibility in the use of funding, with exceptions for some instruments, and (2) the relatively long funding window of five years, although it could be argued that this remains insufficient to ensure the sustainability of capacity building efforts.

**Tasks are generally efficiently distributed among tiers**, although partnerships could leverage more on local CSOs taking on fund management and coordination roles, especially those experienced in managing large funds.

The partnership model implies that some overhead goes to international partners. This model is likely to be more efficient than direct project funding to all individual consortium partners. Based on a review of financial data from a selection of SPs, we see that roughly 50–70% of the partnership budget reaches local partners (and 70–80% in the case of VOICE and the LFS funds). Efficiency in comparison to the EKN managed delegated funds is difficult to assess given that it is difficult to make a comparable assessment of the overhead/indirect costs to be attributed. Nevertheless, it is clear that the EKN is currently not staffed and equipped to manage the funding of 25 independent SPs, let alone the more than 300 Ugandan partners and grantees operating under the SCS policy framework.

The involvement of local partners in financial decision-making differs, but high-level financial decisions are usually taken at the international consortium level, and they are – with a few exceptions – not clear to local partners. The evaluation did not find significant differences in efficiency between Northern- and Southern-led partnerships.

## 5.6 Overall conclusion

When assessing the overall value and performance of the SCS policy framework in Uganda, the MTR sees a broad CS-oriented policy framework that complements the complex governmental bilateral cooperation between the Netherlands and Uganda. As such, **the SCS policy provides a relevant funding framework to strengthen civil society in a shrinking civic space.** The SCS policy framework enables the operations of 25 SPs and several grant-making funds, strengthening the capacity and supporting the work of over 300 CS partners operating in various sectors at the national and sub-national levels, with strong potential for complementarity.

The majority of these SPs/funds manage to include and/or reach partners representing the marginalised groups that the policy framework aims to support. This inclusion of marginalised groups as well as the widespread use of (gender) transformative approaches are proving to be key factors in explaining the multiple signs of progress towards the various policy objectives. **The MTR is therefore positive about the overall performance of the SCS policy framework in Uganda.**

The MTR appreciates that the policy framework allows capacity strengthening of CS organisations and movements to go hand-in-hand with the provision of direct support to their advocacy efforts. In this way, the policy framework intends to facilitate experience-based learning and growth, and the majority of SPs confirm that this is realised, albeit in a more organic way befitting the local learning culture and context, rather than through systematically structured and planned learning trajectories.

Besides its success, the MTR also observes a number of dilemmas and challenges faced by the SCS policy framework. These partly illustrate the growing capacity and maturity CS partners in Uganda and can, therefore, also be seen as ‘next steps’ in policy evolution.

These dilemmas/challenges relate to:

- reconciling progress in CS management capacity with (increasing) demands for localisation as local SP partners expect that increasing managerial capacities would need to be recognised by a gradual transfer of managerial responsibility and accountability from international to local partners;
- the scope of the framework being experienced as (overly) narrowly focused on advocacy without adequately addressing the preconditions that in particular need to be in place for the most marginalised groups to engage in advocacy;
- the limited coordination and coherence among SPs in a framework that operates through competitive instruments, financing individual entities in the pursuit of collective results;
- ensuring that the design and implementation of effective advocacy efforts are not the responsibility of the SPs alone, and more convincingly supported by (objective) evidence from professional research and M&E efforts; and
- securing the sustainability of strengthened capacities and cooperative arrangements enabled by an externally funded framework with an uncertain future beyond 2025.

Although these dilemmas/challenges are partly recognised and addressed in ongoing discussions and L&L processes, the MTR sees merit in paying more attention to these issues in the remainder of the current framework and the design of future SCS or similar policy frameworks and instruments.

## 6 Recommendations

Following the above conclusions, the MTR formulated recommendations for the remainder of the policy framework and for future SCS and thematic policymaking, primarily directed at the MFA. Besides, drawing on its own conclusions, the MTR's recommendations have been inspired by the suggestions/ideas generated by SP representatives during the validation workshops in response to a number of strategic questions/challenges (see Figure 22 below). Guided by this, the MTR team has formulated its own recommendations, which are presented below.

LOCALISATION: What can and should be done by whom to ensure the right pace in localisation in the context of the SCS policy framework in Uganda, making optimal use of the added value of both national and international partners?

