

A civil society review of progress
towards the Millennium Development
Goals in Commonwealth countries

National Report:

Uganda



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A civil society review of progress towards the Millennium Development Goals in Commonwealth countries

National Report: Uganda

This project aims to encourage and articulate civil society analysis of: progress towards the MDGs; the usefulness of the MDG framework for civil society; the contribution of civil society to the attainment of the MDGs; issues for a post-2015 agenda to consider.

This report documents the outputs of a two-stage process: desk research to review UN, government, civil society and other multilateral reports on national progress towards achieving the MDGs; and a national consultation workshop with civil society, which tested the findings of the desk research and enabled a deeper discussion on MDG progress, utility and post-2015 agenda setting.

This project was undertaken as part of a programme with the UN Millennium Campaign (UNMC), which supported country-level research by civil society organisations in 20 countries.

The Commonwealth Foundation led this process for the following 14 countries: Cameroon, Ghana, Grenada, Jamaica, Malawi, New Zealand, Pakistan, Samoa, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Trinidad and Tobago, Uganda and Zambia. The UNMC led in the following six countries: India, Mozambique, Nepal, Nigeria, Philippines and The Gambia.

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The Commonwealth Foundation is a development organisation with an international remit and reach, uniquely situated at the interface between government and civil society. We develop the capacity of civil society to act together and learn from each other to engage with the institutions that shape people's lives. We strive for more effective, responsive and accountable governance with civil society participation, which contributes to improved development outcomes.

UN Millennium Campaign

The UN Millennium Campaign was established by the UN Secretary General in 2002. The Campaign supports citizens' efforts to hold their governments to account for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The Millennium Development Goals were adopted by 189 world leaders from rich and poor countries, as part of the Millennium Declaration which was signed in 2000. These leaders agreed to achieve the Goals by 2015. Our premise is simple: we are the first generation that can end poverty and we refuse to miss this opportunity.

Executive Summary

Project rationale and process

This summary presents perspectives from Ugandan civil society on progress made and challenges experienced in relation to the national efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and the extent to which MDG processes have provided opportunities to enhance participatory governance and civil society relations with government. Based on their reflections, Ugandan civil society organisations (CSOs) made a number of recommendations to accelerate progress on the MDGs and improve future development frameworks.

The review process included an analysis of government and civil society reports, interviews with government officials, CSO representatives, political leaders, representatives of bilateral and multilateral agencies and members of the public, and the convening of focus group discussions and a consultative workshop, facilitated by Nakawa Blessed Cooperative Savings and Credit Society in the first half of 2012. This was followed in December 2012 by a national consultation to verify and augment the findings and make further recommendations, convened by the Uganda National Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Forum and CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation.

Civil society review of the MDGs in Uganda

Overall perspectives from CSOs are that only two Goals – 3 and 8 – are on track, while progress towards the others is slow, stagnant or regressing. A common opinion is that recent economic deceleration has pushed many people back into poverty, so that there is a gap between official reports of progress on Goal 1 and experience on the ground. This suggests that the benefits of the strong growth of the second half of the previous decade were not adequately shared. There are also considerable disparities in poverty levels between different regions of Uganda.

The lack of a clear connection between individual goals and adequate financing mechanisms was suggested as one reason for slow progress on the MDGs, while a number of constraints against the full involvement of CSOs in helping to achieve the MDGs were identified. These include the feeling on the part of many CSOs that they had little engagement with the MDGs, which were variously criticised as offering inappropriate and generic targets or as being imposed by donors or other external agencies. A related constraining factor was CSOs' limited knowledge about the MDGs, both among the public and local level civil society leaders, which prevented demands being made with reference to the goals.

Further, CSOs consulted believed that, while the MDGs could in theory provide a platform for more sustained civil society interaction with government to advance development efforts, the opportunity had been missed because there was no clear framework for such engagement. One barrier against closer collaboration identified by participating CSOs was the current NGO law, seen as bureaucratic and onerous in its requirements. CSOs also reported that recent calls in the political sphere for more regulation and supervision of CSOs have encouraged antagonism, and so are not conducive to stimulating co-operation.

While many examples of CSO projects to address aspects of the MDGs were acknowledged in the review, the MDGs are not always very visible in this work, and a need was identified for more systematic mechanisms of knowledge sharing and learning within civil society. Examples of civil society efforts to monitor the provision of public services were also identified, but these are not systematic, and it was suggested that lack of capacity and an insufficient enabling environment for civil society are key factors that hamper civil society from playing its accountability role to monitor progress on the MDGs.

Key national challenges, such as high unemployment and lack of decent work, and continuing gender inequality within households, despite good performance in getting girls into education and women into parliament, were identified as not being adequately covered by the MDGs. While progress has been made on putting more children into school and, to some extent, on reducing child mortality, CSOs suggest that there is now a need to look at the quality of health and education provision, given, for example, the problems of low quality of free education and high teacher absenteeism.

CSOs feel that continuing basic poverty and hunger show there is a need in any new development framework to address the structural causes of poverty and entrenched sources of inequality more closely. High levels of population growth were also noted as a factor that should be taken into account in framing future development goals. Developments that have become more pressing since the MDGs were launched include a more unpredictable climate, with changing rain patterns affecting agriculture, environmental degradation and the discovery of oil, which presents an opportunity to accelerate development, but is also a reminder of the need to uphold transparency and accountability in governance, and enable civil society to play a role in accountability, given the experiences of worsening corruption in other countries due to oil.

Recommendations

Key recommendations from CSOs on improving the participation of civil society include:

- Encourage the formation of civil society coalitions focusing on key issues, such as governance and accountability, that impact on all goals.
- Improve working relationships between civil society and government, including through fostering a constructive dialogue on the legal and regulatory environment for civil society and by revising Uganda's NGO Board to include civil society representation. These steps would enhance civil society's capacity to monitor the MDGs and future goals.

