

Evaluating the Impact of Civil Society Organisations in the Fight Against Corruption in Uganda

Avaliação do Impacto das Organizações da Sociedade Civil no Combate à Corrupção em Uganda

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ABSTRACT | Purpose: This study evaluates the impact of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in combating corruption in Uganda, examining their strategies, achieved outcomes, and the contextual factors influencing their effectiveness. **Method:** A qualitative research design was adopted. Data were collected through interviews with 58 purposively selected respondents drawn from CSOs, government agencies, and faith-based institutions engaged in anti-corruption initiatives. Thematic analysis was conducted using Atlas.ti software. **Findings:** The findings reveal that CSOs play a significant role through advocacy campaigns, monitoring of government programs, civic education, and follow-up on Auditor General recommendations. These interventions have contributed to increased public awareness and enhanced grassroots demand for accountability and improved service delivery. However, the persistence of high corruption levels indicates structural constraints, including limited political will, intimidation of CSO actors, bureaucratic resistance, selective enforcement of anti-corruption laws, and institutional fragility. **Originality:** Although legally recognized as partners in governance frameworks, CSOs operate within a politically restrictive environment that substantially limits their transformative impact. The study argues that CSO participation in anti-corruption efforts in Uganda often reflects institutional tokenism rather than genuine empowerment. The research contributes to broader debates on societal accountability, governance reforms, and the structural limits of civil society influence in corruption-prone environments.

Key words | Advocacy, Civil Society Organisations, Corruption, Good governance, Service delivery

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RESUMO | Objetivo: Analisar o impacto das Organizações da Sociedade Civil (OSCs) no combate à corrupção em Uganda, examinando suas estratégias, resultados alcançados e os fatores contextuais que influenciam sua efetividade. **Metodologia:** O estudo adotou abordagem qualitativa, com entrevistas realizadas junto a 58 participantes provenientes de OSCs, instituições governamentais e organizações religiosas envolvidas em iniciativas anticorrupção. A seleção foi intencional, considerando experiência e senioridade. Os dados foram analisados por meio de análise temática com apoio do software Atlas.ti. **Resultados:** Os achados indicam que as OSCs desempenham papel relevante por meio de estratégias de advocacy, monitoramento de programas governamentais, educação cívica e acompanhamento de recomendações do Auditor-Geral. Essas ações contribuíram para o aumento da conscientização pública e maior demanda por accountability e melhoria na prestação de serviços. Contudo, a persistência de elevados índices de corrupção revela limitações estruturais, como falta de vontade política, intimidação de ativistas, restrições institucionais e aplicação seletiva da legislação anticorrupção. **Originalidade/Contribuição:** O estudo demonstra que, embora formalmente incluídas nos marcos legais anticorrupção, as OSCs enfrentam um ambiente político adverso que reduz seu impacto efetivo, caracterizando um padrão de participação simbólica. A pesquisa contribui para o debate sobre governança, accountability societal e limites institucionais da atuação da sociedade civil em contextos de fragilidade política. **Palavras-chave |** Advocacy, Organizações da Sociedade Civil, Corrupção, Boa Governança, Prestação de Serviços

INTRODUCTION

The concept of CSOs represents democratic transitions in good governance whereby the citizenry attain their space to demand greater rights and better constitutions. Besides, the society is enabled to develop the necessary political capacity to engage government (NewZealand-Government, 2011; DeMattee 2020). This research adopts DeMattee's definition of civil society organizations "as private, self-governed organizations, established on the principle of voluntary association for purposes other than political control and economic profits" (DeMattee, 2020:6). This definition includes advocacy organizations, professional associations, and religious congregations but excludes political parties and entities organized to raise and retain profits.

Just like the concept of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), the concept of corruption is problematic to define conceptualize. Defining corruption requires an immense amount of knowledge of the different types of corruption that have existed throughout history. According to the normative theorists, corruption is an integral part of institutions in three dimensions (Thompson, 2018). The first dimension is where corruption benefits an institution while at the same time undermining it. In such a case, corruption is legitimate and exploits legitimate practice that provide benefits which facilitate effective functioning of an institution. Activities such as fundraising campaigns or marketing services for a public organization easily fall into this category. The second dimension is the impersonal nature of corruption where by the individuals involved in the political act perform institutional roles. For instance, the politicians seek favour from their constituents and promote their own interests, while at the same time they are promoting democratic processes. The third dimension is the generalisable corruption which is found in both government and non-state institutions including the private sector and Non-Governmental Organizations. In this case, it's possible for the CSOs and public organisations designed to fight corruption to be victims of corruption. Hence, from this perspective, we argue that corruption is related to the theory and practice of institutions where it is embedded.