SCOPE of the Framework: To what extent and how does the SCS Policy framework need to be adapted to enable partnerships to respond adequately to the diverse advocacy and service-delivery needs of their constituencies?

SUSTAINABILITY: How could the SCS policy framework best address the sustainability of partnerships and CSO partners it helped establish and strengthen in Uganda to ensure continuity where needed within a context of limited domestic resources for philanthropy / advocacy work and decreasing international funding?

COLLECTIVE vs INDIVIDUAL Performance: To what extent and how could the SCS policy framework stimulate a more coherent approach across Strategic Partnerships at country and/or thematic level, without recognising the performance / track-record of individual partnerships in fund allocation? - Brian

ARCHITECTURE of the framework: How would a future Policy Framework be best structured to stimulate the success of SPs recognizing the different nature of SPs (new versus existing, complementing versus holding government accountable) and functions needed for effective advocacy (e.g.: fund management, research / evidence-building, results-based M&E, Linking & Learning, Communication)?

Figure 22: strategic questions addressed during validation meetings.

Given that we are in the middle of the fourth year of operations under a five-year policy framework, there is not much time left to change things at the policy level that will significantly influence current policy implementation. Our recommendations are therefore mainly directed at future policymaking related to SCS and related themes. However, we start with some recommendations that can already be acted upon in the shorter term.

### 6.1 Recommendations for immediate action.

#### 6.1.1 Stimulate addressing gaps in capacity development

Many capacity dimensions are being addressed, primarily based on jointly identified needs. However, two areas of capacity strengthening are identified as lacking sufficient attention, concerning 1) the systematic production and analysis of evidence to make more credible advocacy claims, and 2) the sustainability of strengthened advocacy capacity and collaborative arrangements. The latter issue was also prioritised in the externally facilitated joint L&L processes, although real progress in this remains limited.

Therefore, *emphasise these two areas as important priorities for capacity strengthening within and across SPs, encouraging an acceleration of the joint L&L processes in these areas.*

#### 6.1.2 Maintain a transformative policy framework

An important success factor of the current SCS framework has been the emphasis on inclusive, gender transformative approaches and the involvement of partners that are recognised and credible in championing this.

*Maintain this emphasis in the remainder of the current policy framework but also throughout the policy instruments that will be used to operationalise a possible future SCS policy framework.*

### 6.1.3 Start working towards more deliberate localisation

Given the international debate and the call from various Ugandan partners for more attention for localisation,<sup>52</sup> a next SCS policy framework would need to explicitly address localisation. The main arguments for this include stronger local ownership, leadership and drive, combined with increased efficiency.

*Start the initial steps towards localisation already under the current policy framework, as this will have to be a gradual process. This can be achieved by ensuring the direct involvement of at least one Ugandan partner in the highest (international) governance structure for those SPs where this is not yet the case. In other SPs, international lead partners can be encouraged to initiate deliberate efforts in this direction, e.g. by allocating resources for coaching/mentoring, secondments, etc.*

*In the longer run, develop more deliberate localisation processes, pursuing a gradual transfer of management responsibility and accountability to local partners demonstrating predefined progressing maturity levels.*

## 6.2 Recommendations for future SCS and related policy making.

### 6.2.1 Enrich the overall ToC.

The main pathways making up the current ToC remain valid but can be enriched to better address preconditions for CS to engage in advocacy and reflect progress to date in the capacity of civil society organisations. In view of this:

- a) *Be more explicit about the minimal safety and security conditions/precautions that would allow CSOs to engage in advocacy without causing a risk to themselves or the people around them.* Linked to this, the policy framework can be more explicit about the possible allocation of resources when the safety and security situation changes.
- b) *Recognise that the most marginalised groups who are meant to be the primary beneficiaries of this policy face acute limitations in time or resources to engage directly in advocacy activities.* This would recognise the gradual approach already taken by some SPs, starting by working with partners that credibly reach these groups and gradually moving towards organising them as partners.
- c) *Be more elaborate about the causal connections between the different pathways by shifting emphasis to a more explicit experiential learning cycle (plan, do, reflect and act), rather than presenting capacity building and support for advocacy as parallel processes.*

*Additionally, be more explicit about the international dimension.* This means illustrating the policy's thinking about how national advocacy processes and results feed into international processes, and vice versa. Besides, this relates to how and where international organisations/representations active in Uganda feature in the ToC. This concerns in particular the role and contribution of the EKN, as a co-owner and strategic partner in this policy framework.