Key recommendations from CSOs for shaping a future development framework include:

- A future development framework should have an overarching focus on equity, transparency and governance. Goals should establish a minimum social protection floor and should make reference to human rights, including women's rights.
- Future development goals, targets and indicators should be localised for the Ugandan context. Extensive consultations with relevant actors, including the intended beneficiaries of development, would be needed to increase shared ownership and buy-in of goals, and ensure greater local relevance of goals, targets and indicators.

1. Introduction

This report provides a combined civil society perspective on progress towards attainment of the MDGs in Uganda, the role of civil society in this, and the extent to which MDG processes have provided opportunities to enhance participatory governance and relations between civil society and government. The review process which generated this report included an analysis of government and civil society reports, interviews with government officials, CSO representatives, political leaders, representatives of bilateral and multilateral agencies and members of the public, and the convening of focus group discussions and a consultative workshop, facilitated by Nakawa Blessed Cooperative Savings and Credit Society in the first half of 2012. This was followed in December 2012 by a national consultation to verify and augment the findings and make further recommendations, convened by the Uganda National NGO Forum and CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation.

Uganda has experienced several major changes over the past decade, some of which have helped and others of which have hindered the achievement of the MDGs and civil society's participation in these. The end of a two decade-old conflict in northern Uganda and the discovery of oil in 2006 both offer renewed opportunities for development. At the same time, Uganda has also endured setbacks related to economic downturn, energy crisis,¹ global surges in food and oil prices, unpredictable weather conditions linked to climate change, and the outbreak of diseases such as cholera, Ebola and nodding disease.

A further challenge is the growing population. Uganda has the third fastest population growth in the world at a rate of 3.2 per cent per annum, compared to the sub-Saharan Africa average rate of 2.4 per cent.² On this basis, Uganda's population, estimated at 30.7 million in 2009, is projected to rise to 38 million by 2015. This, it can be assumed, will put more pressure on agriculture, which currently engages two-thirds of the working population,³ and on energy resources.

2. Civil society perspectives on progress towards the MDGs

Civil society views that emerged from this process were that two Goals – 3 and 8 – are on track and likely to be achieved, while progress towards others is slow, stagnant or even regressing, and they are therefore unlikely to be achieved by 2015. The picture is mixed but is more off track than official sources suggest.

¹ According to a Norwegian government study there is heavy reliance on fuel wood (93% of households) and little electrification (6–7%). High population growth is driving up demand for energy, and fluctuating prices for energy commodities can cause vulnerability. See K Johansen, 'The Energy Sector in Uganda', Norway: The Official Site in Uganda, <http://www.norway.go.ug/Embassy/Development/Energy-and-Petroleum-Sector/energysectorinuganda/>

² Ministry of Health Statistical Abstract, 2010

³ Sixty-six per cent of the workforce is employed in agriculture, according to World Bank data, 2009

Table 1: Civil society assessment of progress towards the MDGs

Goals, targets and indicators ⁴	Civil society assessment of progress	Government assessment of progress	Civil society perspectives on challenges
<p>Goal 1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger:</p> <p>1a. Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1.25 a day</p> <p>1b. Achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people</p> <p>1c. Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger</p>	The picture is mixed but is more off track than official sources attest	On track	Many stakeholders, including government, consider Uganda likely to meet this goal, but civil society questions this. CSOs see many cases of hunger, including child hunger, which contradicts the official narrative of a steady improvement.
<p>Goal 2. Achieve universal primary education:</p> <p>2a. Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling</p>	Off track	Slow	<p>Despite many positive steps, such as Uganda being one of the first countries to introduce free universal primary education, before the instigation of the MDGs in 2000, performance on Goal 2 has been rated as slow across the board, not only by CSOs but also by government, for example in its 2010 progress report on the MDGs. This is largely due to low education completion, influenced by poverty, gender inequality and socio-cultural factors. While net enrolment of 100 per cent can be achieved by 2015, 100 per cent completion rates of primary education are unrealistic.⁵</p> <p>A high rate of teacher absenteeism, linked to low pay, presents a major problem,⁶ with teacher poverty assessed as a contributing factor to this, while CSOs believe the quality of free education to be very low.</p>

⁴ Unless otherwise stated, government assessments and quantitative data in this table are drawn from the Millennium Development Goals Report for Uganda 2010, Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, September 2010, http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/MDG/english/MDG%20Country%20Reports/Uganda/Uganda_MDGs_Report_2010.pdf. Unless otherwise stated the deadline for goals to be achieved is 2015

⁵ See the Education and Sports Sector Annual Performance Report (ESSAPR), 2007/08 for more details; this was further emphasised by an African Network for the Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect representative during an interview on Record TV in May 2012 who asserted that 'three in four children hardly finish school'

⁶ See for example: 'Africa Education Watch: Good Governance Lessons for Primary Education' Transparency International, 2010, available at <http://image.guardian.co.uk/sys-files/Guardian/documents/2010/02/23/AfricaEducationWatch.pdf>. See also: 'Second Annual Report on Corruption Trends in Uganda: Using the Data Tracking Mechanism', Inspectorate of Government, November 2011, <http://www.igg.go.ug/static/files/publications/doc.pdf>; and: 'Teacher Absenteeism under the UPE Programme in Uganda's Education Sector: Is the Problem Out of Reach?', Anti Corruption Coalition Uganda