Civil society organisations are expected to play a significant role in the fight against corruption including raising awareness on corruption and reporting cases of corruption (Grimes, 2013), providing a platform for the public to articulate their grievances and promoting transparent and accountable state leadership (Tusalem, 2007) monitoring the performance of public institutions (Mungiu-Pippidi & Dusu, 2011), engaging in policy advocacy and redesigning anti-corruption statutes (Setiyono & McLeod, 2010; Wampler & Avritzer, 2004). Additionally, CSOs, particularly the media have potential to leverage platform for providing diagonal accountability thereby limiting the government both directly and indirectly through provision of valuable information to the public (Namgay& Pelden, 2022). Nevertheless, there are increasing scenarios of corruption in Africa where Uganda is among countries on the top list. Media has always exposed corruption scandals but there seems to be nothing done to address the gaps or even penalize the victims. The question here is whether CSOs are politically being used to disguise that there are systems to promote transparency and accountability.

In addition, an emerging body of literature looks at the conditions under which civil society may affect control of corruption, including free media expression, government transparency, political competition, and important legal, political and socioeconomic contexts partly shaped by national governments (Donaghy, 2011; Uhlin, 2009; Uhlin, 2010; Widojoko, 2017). It is argued that whereas the CSOs are instrumental in exerting pressure on the state from below, their likelihood to succeed depends on their ability to gain the favour and attention of the gatekeepers with authority to foster their demands (Gumisiriza & Mukasa, 2022). Furthermore, for the voters and civil society to effectively fight corruption, there is need for concerted effort in aspects such as community monitoring, demanding community resources rather than individual short-term benefits, voting for an honest politician rather than one that has promised a payoff in exchange for a vote, arranging a successful public hearing and lobbying for institutional reform (Grimes, 2008).

1 LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Corruption as a global pandemic to development

Corruption is a global pandemic that poses a significant threat to development. More than \$2.6 trillion, or 5% of global GDP is being lost to corruption annually around the world (World Bank, 2022). Almost all countries, including those in the G20 and even those considered long-lived democracies, exhibit significant traces of corruption (Tangri & Mwenda, 2013). Hence corruption has detrimental effects on the social and economic development of every society (Popova & Podolyakina, 2014) and has been cited as a major barrier to economic growth, good governance, and basic freedoms (Popova & Podolyakina, 2014; Spyromitros & Panagiotidis, 2022). The multi-dimensional and multi-layered nature of corruption (Villanueva, 2020) results in variations and unclear outcomes from the various efforts and strategies applied by nations across the various contexts to curb it (Lodge, 2019; Vian, 2020). This is so because corruption behaviours are often institutionalised within government agencies and private sector boardrooms, a situation that makes most efforts to curb the vice very futile (Nuristani & Vanhove, 2020). This is particularly true because even individuals with good intentions cannot easily revoke the system, as some are either forced to compromise their integrity and align with the corrupt or allow the corrupt system to prevail if they wish to retain their lives and jobs.



Scholarly literature records historical revolutions around the world that aimed fighting corruption. For example, the French Napoleonic *Code pénal* of 1810 introduced tough penalties to combat corruption in public life and this was the idea that birthed the criminalization of corruption (Stessens, 2001). In Africa, the anti-colonial struggle bore the anti-corruption language to deter the colonial governments that siphoned African resources to benefit their home governments while at the same time individual African leaders, mainly chiefs, enhanced their power and undermined their accountability to the local population (Ali et al., 2020). Under the system of native administration during colonization, British rule contributed to increased levels of corruption among chiefs because they entrenched the chiefs' power. Hence, with this perspective, the attainment of independence by most of the African nations ideally paved way for good governance. The corruption situation in Africa has persistently taken a negative dimension in the post-colonial era. Findings from the 2019 Global Corruption Barometer-Africa by Transparency International (TI) reveal that more than half of citizens on the African continent believed that the magnitude of corruption was worsening, with less action by respective nations to curb the vice (Pring & Vrushi, 2019).

