



## EMPOWERING PEOPLE: OSISA'S EXECUTIVE STRATEGY 2019-22

### Introduction

OSISA programmes in 11 southern African countries. Our work has been bolstered by relatively stable financial resources over the past decade, an experienced and motivated staff, evidence-based research, data and analysis, a committed network of partners who share our vision and being part of the global network of Foundations. All increase our work's visibility and amplify the voices we support.

We see increased citizen and civil society mobilising, both during elections and threats to constitutional democracy, as well as against poor social service delivery and inequality in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Angola, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique, Madagascar and South Africa. We have recorded success in building social movements of smallholder, women farmers, women informal traders, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and intersex (LGBTI) groups and women in mining-affected communities. In addition, the expansion of investigative journalism and our work on natural resource governance holding extractive industries to account speaks to our impacts. However, we also see increased government backlash especially through the threat of greater civil society regulation and increased control of the media (including social media).

We aspire for people to live free from discrimination and enjoy their rights regardless of who they are; power to be exercised responsibly; and dissenting voices to have as much respect as those of the majority. Our 2019-22 strategy outlines our overall goal, specific objectives and tactics to achieve them, as well as how we align our strategy to resources. We will continue to play a distinct role through our convening power, thought leadership and grant-making, especially in areas other donors do not fund, such as strengthening citizen agency and movements to promote, protect and advance the rights of the marginalised. This positioning allows us to open up space for engagement on difficult and sensitive, yet pertinent, issues that affect our region.

Through our grants, research, advocacy and other interventions, we hope to see more people organising, speaking out, protesting and challenging attempts to subvert democracy, constitutionalism, transparency and accountability. In anticipation of governmental backlash, we expect to provide organisations that provide legal defence with grants to enable them to provide legal support to protesters and activists (see our Theory of Change).

In our new strategy, the *main shift* will be in our approach. To push back against democratic setbacks, increased discrimination and human rights violations and non-inclusive economies, we will increase our support to *empowering* people as the *main agents of change in society*. Whilst our previous efforts have sought to work on both the demand and supply sides, we will increase our support to the demand side moving forward in view of deliberate government efforts to close civic space, unaddressed corruption as well as the inability and unwillingness to promote and protect human rights. As concerns public services, we will focus on health and education as key investments to ensure people live meaningful and dignified lives. We will place people who bear the greatest brunt in closed societies at the centre of our efforts in all the work we do.

## Our context

The political, social and economic context in southern Africa is undergoing important changes. With regards to *politics*, dominant liberation movements like the Zimbabwean African National Union (ZANU PF), the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO), the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) and South Africa's African National Congress (ANC), which have ruled for decades, have undergone leadership renewal. Whether this presents an opportunity for a different kind of politics from the current politics where political space has been restricted, opposition voices silenced, media freedoms curbed and civic space curtailed remains unknown.

The region has seen reversals in its democratic trajectory. These reversals have taken various forms.

*First*, has been *violations of the constitutional order* in countries such as: Zimbabwe, which experienced a military coup in November 2018 and held elections in July 2018; the DRC, where President Joseph Kabila created a political crisis by remaining in power beyond his constitutional mandate; and Zambia, where in December 2018, the Constitutional Court allowed President Edgar Lungu to contest for a third term. In Mozambique, peace talks between the ruling party, FRELIMO, and the opposition Mozambique National Resistance (RENAMO), have stalled following the death of Alfonso Dhlakama. The country's economy is in crisis following a massive debt corruption scandal. Local elections have tested the country's peaceful and democratic trajectory whilst impunity for serious human rights violations continues.

*Second*, has been the tendency by ruling parties to *manipulate elections* to remain in power and subvert citizens' democratic choices. This has taken various forms ranging from: restricting opposition political activity (Zimbabwe, DRC, Angola, Zambia, Swaziland, Mozambique); enacting and enforcing laws that restrict political, civic and media activity (Zimbabwe, DRC, Angola, Zambia, Botswana); manipulating electoral processes and institutions (Angola, DRC, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Zambia); and using violence and intimidation (Zimbabwe, DRC, Angola, Zambia, Lesotho). Although the resort to violence to win elections seems to have receded due to the higher costs of illegitimacy imposed by the regional and international community, newer and smarter forms of electoral manipulation including the use of technology are on the rise (Zimbabwe, DRC). A common thread is the violent clampdown of protests by young people in Angola, DRC, Malawi and Zimbabwe where they are arrested, harassed or even killed.

*Third*, has been the targeting of old and new media spaces to *close civic space*. Journalists have been subjected to laws that restrict their work, harassed, prosecuted for criminal defamation and, in some cases, threatened with violence and death. In Botswana, in 2017, journalists from the *INK Centre for Investigative Journalism* (were detained and threatened with death by security agents in the course of their work. In Lesotho, a journalist was shot by unknown gunmen in 2017 but survived. In Zambia, a major independent newspaper remains closed on alleged tax violations of USD6 million. In Zimbabwe, at least 32 journalists were assaulted in the course of their work in 2016 alone.<sup>1</sup> A common trend is the targeting of journalists whose work exposes corruption.