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Goals, targets and indicators	Civil society assessment of progress	Government assessment of progress	Civil society perspectives on challenges
<p>Goal 3. Promote gender equality and empower women:</p> <p>3a. Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015</p>	On track	On track	<p>Uganda has made progress in some areas, including in improving equality in primary education, and increasing the number of women in parliament, which stands at 35 per cent for the parliament elected in 2011, above the global average in 2012 of 20 per cent.⁷ Uganda has also exercised affirmative action in favour of girls in admission to university and other tertiary institutions. This has seen the proportion of women in total tertiary student enrolment rise from 31 per cent in 1994 to 42 per cent in 2004. 2006 also saw the introduction of an Act that increased maternity leave from six weeks to two months, following extensive lobbying by civil society.</p> <p>Significant gender equality gaps still exist, for example in agriculture and at the household level. Issues such as gender-based violence have repeatedly been raised by concerned CSOs, but with little progress. A further question is what impact the larger number of women parliamentarians are having on gender equality in practice.</p>
<p>Goal 4. Reduce child mortality:</p> <p>4a. Reduce by two thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate</p>	Off track	Slow	<p>Significant progress has been made, but this still falls short of Uganda's targets. The under fives mortality rate, for instance, improved from 156 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1995 to 137 in 2006, while the infant mortality rate decreased from 85 to 76 deaths per 1,000 live births over the same period. More recent data from a different source put the infant mortality rate at 58 deaths per 1,000 live births.⁸ In the same period, the prevalence of underweight children among the under fives fell from 23 per cent to 16 per cent, and stunted growth from 41 per cent to 38.5 per cent.⁹ Immunisation rates have risen: the rate of immunisation for children under two years old for diphtheria, tetanus and whooping cough rose from 64 per cent in 2005 to 82 per cent in 2011, although this still falls short of the national target of 90 per cent.¹⁰</p>

⁷ International Parliamentary Union Women in National Parliaments database, 2012, <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>

⁸ World Bank data, 2011

⁹ Uganda Demographic and Health Survey, Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2006; Ministry of Health Statistical Abstract, 2010

¹⁰ World Bank data, 2011

Goals, targets and indicators	Civil society assessment of progress	Government assessment of progress	Civil society perspectives on challenges
<p>Goal 5. Improve maternal health:</p> <p>5a. Reduce by three quarters the maternal mortality ratio</p> <p>5b. Achieve universal access to reproductive health</p>	Off track	Slow	<p>Despite Uganda's commitment to reduce maternal mortality to 131 deaths per 100,000 live births by 2015, the absolute number of women who die while giving birth increased by 16 per cent between 1995 and 2010. The decline in the maternal mortality rate, from 505 per 100,000 live births in 2001 to 435 in 2006,¹¹ is viewed by civil society as unreasonably slow, which indicates that it is unlikely that Uganda will meet what now seems an ambitious MDG target, despite receiving earlier alerts on slow progress in the previous Commonwealth civil society review of the MDGs.¹² CSOs assess this as indicative of larger problems of patchy provision in the health system, which is also marked by a high urban/rural divide.</p>
<p>Goal 6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases:</p> <p>6a. Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS</p> <p>6b. Achieve, by 2010, universal access to treatment for HIV/AIDS for all those who need it</p> <p>6c. Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases</p>	Off track	<p>6a: Reversal</p> <p>6b: On track</p> <p>6c: Slow</p>	<p>In the health sector strategic plan, the Ministry of Health states that diseases such as malaria, HIV/AIDS and TB account for over half of the total disease burden and are the leading causes of ill health and death in Uganda.¹³ Despite various strategies to combat these diseases, Uganda is still experiencing severe epidemics. Only tuberculosis (TB) prevalence is showing signs of the target being met. HIV prevalence doubled from 1.2 million people in 2005 to 2.4 million in 2011.¹⁴ CSOs that took part in this review criticised the government's HIV education and behaviour change strategies for lacking clear guidelines, policies, strategies and targeting.</p>

¹¹ Uganda Demographic and Health Survey, 2006. The World Bank's modelled estimate of maternal mortality in 2010 was 310 deaths per 100,000 live births

¹² See Uganda chapter by A Ssebina-Ziwa, W Nyamugasira and A Larok in 'Breaking with Business as Usual – Perspectives from Civil Society in the Commonwealth on the Millennium Development Goals', Commonwealth Foundation, 2005

¹³ Health Sector Strategic Plan 2010/11-2014/15, Ministry of Health, 2011

¹⁴ Uganda AIDS Indicator Survey, 2011

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Goals, targets and indicators	Civil society assessment of progress	Government assessment of progress	Civil society perspectives on challenges
<p>Goal 7. Ensure environmental sustainability:</p> <p>7a. Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources</p> <p>7b. Reduce biodiversity loss, achieving, by 2010, a significant reduction in the rate of loss</p> <p>7c. Halve, by 2015, the proportion of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation</p> <p>7d. Achieve, by 2020, a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers</p>	Off track	<p>7a: Slow</p> <p>7b: Slow</p> <p>7c: On track</p> <p>7d: No target</p>	<p>The 2010 progress report on the MDGs indicates that progress on Goal 7 is poor, with persistent degradation of Uganda's natural resources and unprecedented climatic changes. Statutory regulators such as the National Environment Monitoring Authority and National Forestry Authority are assessed by civil society concerned with environmental issues as largely ineffective and subject to political interference.</p> <p>Almost all CSOs consulted had doubts about sanitation and access to clean water, and sections of the citizenry have raised concerns about the negative effects of the imposition in 2012 of a value added tax on piped water.</p> <p>The discovery of oil is likely to further test the value placed on environmental protection.</p>
<p>Goal 8. Develop a global partnership for development</p> <p>8a. Develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system</p> <p>8b. Address the special needs of least developed countries</p> <p>8c. Address the special needs of landlocked developing countries and small island developing states</p> <p>8d. Deal comprehensively with the debt problems of developing countries</p> <p>8e. In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries</p> <p>8f. In cooperation with the private sector, make available benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications</p>	On track	<p>8b: Reversal</p> <p>8d: Achieved</p> <p>8e: Stagnant</p> <p>8f: On track</p>	<p>There are significant developments that suggest to CSOs consulted that many aspects of Goal 8 are likely to be achieved in Uganda. These include the implementation of the East African Confederation (EAC) treaty signed in 1999, and Uganda's membership of the Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA). Uganda has also benefited from various bilateral and multilateral development partnerships.¹⁵ CSOs believe that official development assistance (ODA) provided by partners to Uganda has played a key role in supporting the less privileged rural poor and the country's recovery, growth and poverty eradication efforts, for example in post-conflict northern Uganda.</p> <p>Internet and mobile phone subscriptions have increased significantly.</p>