1.2 CSOs in the fight against corruption in Uganda

In Uganda, the role of CSO in the fight against corruption can be traced far back from the colonial era. However, during this period, the number of people in organised groups was limited and the CSOs comprised mainly of cooperative unions for farmers that later became political agents for independence (Oloka-Onyango & Barya, 1997). During the immediate post-independence era of Obote 1 and Amin's regimes of 1966-1971 and 1971-1979, respectively, the CSOs were confined to the provision of welfare services. The decentralization system of governance under the National Resistance Movement (NRM) after 1986 gave CSOs more support from IMF and World Bank that emphasised citizen's participation thereby enabling CSOs to put more pressure on the state authorities, right from the grass root. The government has put in place a legislative framework such as the Whistle Blowers policy 2009 and Anti-corruption Act 2010, which provide for the participation of Non-State actors in the fight against corruption in addition to anti-corruption bodies such as the Inspectorate of Government (IG), Office of the Auditor General (OAG), the Anti-Corruption Court and Anti-corruption Committee. The CSOs complement the governmental institutional agencies that are engaged in the fight against corruption at grassroots and national levels (Masumba, 2021).

Despite the existing legislative framework that justifies the significant role of CSOs in combating corruption, Uganda continues to record high incidences of corruption. Uganda is currently one of the most corrupt countries, ranking 142 out of 180 least corrupt countries globally and 140th out of 180 countries in 2024 (Transparency International, 2023, 2024). According to Inspectorate of Government (IG's) Budget Framework Paper FY 2023/24, the estimated cost of corruption in Uganda was reported be UGX 9.144 trillion per year. In addition, UGX 4.2 billion out 8 billion had been recovered from corrupt individuals and institutions in six months for the period of July-Dec 2024; while for the period January 2022 to June 2023, only UGX 7.99 billion was recovered out of UGX 38.7 billion recommended for recovery. Furthermore, UGX 30 billion was lost to corruption in the Financial Year 2023/2024 (IG, 2025; NilePost, 2024; IG, 2023). This trend communicates that while the legislative framework seemingly



provide a robust support for the CSOs to engage in the fight against corruption, this inclusion is largely an exercise of tokenism. We argue that the existing legislative framework provides an illusion seat for the CSOs at the table of good governance but in reality, the CSOs are rendered toothless through systemic failure to penalise the corrupt victims.

Therefore, this paper illuminates the role of the CSOs in the fight against corruption and pinpoints the key hindrances in the internal and external environment that consequently influence their overall impact in enhancing transparency and accountability. The paper contributes towards enhancing understanding about the contextual environment in which CSOs operate, thereby unearthing the gaps in the policies and systems and consequently shape the overall impact in the fight against corruption both in Uganda and globally.

2 METHODS

The study adopted a qualitative approach because of the need for deeper interrogation about the persistent increasing levels of corruption in Uganda. The population of study included representatives mainly the main CSOs that have been fighting corruption at national and regional levels. Respondents were also drawn from government agencies, Faith-Based organisations and political party representatives that have been at the forefront in the fight against corruption. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the respondents basing on the criteria of seniority, experience in anti-corruption activities and length of service. Structured interviews were used to collect data from a sample of 57 respondents. The interview guides contained non-structured questions to allow greater flexibility to probe and get detailed information about the research questions.

Data processing and analysis wet through the process of transcribing, editing, cleaning and developing the codes and codebook using excel. The AtlasTi package version 9 was used to summarise and identify the main commonalities in the data and in identifying the frequencies using the generated codes. Both thematic and narrative analyses were be used to draw the conclusions. The narrative analysis was basically be used to analyse the data from the experiences of CSOs representatives in the fight against corruption.

We ensured accurate and quality data using member checking during the coding process and by using systematic coding whereby a codebook was first developed followed by categorisation of codes to identify patterns and themes. In addition, the Research Assistants were trained before field data collection to enable them understand the research objectives and the type of data required from the different questions.

To ensure that quality and reliable data was obtained without compromising the rights and integrity of the respondents, the research protocol was subjected to rigorous process of approval by Kabale Research Ethical Committee (REC) and Uganda National Council of Science and Technology (UNCST).



3 RESULTS

This section presents the role of CSOs in the fight against corruption in Uganda. We start by presenting the strategies used. We delve into examining the impact of their work as well as assess the contextual factors that inhibit them from realising the expected impact in the fight against corruption.

3.1 Strategies used by the CSOs in the fight against Corruption.

This section presents the methods used by the CSOs in the fight against corruption. These fall into four broad themes: advocacy and public awareness about corruption, monitoring of government programmes to ensure that services reach the intended beneficiaries, provision of civic education to enlighten the public about their rights and how to get involved in anti-corruption work, following up on recommendations of the Auditor General's Report/office and formulation of Anti-corruption laws.