*Furthermore, more strongly elaborate the causal relation between societal norms and values and the behaviour of government and business leaders, by adding workstream with government and private sector as complementary pathways of change rather than mentioning them only as outcomes.*

### 6.2.2 Protect the scope of the policy framework

The current SCS policy framework enables supporting a wide variety of CS movements and entities in different sectors, recognising the diversity of CS. The MTR believes that this wide coverage is valuable and justified, given that the essence of the policy is to contribute to **inclusive**

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<sup>52</sup> Localisation is defined here as the process whereby programmatic decision-making, leadership and accountability for results and resources increasingly lies with local partners.

sustainable development pursued through **inclusive** laws, policies, norms and practices. The SCS policy recognises that this inclusiveness requires effective CSO involvement, regardless of the sector or theme. This translates in the ambition of the SCS policy framework to see CS themselves effectively advocate to secure civic rights and sound public decision-making and service delivery. This scope is challenged by partners with a history in service delivery or working with the most marginalised groups, who feel that they cannot afford to (only) engage in advocacy.

While this challenge is understandable, it is recommended to *maintain restraint in broadening the scope of the policy framework and retain its advocacy focus to hold the government and private sector accountable for their decisions and actions. Limit a possible widening of scope to addressing safety and security conditions as part of a deliberate process to overcome specific risks that prevent particularly vulnerable/marginalised groups from taking part in advocacy efforts.*

In addition, *emphasise the importance of building in/seeking connections to complementary efforts directed at the capacity (= ability, willingness and conditions) of the government (and private sector) to engage with CS, using the lesson that government is more easily influenced when working at the sub-national level or with more technical (executive) government entities.*

Besides, *seek complementarities with more service-oriented (livelihood) programmes /funding windows that help to create more conducive conditions for CS to engage in advocacy efforts.*

### **6.2.3 Ensure complementary policy instruments**

The SCS policy framework is operationalised through seven – supposedly complementary – (funding) instruments, expanding on and bringing existing funding windows under one umbrella. This complementarity of instruments is not obvious on the ground, as similar types of partnerships operate in similar ways under different instruments with partly overlapping membership. The main differences are found between the operations of partnerships (longer-term cooperation within one programmatic framework) and funds (shorter-term cooperation through specific grant projects), and between partnerships that primarily focus on in-country results (e.g. local food security) and those with a stronger international dimension.

Therefore, *work out policy instruments that more clearly recognise and respond to this reality as part of a future policy framework*

This could include at least the following types of instruments:

- a) Local grant-making Funds to support specific projects that benefit marginalised communities to be obtained through relatively simple processes managed by empathic (in-country) fund managers who understand the challenges and context of the targeted beneficiaries.
- b) Country-specific SP funds, whereby the emphasis lies on advocacy results at the national or sub-national levels, channelled through and aligned with the EKN's MACS. The role of (possible) international partners in these partnerships would be more limited to facilitate learning across countries<sup>53</sup>, connecting to international advocacy efforts on the same subject and – as needed – fund mobilisation and management. *N.B. this modality would require additional capacity at the EKNs.*
- c) International SP funds, whereby the emphasis lies on strengthening CS advocacy with a clear international dimension, dealing with issues where multiple governments, inter-governmental institutes and/or international firms are involved (e.g. related to international investments in infrastructure or agriculture implicating local civic rights or related to global public goods). Overseen by MFA in the Hague, such partnership funds would require international and national partners to work closely together on content (i.e. the design and implementation of advocacy efforts).

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<sup>53</sup> The MTR envisions that multiple countries can be covered by one SP.

#### 6.2.4 Create a professional architecture around Partnerships

The successful performance of SPs in designing, achieving and demonstrating effective advocacy requires more than planning and implementation of experience-based advocacy plans, including:

- production and analysis of an objective evidence base to justify goals and set priorities;
- context-sensitive and accountable fund management;
- complex-aware and pragmatic monitoring and reporting of meaningful results;
- needs- and (M&E) evidence-based L&L efforts;
- accommodative and efficient internal and external coordination;
- deliberate recognition and use of complementarities among implementing partners.