¹⁵ National Development Plan (2010/2011 – 2014/2015) – A Transformed Uganda Society from a Peasant to a Modern and Prosperous Country within 30 Years', Government of Uganda, 2010

As can be seen from Table 1, government sources and civil society actors consulted during this review agree in the most part on their assessment of progress towards the MDGs. Civil society assesses progress on Goal 8 if anything more optimistically than the government, while the most significant area of disagreement is on Goal 1, where civil society does not share the government's assessment that progress is on track.

For a full list of the MDGs, along with the targets and indicators, see: <http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/host.aspx?Content=indicators/officialist.htm>

3. In focus: mixed views on Goal 1

Uganda has made steady and impressive progress on poverty eradication and is considered likely to achieve Goal 1, according to official sources such as the Ugandan Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development,¹⁶ the UK Department for International Development (UKDFID)¹⁷ and the World Bank.¹⁸ With the number of households living in poverty declining from 56 per cent in 1992 to 44 per cent in 1997, 38 per cent in 2002 and 31 per cent in 2006, Uganda is expected to exceed the target of 28 cent by 2015, according to the World Bank report; this is supported by a later government report which puts the proportion of the population living under the formal US\$1.25 a day poverty line at 24.5 per cent in 2010.¹⁹ On reducing hunger, according to World Bank figures the proportion of underweight children under five years of age fell from 25.5 per cent in 1995 to 20.4 per cent in 2006. This is still far from the target of 11.5 per cent, although a United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) report places the figure nearer the target, at 16 per cent.²⁰

Despite these pointers to reduced poverty levels, in various consultations conducted for this review CSOs have portrayed a worsening situation in recent years, contending that the economy is currently in a decelerating phase. The cost of living is rising,²¹ while participants in focus group discussions stated that their personal incomes have remained constant or even declined, thus impacting on standards of living and quality of life. In 2012 the Uganda Debt Network (UDN) stated that the economic gains registered between 2008 and 2010 were being eroded by these trends.²² The UDN and other CSOs indicate that there is a gap between the progress reported on Goal 1 and the real situation for many people, with deepening levels of poverty even for those living above the poverty line.²³ Research by Afrobarometer offers further insight into the poverty situation, noting that despite economic growth of 6.4 per cent in 2011, 'a startling 75 per cent [of people] rate the economy as doing fairly or very badly, and 68 per cent feel that it is doing worse now than it was 12 months ago'.²⁴

These findings are consistent with the analysis of the previous civil society review in 2005 that the benefits of strong growth had yet to affect positively the lives of many people.²⁵ CSOs' periodical reports and community dialogue sessions reflect the fact that many young people, in particular, still go hungry and live in poverty. Developments at the May/June 2012 launch of the Job Stimulus Package (JSP)²⁶ programme in Kampala also suggest this. Young people, the intended beneficiaries of the programme, took part in violent demonstrations demanding immediate release of funds.

16 MDGs Report for Uganda 2010 (ibid)

17 'Summary of DfID's Work in Uganda', Department for International Development, 2011

18 'International Finance Corporation and Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency Country Assistance Strategy', World Bank, Report No. 54187-UG, 2011

19 'The State of Uganda Population Report 2012', Population Secretariat and United Nations Population Fund, 2012, http://www.posec.org/publications/8_2997843810.pdf

20 'Maternal, Newborn and Child Survival: Uganda Country Profile', UNICEF, March 2012, http://www.unicef.org/esaro/DI_Profile_Uganda.pdf

21 For example, the Uganda Composite Consumer Price Index stood at 189.48 at the end of financial year 2011/2012, compared to the base of 100 in 2005/2006. Uganda Bureau of Statistics Consumer Price Index bulletin, December 2012, <http://www.ubos.org/onlinefiles/uploads/ubos/cpi/cpijan2013/FINAL%20CPI%20release%20DEC.pdf>

22 Strategic Advocacy Programme and Plan 2012-2016, Uganda Debt Network, 2012, <http://www.udn.or.ug/pdf/UDN-SAPP-2012-2016.pdf>

23 Further, community consultations that informed this report, carried out in May 2012, observe that the US\$1.25 poverty line definition can barely cover the most basic requirements of the average size household. Hence even impressive achievements in reducing the number of people living below this threshold do not necessarily equate with a large improvement in the quality of life of Ugandans. See the end of report for a full list of consultations that took place

24 'Public Perceptions of Uganda's Economy: In Crisis?', Briefing Paper No. 101, Afrobarometer, 2011

25 'Breaking with Business as Usual - Perspectives from Civil Society in the Commonwealth on the Millennium Development Goals' (ibid)

26 Uganda began in 2012 to roll out the Job Stimulus Package, a programme intended to promote business growth and counter unemployment amongst young people

The continuing challenge of hunger was further made clear in a focus group session held in May 2012, where participants reported that because of hunger, partly caused by the impact of more unpredictable weather patterns on agriculture, they had eaten the improved seeds that had been distributed for planting. This also helps demonstrate the connection between continuing poverty and the difficulties in achieving other goals.

Many CSOs are increasingly concerned about economic inequality, including that between different regions of Uganda. For example, the Karamoja sub-region of north-east Uganda is isolated and so performs worse due to often impassable roads, while in substantial parts of northern Uganda the recent conflict has impacted on development, partly because there are a large number of internally displaced persons.