3.1.1 Advocacy and awareness creation

Advocacy and awareness creation ranked highest with the frequency of 34 responses. Most of the respondents mentioned that CSOs sensitise the public about the available programmes and opportunities and how they can be accessed in addition to sensitizing them on anti-corruption frameworks, forms of corruption and how they can participate in demanding for accountability or report cases of corruption. The methods used in awareness raising however were found to be varying and include radio and TV shows, community sensitisations at village or schools level, and protest, among others.

3.1.2 Monitoring of government programmes

It was reported by 24 out of 58 interviewees that CSOs take a central role in monitoring government projects and this is done in partnership with government anti-corruption agencies. It was pointed out that CSOs participate in planning, monitoring and implementation of government projects and programs to ensure that the resources reach the intended users. The monitoring of government programmes is done through both direct participation of the CSOs and through empowering the community. Community empowerment is done through training and formation of grassroots networks. It was also pointed out by CSO respondents that they have been involved in the identification of beneficiaries for government programmes such as the Parish Development Model (PDM) and Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF). One of the respondents said,

"..... We have a Memorandum of Understanding with Ministry of Finance to promote budget transparency and administration and basically this means that we are involved in budget formulation and budget execution. So we check how the budget was formulated, passed and how the money is spent. The ministry of Finance will follow it to the last unit to make sure that we reduce the chance of leakages..... So in the whole budget circle we are involved and our own intention is to reduce on budget leakages. We even



ensure that for example the units such as schools and hospitals, pin information on the notice boards so that they know when their money came and how it is being used (Said, KII2).

Another respondent said,

“We report any corruption tendencies like Parish Development Model (PDM), Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF). We monitored NUSAF I, NUSAF II, and NUSAF III alongside the Inspectorate of Government (IG). We are waiting for NUSAF IV. At village level, we train the community monitoring groups to combat corruption through reporting and monitoring. At the district and maybe sub-regional levels, we normally organize meetings where different people come up and bring issues in the area of their implementation like the CSOs” (Said, KII6).

3.1.3 Provision of civic education to citizens

This was the third highly ranked response and appeared 30 times. The respondents mentioned that the CSOs equip the citizenry with the necessary information that enables them to understand their rights and in so doing demand for services and accountability from the government. Part of this task involves education on the legal framework, the rights and responsibilities of the citizens, the existing institutions to fight corruption and the legal provisions on corruption.

“CSOs have equipped the citizens with the necessary information and tools in terms of audit findings and audit reports and that has led to an empowered citizenry which can now demand for effective accountability and better services in their respective communities.” (Said, KII 20).

“We educate people on corruption, anti-corruption, the policy frameworks, the laws which define corruption, and the government strategies to fight corruption. Talking about the laws, talking about the policies, talking about the institutions are created under the different laws. So, that’s what we do under anti-corruption campaigns... We take time to educate people on why this will enter the governance process. It starts with making critical decisions about which services to deliver and what investments will be made in their implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. It is crucial to ensure that whatever limited resources have been allocated to a project of their choice are not wasted. It’s not uncommon to see bags of cement being delivered to a project site during the day, only to find that, by night, they are being taken back to where they came from. Therefore, providing security and exercising vigilance in project management are key areas we focus on...” (Said KII 10).

In general, we observe that as a result of the civic engagement efforts, the citizenry have taken a number of initiatives to demand for better services, report cases of corruption and demand for accountability.



3.1.4 Follow up on audit recommendations

Fourteen (14) respondents mentioned that CSOs are involved in following the Auditor General's recommendations to ensure that the government officials respond to accountability and transparency issues raised by the Auditor General's Office. Findings show that CSOs follow up on recommendations on budgeting, expenditure and the implementation of programmes given that they interface with the community and Local government officials. Examples of responses from the respondents are as follows:

"Lately, we have been following up on the level of implementation of the Auditor General's reports. We would pick up these reports, process district specifics, and then go to the district authorities (the CAO, the town clerks, and the heads of departments). We therefore can question: "These issues came from the Auditor General. How far have you gone with these recommendations?"(KII 03)

"We present the Auditor General's recommendations and conduct research in certain key areas where we identify issues with specific projects that communities believe were not executed properly. These findings are shared in forums for stakeholders to discuss what went wrong and how they can address these situations, such as issues involving sub-county headquarters, schools, roads, and bridges that were not adequately addressed, prompting them to provide explanations" (KII 10)