On the *economy*, most southern African countries are dependent on mineral resources. They are some of the world's largest producers of the world's main minerals, for example oil (Angola) cobalt (DRC, Zambia, Zimbabwe) copper (Zambia, DRC), diamonds (Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, DRC, Angola, Zimbabwe, South Africa), platinum (South Africa, Zimbabwe), gold (DRC, South Africa, Zimbabwe) and coal (Mozambique, Zimbabwe, DRC, South Africa, Botswana). This endowment (and dependency on it) makes the economies of the region vulnerable to the commodity boom/bust cycles that accompany

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<sup>1</sup> Amnesty International – 2017 Report on Human Rights in Southern Africa

mineral extraction. After a bust period of several years, there are preliminary signs that commodity prices for some major minerals are once again set for a boom. Paradoxically, most countries in the region also happen to be the most unequal and poor. Four countries from the region (Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Botswana) feature in the top ten most unequal countries in the world. Underlying these development challenges is public and private sector corruption, which subverts democracy and robs countries of the resources to deliver public services.

The region continues to face regression in respect of *human rights* especially for minorities, disadvantaged and marginalised groups and communities. Apart from governments' failure to protect their civil and political rights, women, sexual minorities, indigenous groups, young people, migrants, persons with albinism and other groups face systematic discrimination, exclusion and violence. In Angola, despite the recent repeal of the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) law, the space for citizens to express their civil and political rights continues to shrink with violent government responses to young people's peaceful protests. In the DRC, escalation of violence in Kasai region has resulted in the death of thousands and the displacement of up to one million people. In Zimbabwe, laws aimed at restricting political activity and media freedoms remain, despite a promise to hold free and fair elections in August 2018.

### **Our strategy**

Our goal in the coming four years is to **strengthen people's capacities** to mobilise and organise themselves to protect and defend constitutional democracy, challenge discrimination and injustice and push for inclusive economies and equitable public services. This demand-side approach will be realised through consistent grant making to citizen and civic formations and organisations. Where necessary, we will play a catalytic as well as support role through utilising our convening power and investing in conceptual work to ensure strategic thought-leadership in the three pillars below.

### **Our strategic objectives**

In response to the context described above, we have organised our work around three priority pillars: **Democracy and governance; Economic and social justice; and Human rights, access to justice and rule of law** each with a strategic objective:

*Democracy and governance pillar:*

**Strategic Objective 1:** *Empower pro-democracy voices, processes, organisations and movements that work to promote and defend democracy, constitutionalism, public and private sector accountability.*

The challenges are how to ensure: citizens are able to push back on the erosion of democratic space; political power is legitimately obtained; and citizens can hold political and other actors to account in the exercise of that power.

We will continue to support democratic consolidation including through supporting citizen's participation in credible elections Malawi (2019), Mozambique (2019), DRC (2018) and Zambia (2020). We will increase our support to pro-democracy voices and civil society actors advocating in defence of constitutionalism in the DRC, Zimbabwe and Zambia. Our support has previously focused on providing legal assistance to arrested young protesters in Angola, the DRC and Zimbabwe. We will now additionally provide grants to emerging youth formations in the DRC, Zimbabwe and Angola as they organise and mobilise in defence of rights, democracy and constitutions (rather than solely *post facto*). We will increase our support to emerging forms of activism that leverage ICT and hash tag movements through youth-led technology hubs and platforms to raise youth voices demanding government accountability. We will continue to support investigative journalism in Botswana, Malawi, Lesotho and

Zimbabwe in reporting on corruption—especially related to public procurement and its impacts on public service delivery.

*Human rights, access to justice and rule of law pillar:*

**Strategic Objective 2:** *Empower people facing discrimination, injustice and human rights violations because of their identity, beliefs and opinions to know, understand and fight for their rights; and strengthen capacities of national institutions to address discrimination, deliver justice and protect human rights.*

Whilst the human rights situation remains poor for most people, it is worse for the LGBTI community, sex workers, women, persons living with disabilities, indigenous groups, migrants, mining communities, informal traders, human rights and political activists targeted for their identities, opinions, beliefs, socio-economic and other status. The challenge is how to empower citizens facing discrimination and other human rights violations to understand, demand and fight for their rights and, at the same time, strengthen the capacities of public institutions to deliver justice.

We will therefore continue to support organisations to help them organise and mobilise the LGBTI community to fight discriminatory laws, policies and attitudes. We will continue to foster solidarity and build movements including with faith-based organisations (FBOs) to target negative attitudes towards LGBTI and sex work communities.

We will also continue to support human rights awareness campaigns and provide support to human rights activists throughout the region.

*Economic and social justice pillar:*

**Strategic Objective 3:** *Empower citizens to advocate and demand inclusive and responsive economies that deliver more accountable and equitable public services, in particular, health and education.*

The challenge is how to involve citizens in advocating for an inclusive economy, better government accountability and more equitable public services.

We will continue to work with activist think-tanks that represent the interests of marginalised communities, and economic justice movements in the region. We will target rural women farmers, informal women traders, women domestic workers (domestic workers' rights) and women affected by the extractives sector. We will support women's rights groups and groups campaigning against illicit financial flows (IFFs) and calling for greater domestic resource mobilisation as well as tax reform in Angola, DRC, Mozambique and Zimbabwe.

In the area of education we will continue to support education coalitions, parents' associations, school governing bodies and other stakeholders to push for the expansion of access and quality especially for *out-of-school children*, learners with disabilities and children from poor, indigenous communities both at general and early childhood development (ECDE) levels. We will continue to support coalitions and ECDE networks.

In the area of health, undertaken in close collaboration we will continue to use grants, research and advocacy to advance health rights. We will provide grants to civil society groups and communities in Zimbabwe, Malawi and Mozambique.