4. Usefulness and challenges of the MDG framework to civil society

Considerable doubts were expressed about the MDGs in this review process. Perspectives from civil society expressed during the consultations included the view that the MDGs have been misinterpreted as a series of one-size-fits-all targets; that they are a foreign imposition reflecting the influence of external global forces; that they have been misused to reinforce a donor-centric view of development; and that they have been misappropriated by lobbies to defend particular agendas or perspectives. A key challenge has therefore been to encourage CSOs that are not engaged to explore what they can find in the MDG framework that might be locally useful, relevant and beneficial to their work.

It was also evident from consultations with civil society at community and other local levels that the MDG framework was not very well known or understood at sub-national levels.²⁷ There is also little knowledge of the MDGs among the general population, including at various levels of citizenship leadership. Although the previous review in 2005 suggested that several categories of Kampala-based CSOs had fully embraced the MDG framework, it further emphasised that a majority did not know much about it and hardly utilised it.²⁸ This lack of knowledge implies that communities are being excluded from planning processes, or are hindered in engagement opportunities that may arise, by misapprehensions about the MDGs.

Lack of knowledge, particularly among sub-national CSOs, contrasts with the position in government, where it is clear from interactions that most government institutions are conversant with the MDGs and there are examples of their being internalised. For example, the Ministry of Health incorporates an MDG perspective in its annual reports.²⁹ Some CSOs, however, critique the government's approach as being too narrowly focused on poverty eradication, rather than on a broader agenda of people's empowerment. Concern is also expressed about the emphasis on the collection of quantitative data on the MDGs, which overlooks more qualitative measures of people's quality of life and capabilities.

²⁷ One respondent (an academic) who was consulted during the data collection exercise remarked, "MDGs are a UN thing," while another (an environmental health expert) observed that the population is not conversant with the MDGs and that MDGs are only known by those who sit in the Serena Hotel, a venue in Kampala where meetings are frequently held

²⁸ 'Breaking with Business as Usual – Perspectives from Civil Society in the Commonwealth on the Millennium Development Goals' (ibid)

²⁹ See Annual Health Sector Performance Report: Financial Year 2011/12, 2012

Some inclusive opportunities are available in the planning and policy formulation process in Uganda. While government leads the process, it involves several stakeholders, including from civil society and the private sector. The Uganda National NGO Forum, a national CSO platform with over 400 members, participates in planning and policy processes offered by the government, and played an important role in the development of the current national planning framework, the National Development Plan (NDP). The design of the NDP took into account the September 2000 Declaration on the MDGs, demonstrating that the government was taking steps to internalise the content of the MDGs. As a result, the national budget allocation is expected to reflect the commitment of government to the implementation of the MDGs, and this offers a basis for CSOs to hold government to account on its commitments.

However, participants in the consultation felt that, given this, a key opportunity presented by the MDGs was being missed: they could provide a valuable platform for more sustained civil society interaction with government, but there was no clear framework for this level of engagement. This gap, participants in this review felt, was one of the largest shortcomings of the MDG process at a national level.

It was noted that the current NGO law constrains engagement between CSOs and government, thus fuelling mutual suspicion and sometimes hostility that limit dialogue opportunities, rather than stimulating the co-operation and partnership required to advance the MDGs.³⁰ Further, the registration process for CSOs limits the potential of groups at the local level to form and seek access to official processes. The documentation requirements are seen as onerous and bureaucratic, and therefore difficult to negotiate, particularly for smaller CSOs. Some CSOs are also vulnerable to hostility from politicians. In recent times prominent international CSOs, including CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation and the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project, have expressed concern about increasing calls for more regulation and supervision of CSOs, and the introduction or discussion of new limiting laws.³¹

Further, CSOs perceive that government institutions such as the Ministry of Finance have substantial powers to make budget re-allocations which often run counter to agreed targets, hence affecting delivery of the MDGs in the absence of proper accountability mechanisms.

Key civil society concerns about the MDGs in Uganda also relate to their reach. Some view the MDGs as incapable of giving sufficient coverage to some of Uganda's major national challenges, for example, in employment, gender equality and other equality challenges. CSOs involved in this review view Ugandan society as having some entrenched inequalities that are embedded in socio-cultural, political, economic and historical causes, and that go beyond the scope of the MDGs. For example, boys still tend to be favoured over girls. Corruption and poor governance are also cited as having created fertile ground for widespread inequality and social exclusion.

³⁰ See S.1 (d) of the NGO Registration Act Cap. 113; A Synopsis of the Legal Regime for Non Government Organisations (NGOs) in Uganda

³¹ 'Space for civil society shrinking in Uganda say national and global CSOs', CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation and East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project, 25 June 2012, <http://civicus.org/media-centre-129/press-releases/966-space-for-civil-society-shrinking-in-uganda-say-national-and-global-csos>

It was also recognised in this process that it is not always helpful to consider the different goals in isolation. For example, there seems a clear need to focus on the social and political barriers that hinder full achievement of Goal 3, such as the continuing low status of women at household level, lack of channels for seeking help in the face of domestic violence and limited opportunities in the non-agricultural job market. It needs to be better understood that slow progress on Goal 3 affects the achievement of Goals 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6, and by extension national development as a whole. Similarly, the chances of achieving Goals 3, 7 and 8 are also lessened if improvements are not being made on other goals.

This review identifies the volatile funding environment for CSOs as a further challenge to adequate engagement with the MDGs. Reported issues here include dry spells in funding, donor dependency and donor influence, and poor co-ordination between CSOs that receive donor funding and arms of government that also access it. Other issues that hamper co-operation include turnover of staff in CSOs; limited follow-up opportunities for sustained dialogue between CSOs and government officials; and poor documentation of CSO achievements on the MDGs.