"We... have a partnership with the office of the Auditor General. And that one, we help them track. When they make recommendations to the district, we normally follow up to see if the districts are implementing or they have had it in their council meetings or not. Then, we also report and tell them, you have recommended this, but nothing has been done. Please, maybe use the other agencies that are supposed to follow up, like Ministry of Finance, to follow up on this issue (KII 07)

3.1.5 Policy formulation

A total of 8 respondents reported that CSOs have been participating in formulation of laws and influencing the laws against Corruption through their advocacy activities. Across the board, the respondents emphasized that the anti-corruption legislation in place is reasonable but there are significant gaps when it comes to implementation.

"In the area of legislative reform, we have actively advocated for implementation of anti-corruption laws and frameworks, and looking at efforts that can shape key policies, like the Anti-Corruption Act, and whistleblowing protection act, and some of the leadership aspects, especially governance and the rule of law." (KII 01)



3.2 Impact of CSOs' activities in the fight against corruption

This section examines the actual impact of CSOs efforts in the fight against corruption in Uganda and further analyses the impact of the external environment on their anti-corruption efforts.

3.2.1 Increased awareness among citizens hence the ability to demand for accountability

Majority of the respondents (27) mentioned that CSOs have increased awareness among the citizenry and this has led to increased demand for improved and increased service delivery. It was pointed out that as a result of CSOs work in advocacy, training and community education, the citizenry are now aware about their rights and can demand for services accountability from those in public offices. In addition, some of the respondents mentioned that the citizens can now identify cases of corruption and be in position to point them out as recoded in the excerpts below:

“The biggest impact I think is generating information on corruption, incidences of corruption and how much government is losing in corruption and creating awareness around corruption, building the consciousness both citizens and other stakeholders about corruption that has been one of the biggest achievements about corruption by CSOs.” (KII 45)

“One is empowering citizens I think we have empowered citizens in terms of giving them information, and in terms of really citizens taking up the fight. Also, citizens have been made aware of the problem of corruption, and they are generally knowledgeable in terms of their obligations and how they can fight it” (KII 44).

Another responded said;

“CSOs have been instrumental in raising public awareness about the devastating impact of corruption. Through public education campaigns, media outreach, and community engagement, they've successfully shifted public perception, making citizens more aware of their rights and responsibilities in combating corruption. This increased public scrutiny has put significant pressure on government officials to be more accountable. (KII 35)

One of the respondents from the government institutions said;

“The most significant impact is that these efforts have deepened awareness among the citizenry as far as the fight against corruption is concerned. But more importantly, they have equipped the citizens with the necessary information and tools in terms of audit findings and audit reports and that has led to an empowered citizenry which can now demand for effective accountability and better services in their respective communities”(KII 52).



It was mentioned across all the respondents that as a result of the empowerment activities by CSOs, community members can now task the government officials to provide the required services. For example, they can voice out their grievances and demand for effective service delivery using different avenues such as the media and their opinions regarding misuse of resources can now reach the different duty bearers.

However, a significant number of the respondents mentioned that as a result of the complacency by the government in punishing the victims of corruption, apathy is taking root among the community members. We observe that the community/public looks at corruption as a cancer that has no cure. Moreover, it was also raised by many respondents that less is always done to reprimand culprits of corruption. It was revealed that sometimes the government takes no action on some of the cases of corruption exposed. In general, the responses from both the CSO and government anti-corruption agencies communicate a state of apathy when it comes to public engagement in anticorruption work because most of the corrupt personalities are left to go free by those in power. Hence, the community members are feeling discouraged –the reason a number of them witness corruption cases but they don't report. One of the respondents from government anti-corruption agencies reported:

“One of our biggest challenges is overcoming public apathy and distrust. People often feel powerless and disillusioned by corruption, believing that it’s an inevitable part of life and that their individual actions won’t make a difference. This can lead to a sense of resignation and a reluctance to get involved. Additionally, a lack of trust in government institutions and the justice system can further discourage public participation” (KII 33)

3.2.2 Responsive leadership

The study also reveals that that as a result of CSOs efforts in exposing cases of corruption, action has been taken on some of the cases. It was further found out that some CSOs undertake research on cases of corruption and this informs government intervention. Six (6) respondents reported that as a result of their evidence and exposure of corruption acts by government officials, some of the culprits have been reprimanded.