At present, these requirements are more or less implicitly expected to be met by each of the SPs separately. At the same time, external resource persons and partners confirm scope for improvement in producing evidence, suggest more in-country fund management, describe current M&E frameworks as complicated and inadequate in capturing meaningful results, and indicate that coordination across SPs takes up resources that are not planned/budgeted.

*Therefore, consider an alternative architecture around partnerships, whereby partnerships concentrate on the planning, management and realisation of their (direct) capacity strengthening and advocacy results, while having access to prequalified (local) service providers that could undertake relevant research, periodic outcome-level monitoring to inform strategic steering and/or coordination across partnerships. This could be similar to the current arrangement with an external national L&L facilitator, albeit with stronger incentives to make use of this supporting architecture.*

N.B the MTR recognises that further and careful thinking is needed about how to ensure that the more complicated coordination and accountability arrangements that follow from this recommendation are properly functioning.

#### 6.2.5 Pursue coherence and collective results at the country level

Coherence among SPs receives limited attention, partly because each SP works with its own country-specific ToC and results framework, which makes the need for coordination and coherence less obvious. Moreover, coordination for coherence takes time that is not planned for, meaning that this is assigned lesser priority than delivering on one's own plans. At the same time, both the EKN and SPs recognise that all SP efforts contribute to the collective goal of CS strengthening, although the limited coherence and coordination means that there is no clear and comprehensive overview of the collective results under the SCS policy framework in Uganda.

*Therefore, develop a joint-country level ToC among all SPs before embarking on the implementation of a next programme phase, ensuring this is aligned with the EKN's MACS and specifies collective results (as needed per thematic area) and the individual contributions of SPs, Funds and the EKN.*

N.B. the MTR recognises that this

*Subsequently, use this joint-country level ToC as a basis for developing a joint, complex-aware M&E framework to assess meaningful progress towards collective results and account for individual contributions.*

***A complex-aware M&E framework for advocacy programmes is ideally actor-oriented, specifying the progressive effects of interventions on the behaviour of clearly defined target actors. The COM-B model<sup>54</sup> offers a good universal framework for this, recognising that behavioural change of actors targeted by advocacy efforts takes place gradually and depends on successfully addressing Capabilities, Opportunities and Motivation for change.***

<sup>54</sup> Capability, Opportunity, Motivation – Behaviour model, J. Mayne, 2017. See also [https://social-change.co.uk/files/02.09.19\\_COM-B\\_and\\_changing\\_behaviour\\_.pdf](https://social-change.co.uk/files/02.09.19_COM-B_and_changing_behaviour_.pdf);

The MTR realises that this recommendation entails an extra step after grant approval that may delay the actual implementation, and requires (resources for) a competent and neutral facilitator to bring and hold the various SPs and Funds together and recognises that the capacity of the EKN to take charge of such coordination and fund management is limited. However, the MTR is confident that these roles can be outsourced and that capable entities exist in Uganda to do so, possibly per thematic area to avoid an over-dependence on one single coordinator/fund manager. This arrangement can be supported by a competent M&E service provider being responsible for M&E framework development and the collection and processing of M&E data on progress towards collective results and individual contributions.

#### **6.2.6 Mainstream sustainability in future policy cycles**

Sustainability concerns related to the results of externally financed programmes are not unique to the SCS policy framework. Given the continuing uncertainties about the nature and scale of any follow-up framework, already in recommendation 1 we recommend intensifying and accelerating efforts towards securing the sustainability of strengthened capacities and connections.

*In addition, pay more deliberate and systematic attention to sustainability in a possible further policy cycle, ensuring that future proposals are required to include clear and realistic sustainability plans and exit strategies with clear milestones to demonstrate they are acted upon during implementation. In future appraisal processes these elements should play an important role in the scoring of proposals.*

Sustainability plans can be expected to specify a clear and convincing resource mobilisation strategy addressing alternative resources like own income generation (social enterprises) and/or cash or in-kind domestic resources (philanthropy development) from private sector and citizens. Moreover, these plans would ideally include clear indicators to measure progress towards (financial) self-reliance.



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