5. Contribution of CSOs to the MDGs and their delivery

The challenges in formal engagement with government notwithstanding, CSOs of various kinds have for a long time been addressing the content of the MDGs by virtue of engaging in various forms of development work. Yet while many CSOs assess themselves as effective in delivering development, they acknowledge that the MDGs may not be very visible in their work, which also means they are less likely to be involved in key national discourses on the MDGs. CSOs consulted felt that the MDGs are not necessarily directly referenced in many CSO programme plans and reports, but more CSOs were found to align their programmatic focuses to government strategies, such as the National Strategic Plan. As this is primarily MDG driven, it implies that many CSOs are indirectly aligned with and focused on the MDGs.

The bulk of CSO work has been in the area of implementation, but other interventions identified in this review include calls by CSOs for the government to adopt time-bound commitments to attain the MDGs and promote development, together with roles as advocates, monitors and mobilisers for development programmes.

The wide reach and potential of civil society is suggested by the growth in the number of CSOs in Uganda. There were only 160 registered NGOs in 1986, but this number grew to 3,500 in 2000, 4,700 in 2003, 5,500 in 2005 and 7,000 in 2007. The number of registered NGOs is currently close to 10,000.³² In addition, there are numerous community-based organisations (CBOs) registered at district level;³³ Kabarole District, for example, has over 400 CSOs engaged in HIV/AIDS prevention, all working towards helping to achieve Goal 6. The broad civil society universe in Uganda also contains 11,899 registered co-operative societies and unions.³⁴ This suggests that a wide range of civil society actors

³² Source: NGO Board, data on registered NGOs

³³ Uganda is divided into 111 administrative districts, plus the capital Kampala

³⁴ Data on Kabarole District and cooperative societies and unions comes from partner's communication with Kabarole NGO Coordination Office and Office of Registrar of Cooperatives, May 2012. The Kabarole NGOs/CBOs Association is seen to make reference to the MDGs, as these are displayed on a chart in their office as a reminder and reference tool

are already working on development issues related to the MDGs, or with the potential to do so.

It also suggests some challenges: with competing demands and scarce or shrinking resources,³⁵ it seems clear that fostering more strategic partnerships with and among this vast civil society community would help to advance the development agenda.

CSOs cover a range of thematic areas which have relevance to the MDGs, such as adult literacy, education, governance and accountability, gender equality, health, HIV/AIDS, human rights, income generation and peace-building. It is evident from assessing budget allocations and CSO numbers that there is a particular concentration on HIV/AIDS prevention in comparison to the other MDGs. This arose both from the attention paid towards HIV/AIDS in Uganda from the early days of the pandemic and the influence of donors. CSOs such as The AIDS Support Organisation (TASO), which has a particularly strong reputation, and the AIDS Information Centre (AIC) have been active for over two decades and have moved into training other CSOs. Faith-based organisations such as the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda (IRCU) and the Catholic Relief Fund work to support children orphaned by HIV/AIDS or the northern Uganda conflict, and IRCU is also felt to be influential in articulating the issue of condom use from a religious perspective. The high number of CSOs working in the field of HIV/AIDS, coupled with slow progress on the pandemic, as indicators for Goal 6 demonstrate, has led to an acknowledgement that there needs to be better co-ordination of different civil society actors, suggesting that the umbrella group Uganda Network for AIDS Service Organisations needs to play an enhanced role.

In some areas, it is possible to put a financial figure on the contribution of CSOs. For example, in relation to Goal 7, the government has recognised that CSOs invested 17.9 billion Uganda Shillings³⁶ in water and sanitation in 2010/2011.³⁷

Some CSOs are involved in the practical operations of government-led programmes, and are recognised as key partners in their successful implementation. Examples of this relating to Goal 1 include the promotion of Savings and Credit Cooperative Societies (SACCOs), the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund and the National Agricultural Advisory Services, although CSOs have criticised the effectiveness of this latter initiative. In the area of health, the government includes CSOs and other partners as part of a multi-sectoral response to HIV/AIDS and malaria prevention.

There are considerable numbers of CSOs whose tasks involve monitoring the performance of the government in a particular field. The Uganda National NGO Forum has access that most other civil society actors lack, since it participates in major government monitoring structures and programmes, and hence receives a great deal of relevant information that helps with effective monitoring. This access has enabled it to participate in the monitoring of the NDP and to produce credible reports.

Some CSOs also undertake roles in monitoring government initiatives related to Goal 1, such as National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS), the

³⁵ A review of a number of annual reports of CSOs described in this section pointed to shrinking resources as a challenge. The USAID 2011 CSO Sustainability Index for Sub-Saharan Africa, http://transition.usaid.gov/our_work/democracy_and_governance/technical_areas/civil_society/angosi/reports/2011/subsahara/2011_Sub-Saharan%20Africa_CSOSI_9-20-2012.pdf, reported that 'the financial viability of the sector remains precarious', while in the earlier CIVICUS and Development Network of Indigenous Voluntary Associations (DENIVA) Civil Society Index, 2006, http://www.civicus.org/media/CSI_Uganda_Country_Report.pdf, only half of CSO representatives surveyed described their resource position as 'adequate'.

³⁶ Approximately US\$6,685,367 as at January 2013 conversion rates

³⁷ 'Third Government of Uganda/Development Partner Joint Review of the Water and Environment Sector', Ministry of Water and Environment Pull-Out, The Daily Monitor, 11 October 2011

Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF) and the Peace and Recovery Development Plan. However, many in civil society acknowledged that they feel their role in holding government to account could be significantly strengthened, including on Goal 3, where much effort has been made, but with little impact at community level.