“It’s mainly about government responsiveness particularly in areas where public resources are lost, we have had tremendous efforts, tremendous achievements with regard to empowering citizens for them to be able to demand accountability from duty bearers at the local government level, where citizens are able to ask about the quality of the roads that they have been constructed, the quality of infrastructure for schools, health centers and so on and so forth. ...we have also been able to see government stepping out to putting in place improve administrative procedures in public finance, management, revision of amendment of laws with regard to public finance management and also improvement of transparency particularly with regard to the National budget there are civil initiatives the government has done to ensure that the budget is transparent and disseminating budget information across different platforms.” (KII 45)



Despite the contribution in exposing corruption, all the CSOs respondents reported threats of insecurity from the government officials. They mentioned that as a result of anti-corruption campaigns and exposure of incidences of corruption, their lives property are always at risk. A significant number reported that sometimes, their offices are broken into and computers and other office records are stolen by the perpetrators of corruption as a means of destroying evidence. It was further mentioned that the staff of the CSOs suffer threats and intimidation and even others are killed by the corrupt victims. Owing to this situation, sometimes some of the staff shy away from providing evidence or openly condemning corruption. For example, one of the respondents said;

“So you know actually it’s a very risky venture, they look for your weakness, so they can get you the wrong side to bring the organization downbut you see the worst thing with fighting corruption is you can be killed, you can be shot. I have friends who have been shot. One of my friends was shot because he was a strong anti – corruption campaigner and when they shot him, someone said this is a warning”
(KII 42)

Another respondent lamented;

“There is a lot of intimidation in our field of work given that we gather data and key information in assessing the integrity of local government leaders; thus , at times, we are forced to go slow for fear of the unknown”(KII 43).

Respondents also revealed that as a result of anti-corruption work, the CSO leaders are both demonised and persecuted in public space by the technocrats in government and the functionality of their organizations is also threatened. Some of the challenges accruing from anti-corruption work have gone as far as freezing individual organisation’s account and non-renewal of the operating licenses as recorded in the following excerpts:

“Anti-corruption work is not for the weak. It is not for the faint-hearted. Because people will not like you, but you’ll have to do the work. So, one of the major challenges that has been affecting civil society is that you are shunned by some leaders, infact some technocrats. They don’t want to work with you. Even when you’re helping them do their work better, they don’t want to work with you. Every time you go, they will look for anything that makes you look bad on the side of government. So, every time you try to bring anything up, they will tell you you’re anti-government (KII 08)

Another respondent said;

“There are direct threats from those in authority. They feel as if you’re taking personal actions against them, yet the interest is different. But because they are corrupt, they feel any action that’s related to fight against corruption is against them...You know, they tend to start witch-hunting against you, threatening to deregister you, claiming that you’re fighting the regime, you’re fighting government, and so forth. And yet your interest is in terms of ensuring that they’re able to be responsive, provide the kind of information that is needed, but most importantly, deliver services as required. And then also threats



around... local governments not willing to renew your MOUs because you're engaging them, and so forth" (KII 04).

In addition, it was also reported that the CSOs have also influenced the government to formulate the laws on corruption to make the civil servants more accountable. One of the respondents said;

"We are now implementing as partners; there is improvement in the registrations at some point, most of the laws were mainly one sided, so in our engagements, we have seen laws such as the leadership code act being transformed, now we have a leadership co tribunal where matters of declaration by public servants are being handled and we have more respect to anti-corruption provisions such as access to information related to corruption" (KII 46)

Whereas there is significant legislation to fight corruption, the findings reveal that the laws are merely on paper. The respondents mentioned that the government institutions lack commitment to make the existing anti-corruption laws work. It was said that much as the corrupt officials are brought in the dim light, they are not always punished. It was reckoned that even, when a few are penalised, the punishments given do not always commensurate to the money stolen. Moreover, some personalities are always left to go wholesomely because they have "god parents" or they are big shots in the government. One of the respondents lamented;

"The poor implementation of anti-corruption laws brings me back to the political question I was just raising. 'If I have to convict this man once caught in an act of corruption, he is subject to conviction and a commitment to serving 10 years in prison. Of course, after that, he loses his job. Should I allow the judge handling this matter to rule on this case against this person, knowing he was my campaign agent?' This situation compromises the implementation of anti-corruption law (KII 05)

3.2.3 Timely service provision

A total of 11 out of 57 respondents reported that CSOs have contributed to timely service delivery. It was revealed that through advocacy activities, CSOs at the grass root have been able to influence quick government action towards some of the challenges affecting the community as reflected in one of the respondent's words:

"During COVID time, our chair raised a concern to the state and questioned why the Lacor hospital which is a religious institution provides treatment services cheaply that even the ordinary people can afford and yet the government owned hospitals are charging highly. The president acted and things stabilized (CIR)



3.2.4 Public servants made accountable

The findings further revealed that as a result of anti-corruption work by CSOs, Civil servants are now cautious about their actions and how they respond to community needs and demands. It was affirmed by a significant number of 16 out of 57 respondents that the increased awareness among the citizenry about the prevalence of corruption enables them to approach those in power and government offices to demand for service due to them. The citizenry were reported to be more aggressive and are actively involved in the implementation of government programmes as monitors/watchdogs, change agents and whistleblowers. One of the respondents said;

“In Ageo, around 2019, the community members marched to their Local Council I (LCI) chairperson who was sitting on a water user committee collecting monies and using them for his own purpose. The citizens rose up and tasked their LC and recovered money from him by the way. This followed an intervention we had with the support from IDF. So, people had picked the courage that far (KII 09).

Another respondent said;

“... in Ntungamo district local government several leaders, were interdicted, dismissed from work and others made to pay back that money; at the moment, two of them are in the anti-corruption court.”(KII 51)

Whereas the civil society reports some milestones in enhancing public accountability, the respondents observed that there is inadequate political will on the side of the public, hence curtailing the efforts of the CSOs. It was also revealed that lack of political will by government is a reflected in inadequate resource allocation towards anti-corruption work and inability to punish the victims found guilty of corruption. It was emphasized by most the respondents that most of the big shots are protected by those in higher authority such as the president, the police and politicians at district and national level such as the LCV chairpersons, Resident District Commissioners (RDCs) mayors, Members of parliament and the President Among others. . It was further mentioned that given the risky nature of the anti-corruption work, the institutions involved should be well facilitated but this is not the case. One of the respondents commented:

“The very police who are supposed to enforce the law and make arrests are saying they have no transportation. Instead, he becomes a perpetrator of corruption. Because I am unable to provide transportation for the police to arrest the person I suspect has committed or is about to commit a corrupt act, I cannot offer them money. The police take their time; they may act, or they may not. If they do act, it may be after the corrupt action has already occurred. So, implementation of the anti-corruption laws is part of the challenge (KII 01).

Another respondent reiterated;

The biggest hurdle is often lack of genuine political will from government officials. They may pay lip service to anti-corruption but lack the commitment to genuinely tackle systemic issues. We encounter



resistance from powerful figures who benefit from the status quo. This can manifest as obstruction, inaction on our reports, or even retaliation.” (KII 13).

The politicians, particularly the Members of Parliaments (MPs), LCVs and Mayors were also reported to be the biggest perpetrators of corruption at the grassroots. It was mentioned that they are commonly involved in requesting for bail on behalf of those arrested, threatening anti-corruption teams, and are involved in peddling and making other corrupt influences at the district levels.

“Also, we try to go in community, talk about corruption and as I have told you about the system of governance, the politicians try to visit the community that we have visited and they discourage them about CSOs’ anti-corruption initiatives.” (KII 42)

3.2.5 Provision of evidence on corruption

The study findings also reveal that the CSOs’ strategic location at the grassroots enables them to generate the primary evidence on corruption that enables the government institutions to act upon the corrupt government as pointed out by 8 respondents. It was also mentioned by some respondents that they are engaged in conducting research on corruption and their findings influence the interventions and policy formation by the government institutions. For instance, one of the respondents said;

“The Office of the Auditor General, her contribution in the fight is not direct; for us, we provide information, evidence based facts, then other institutions especially IGG and PPDA, use these reports to carry out further investigations and prosecutions. A good example out of our work, procurement of the manual system that has existed for ages now, was one of the key areas that was actually fueling integrity issues among government officials especially in that area; but when the Auditor General repeatedly kept rising a red flag, PPDA now is implementing what we call e-government procurement system to limit the human interface; actually, they have rolled it out, it is now mandatory so we are now witnessing that kind of transition (KII 21)

Another one responded:

“My organization has been largely publishing the stories and distributing them within different segments of the public on streets, through our circulation channels in that way we have been able to make available the stories and we have been able to supply them to different segments of the community....the black Monday campaigns also now the exhibitions especially the parliamentary exhibitions by Agola Disclose. Others I have seen work by Center for Constitutional Governance aaaaaah... am forgetting, the demonstrations, petitions to Parliament and also the IGG.” – (KII 26).