Another important contribution of CSOs that underpins development is in the campaign against mismanagement of resources, at both central and local government levels. Monitoring and accountability help bring about better use of resources and therefore more effective development. CSOs repeatedly express concerns about the misuse of funds, calling attention to the need for improved oversight mechanisms. One active network in this regard is the Uganda Debt Network (UDN), which promotes, supports and leads coalitions and alliances of CSOs to watch over public resources, undertakes advocacy campaigns against wastage and misuse of resources, and partners with the Auditor General, Inspectorate of Government, Parliament and other relevant institutions that exercise oversight roles. The UDN reports that through such advocacy initiatives, CSOs have contributed to an improved policy and regulatory framework; for instance they addressed the misuse of the constituency development fund by members of parliament in 2009.³⁸

A further active network is the Civil Society Budget Advocacy Group, which checks whether budgets are pro-poor and gender sensitive, thus calling attention to issues of poverty and inequality. Related to this, the Forum for Women in Development, along with other CSOs, keeps track of the gender responsiveness of budgets and Uganda's indebtedness levels, and seeks proper management of borrowed resources. In a further example of CSO collaboration, over 50 CSOs united to bring a petition to Uganda's constitutional court in 2012 calling attention to maternal deaths as a human rights issue.³⁹

Some networks and coalitions align with particular MDGs: the Uganda Water and Sanitation Network (UWASNET) is a coalition of CSOs working in the water sector, and has 180 active organisational members, while the Uganda Women's Network is a network which, with other CSOs, has been campaigning for over a decade to have a Domestic Relations Bill passed. There are also CSO networks, forums and coalitions at sub-national level. One such network, founded in 2006, is the Namutumba District NGO Forum, one of 35 networks supported by the Uganda National NGO Forum under the Support Programme for Advocacy Networks (SPAN), a civil society initiative aimed at strengthening sub-national advocacy capacity.⁴⁰

³⁸ 'Civil Society Statement On the Call for Improved service Delivery of Universal Primary Education and Primary Health Care in Uganda', presented to the Parliamentary Committee on Social Services, Uganda Debt Network, 2009

³⁹ 'Uganda: activists to pursue maternal health case against government', IRIN News, 15 June 2012, <http://www.irinnews.org/Report/95659/UGANDA-Activists-to-pursue-maternal-health-case-against-government>

⁴⁰ More information on SPAN is available on the Uganda Nation NGO Forum website <http://ngoforum.or.ug/174-138-164-3.eshop.co.ug/span/>

6. In focus: savings and credit co-operatives' role in development

The Nakawa Blessed Savings (NBS) Saving and Credit Cooperative (SACCO) offers one example of how co-operatives can serve as a specific type of civil society formation to help address the MDGs. SACCO was founded by women seeking to address the challenge of urban poverty, thereby contributing to Goal 1, while also demonstrating the potential for female leadership, relevant to Goal 3.

At its inception, a founding member underscored the need to move from reliance on charity to more sustainable micro-finance as a means of challenging the vicious cycle of poverty and enhancing the prospects of improving the quality of life. NBS accordingly provides financial services to women, young people and men to start up or expand their businesses and raise additional income. The organisation also emphasises the formation and consolidation of strategic partnerships with government, CSOs, and local and international organisations.

To date, almost 30 per cent of NBS members have accessed loans. Field reports indicate that participants' incomes and living standards have improved, demonstrating a direct connection to Goal 1.⁴¹ Further, one of the partners of the SACCO, Asante Mama, provides seed bank facilities and supports groups of women in marketing their products, again helping to realise Goal 3.

7. Lessons learned and recommendations

If the role of CSOs in the delivery of MDGs is to be enhanced, this review suggests, there is a need for a well-articulated, clear and consensus-based policy on CSOs' relationship with government, and with political and other actors. Fostering a healthier working relationship between CSOs and other actors is paramount; therefore there is need to develop and properly implement a comprehensive and consistent framework to institutionalise relationships. As part of this, it would help if the government revised the composition of the NGO board to include civil society representation and voice,⁴² which would help to bring about greater transparency and harmony, and avoid policies that fuel division.

More broadly, there is a need to initiate new structures that enable cohesive and sustained input, including technical and policy input, to ministries, committees and national processes, including on issues of CSO regulation and relationships with themselves. Constructive dialogue needs to be encouraged about the application and development of the legal and regulatory environment for CSOs.

There is also a greater need for CSOs to participate actively in, and help create the channels for, the monitoring and evaluation processes that help determine the availability and use of, and levels of satisfaction with, services provided by public institutions. Monitoring and evaluation scored highest among focus group discussions as mechanisms that should be in place for the post-2015 period. In response, civil society needs to increase its efforts to exercise more accountability to prevent mismanagement of development funds, and to be supported to do so.

⁴¹ The post 2015 agenda: a review of the progress towards attainment of the Millennium Development Goals in Uganda, Eva Magambo, Janet Nahamya and Conrad Ssenyimba, Nakawa Blessed Cooperative Savings and Credit Society Limited (NBS), July 2012

⁴² This issue was raised by the Uganda NGO Forum and is contained in a NGO Board document reviewed in June 2012

Despite the apparent growth in coalition building outlined above, in the opinion of many consulted by this study there is still a need to form, refocus and strengthen co-ordination bodies based on the evidence of what works in practice, and to focus these less on individual areas of development and more on cross-cutting issues that would impact on all goals, such as governance and accountability. Such coalitions should enable the development of more systematic mechanisms for knowledge sharing and learning, and in doing so, help to address concerns about duplication, waste and lack of synergy.

Low success levels on the MDGs can partly be attributed to the lack of a link between a goal and an obvious financing mechanism. Addressing this will therefore be essential to enabling equitable achievement of all current and future goals. This suggests in turn that there will be a need for regular and transparent reporting on financial commitments made by government, and for receipt of donor funds for development. In addition, it suggests the need for donors to be held accountable for honouring their financial obligations. CSOs also recognise that, with the help of other stakeholders, they should try to find more sustainable sources of financing for their work. This should be accompanied by a framework that improves accountability for the use of local and foreign resources,⁴³ and focuses on reducing duplication and waste.

CSOs believe their roles in the MDGs could further be enhanced by better promotion of the MDGs and prioritising co-ordinated and concerted efforts on goals that have received less attention, such as Goal 7, and those where this review has shown there is a clear need for further extensive efforts, such as Goal 3.

It is also apparent from its low profile in this review process that civil society co-operation with the private sector on the MDGs is an under-explored area. More focus is needed on creating ways in which civil society and the private sector can come together to identify co-operation potential.

A further framing factor that needs to be taken into account in shaping future goals and mechanisms to track them is the recent discovery of oil. The experience in other countries shows that oil could be a driver of corruption and poor governance, as well as a development opportunity, unless proper accountability mechanisms are put in place. This should provide another stimulus to supporting civil society's watchdog role.

⁴³ The National Development Plan (2010) states that one way of enhancing the contribution of CSOs is to "work with NGOs to realise a comprehensive cooperation framework that will lay out the partnership principles including mutual accountability between NGOs and government."

8. Post-2015 development framework

Given the above analysis, a forum for regular interaction between government and civil society is suggested as an essential component of the development and implementation of any post-2015 development framework. Part of the purpose of such a forum would be to enable civil society to play a fuller role in monitoring and evaluating development efforts.

The best approach to developing post-2015 goals, in the opinion of many consulted, involves localising the agenda and indicators, and adopting targets that are more explicitly rights based and participatory, and that focus more on equity and sustainability. Extensive consultations with relevant actors, including the intended beneficiaries of development, should form the basis for encouraging greater relevance and shared ownership and buy-in. Ownership would be further reinforced by building capacity for more CSOs to participate and to raise awareness of the goals. A future framework should be underpinned by more vigorous attempts at explaining and demystifying the MDGs to win support. As part of this sensitisation, there should be transparency in sharing the information that guides decision-making on the various development frameworks. However, to succeed fully, such a framework would need to enable critical discussion of sometimes difficult governance and accountability issues.

In the opinion of those consulted, issues that need to be addressed in any new framework that have hindered the achievement of MDGs to date include high unemployment, which has exacerbated crime, particularly in urban areas; a more unpredictable climate, including prolonged droughts and heavy rain; strong culturally-rooted beliefs which have not been sufficiently understood and interrogated; and rapid population growth.

It is suggested that any future framework should have an overarching focus on equity, transparency and governance. Goals should establish a minimum social protection floor and should make reference to human rights, including women's rights as part of these.

Suggested specific future goals to emerge from this consultation process include a continuing prioritisation of water and sanitation, gender equality, quality of health, quality of education (including teacher training), food security, disability, youth employment, crime, and a focus on the environment and the deep-rooted causes of poverty. It was recognised that these thematic areas were chosen to focus on the current MDGs that Uganda is not likely to achieve, such as that on infant mortality, or where progress has been very slow, such as that on HIV/AIDS and malaria.⁴⁴ However, a challenge is to reconcile this menu with the parallel suggestion that there is a need to prioritise having fewer goals on which efforts could be concentrated.

⁴⁴ The post 2015 agenda: a review of the progress towards attainment of the Millennium Development Goals in Uganda, 2012. (ibid)

9. Conclusion

Because of slow progress on many goals, any proposal for a post-2015 agenda will be premised on unfinished business, but ought to be informed by in-depth consultation with civil society and other stakeholders at all levels.

The MDG campaign calls for strong and consolidated partnerships, coherence, accountability and transparency. However, this study has called attention to concerns about gaps in accountability and limitations that hinder civil society's ability to seek positive movements in these. Better co-ordination is also needed to improve implementation, and this needs to be enabled by a functional framework. Ultimately, expanding accountability and governance require the enabling of greater civil society access and participation.

Participating organisations

Original research process:

- Nakawa Blessed Cooperative and Savings and Credit Society Limited

Informants consulted came from the following organisations:

- ActionAid
- Africa Development Link Programmes
- Community Development Office, Nakawa
- Gulu Referral Hospital, Gulu, Northern Region
- Health and Safety Agency Ltd
- Malaria Consortium
- School of Law, Makerere University
- Parliament of Uganda
- Reproductive Health Uganda
- Uganda Christina Lawyers Fraternity, Gulu, Northern Region
- Uganda National NGO Forum
- Uganda Women Entrepreneurs Association Ltd
- UK Department for International Development

Focus groups took place on May 2012, with participants from the following groups and areas:

- Community group, female, Gulu
- Community group, female and male, Kyebando Kawempe
- Community group, female and male, Mbuya Kinawataka
- Consultative meeting, Nakawa Blessed Cooperative and Savings and Credit Society members
- People living with HIV/AIDS, Kiswa Health Centre
- Pregnant mothers, Gulu Regional Referral Hospital
- Pregnant mothers, Kiswa Health Centre
- Women councillors, Nakawa Division
- Youth group, female and male, Gulu
- Youth group, male, Kawempe Division

Consultation partners:

- Uganda National NGO Forum
- CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation

Consultation participants:

- Action on Disability and Development International
- Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development (ACCORD)
- Basic Needs Foundation Uganda
- Environmental Alert
- Foundation for Human Rights Initiatives
- International HIV/AIDS Alliance Uganda
- Kalangala District NGO Forum
- Kiboga District NGO Forum
- Ministry of Finance
- Nakawa Blessed Savings and Cooperative Society
- Parliament of Uganda
- Toroo District Civil Society Network (TOCINET)
- Uganda Development Services
- Uganda Environmental Education Foundation (UEEF)
- Uganda National Association of Community Occupation Health
- Uganda National Association of HIV/AIDS Service Organisations (UNASO)
- Uganda National NGO Forum
- United Nations Development Programme – Uganda
- World Vision International Uganda

Media in attendance:

- Central Broadcasting Service (CBS) FM
- Channel 44 TV
- Community FM
- Impact FM
- The New Vision
- Prime Radio
- Uganda Broadcasting Cooperation (UBC)



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