Despite the role of CSOs in the provision of evidence on corruption cases, it was found out that they face sabotage from the government institutions in the process of gathering the required evidence on corruption cases and this jeopardises the accuracy of their reports. The respondents from CSOs



pointed out lack of autonomy in investigations as a result of political interference and too much bureaucracy in handling anti-corruption cases. As one of the respondent reiterated:

“Secrecy and lack of transparency within government institutions are major obstacles. We face difficulties in obtaining crucial information needed for our investigations. Laws and regulations regarding access to public information are often inadequate or poorly enforced hence hindering our ability to hold officials accountable.” (KII 14)

4 DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reinforce the dual perspective on the role of CSOs in anti-corruption efforts. On one hand, the study confirms the optimistic view that CSOs in Uganda are actively engaged in crucial anti-corruption initiatives such as advocacy, monitoring, civic education, and policy formulation. These findings contend with Ojok et al. (2024) that the CSOs have the ability to exert pressure and oversight to enhance public capacity to demand for accountability. These efforts have demonstrably led to increased community awareness about corruption and, to some extent, improved service delivery, aligning with the arguments of (Grimes, 2013) and (Tusalem, 2007) regarding the awareness-raising and grievance-articulation roles of CSOs. The monitoring and oversight activities, particularly the follow-up on Auditor General’s reports, highlight a practical application of the accountability function attributed to CSOs by Mungiu-Pippidi & Dusu, (2011). The involvement in policy formulation further underscores their role in shaping the legislative environment (Setiyono & McLeod, 2010; Wampler & Avritzer, 2004). This is also in consonance with United Convention Against Corruption Coalition (UNCAC) that CSOs in Uganda have played a critical role in advocating for and shaping key anti-corruption legislation that have led to development of numerous anti-corruption legislation including the 2015 Anti-Corruption (Amendment) Act and the Anti-Money Laundering Act (UNCAC, 2021).

However, we observe that much as the government of Uganda has in place a “zero tolerance to corruption” policy and a National Anti-Corruption Strategy that promotes consultation with CSOs in policy development (UNCAC Coalition, 2023), this consultation is merely to formalise policy frameworks that are never adhered to. The actual implementation of these anti-corruption legislations is hindered by lack of political will. As noted by Mistree & Dibley (2018) political will is critical in ensuring success of any anti-corruption initiative. However, this is the reverse in Uganda as reflected by political interference, inadequate resource allocation for anti-corruption institutions, and the reluctance to prosecute high caliber government officials (ActionAid, 2025). Furthermore, lack of adherence to anti-corruption policies demonstrates that the inclusion of CSOs in the planning and monitoring process converts the CSOs effort from a genuine accountability instrument to a tokenistic symbol. The inability of the government to protect CSO staff from external threats and intimidation makes the anti-corruption investigative work very hazardous and curtails the freedom of expression. This agrees with Gumisiriza & Mukasa (2022) that the success of anti-corruption activities heavily relies on the support of gatekeepers. The inability of government to support the anti-corruption work exhibit a clear paradox: CSOs are formally partners in the anti-corruption struggle, but when they effectively



reveal the corrupt in power and authority, they face hostility- meaning the CSOs are tolerated only as long as they do not threaten to the status quo of those in power. This agrees with the findings by (Kimutai et al., 2022) who observed that while CSOs are formally included in policy processes, they face limitations in achieving actual influence.

5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While CSOs are applying effective strategies in performing many of their expected roles, the impact of their interventions is constrained by the challenging and hostile external environment that has kept corruption level high. Though sanctioned by law and marked by genuine effort, the participation of CSOs in the fight against corruption is fundamentally a form of tokenism. The government, creates an illusionary space and invited the CSOs to participate in the fight against corruption while it consistently fails to address the systemic corruption due to fear of losing public trust and political control. The consistent lack of political will to support anti-corruption efforts by CSOs through failure to enforce anti-corruption laws and protect CSO staff from suppression and harassment; and the inability to meaningful provide institutional support confirm that CSOs are not in real sense seen as partners in the anti-corruption struggle but as mere tools for achieving anti-corruption tales. Ensuring that CSOs are true agents of change in the anti-corruption struggle requires a deliberate effort to move from token inclusion to real empowerment, founded on good political will and commitment to provide security to those who risk their lives to expose incidences of corruption.

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