

Promoting Youth Participation and Civic Engagement in the Isles of Zanzibar



In Zanzibar, youth comprise a significant number of the population. [35.3% of the population is between the ages of 15 and 35](#). These youth face serious challenges, including unemployment, poverty, and little participation in governance and political processes, where they are only considered during the elections but excluded in decision-making. Despite this gap, youth remain the most energetic and promising force to deliver socio-economic and political development advancement in the present and future.

Zanzibar Fighting Against Youth Challenges Organization (ZAFAYCO) is at the forefront of addressing challenges for youth in the isles. The youth-led civil society organization, established in 2013, thrives on empowering youth through civic and economic empowerment, health-related services, and environmental sustainability.

ZAFAYCO has been a recipient of the USAID-funded Data-Driven Advocacy (DDA) project, both as a subgrantee and participant in Pact’s capacity development initiatives, since 2019.

“Up to 80% of our achievements as an organization are credited to the capacity development we received from the DDA project through Pact,” commented Abdalla Abeid, the Executive Director for ZAFAYCO. Part of the capacity development offered to ZAFAYCO includes training on resource mobilization, proposal development, project, organizational performance and financial management strengthening, leadership, governance, business sustainability, and adaptive management.

With strong systems and structures, ZAFAYCO has expanded its grants portfolio from TZS 64 million (USD \$27,826) in 2019 to TZS 1.3 billion (USD \$565,217) in 2022/23. In the last four years, ZAFAYCO has been awarded funding from various donor agencies, including the Swiss Embassy, European Union, Holland Embassy, Internews, World Bank, ForumCiv, National Endowment for Democracy (NED), and Electoral Institute for Sustainable Development in Africa (EISA). “Every time we have inspectors for the pre-award assessment, they are always surprised to find that we meet the required thresholds. This has instilled confidence in ourselves and demonstrates to different funding agencies that we have what it takes to comply and manage grants,” added Abdalla.

The Finance Manager, Seif Omar, quotes other significant achievements, including winning a grant from EISA, which was used to deploy observers for the 2020 election. At the end of

this grant, EISA applauded ZAFAYCO as one of its best African subgrantees due to outstanding financial records and compliance. In this election, ZAFAYCO had the most significant number of observers than any other monitoring body, and 90% of those observers were youth.

Furthermore, through the Human Rights Desks they operate they have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Commission for Human Rights and Good Governance (CHRAGG), where they work together to raise awareness of human rights and good governance among youth. “Working with government agencies allows youth to access the correct information and engage directly with officials. It helps build trust and understanding; this is key in fostering and keeping the peace,” Commented Aziza Ismail, the Monitoring and Evaluation Officer.

In 2019 and 2020, ZAFAYCO won two awards from the DDA project, totaling TZS 64 million (USD \$27,826). The first grant was intended to advocate for the creation of the Youth Economic Empowerment Fund. The establishment of this fund was key to coordinating mechanisms for supporting youths’ economic empowerment. The three years of advocacy significantly contributed to enacting the Zanzibar Economic Empowerment Act No. 2 of 2022. Among other achievements, the law establishes the Agency responsible for coordinating economic empowerment programs, and guarantees that credit is given to entrepreneurs in Zanzibar. It also establishes the Zanzibar Economic Empowerment Fund, which intends to boost and create employment. The second grant supported the establishment of the Human Rights Desk for monitoring human rights violations in the post-2020 election period, which was marred with [gross irregularities](#).

ZAFAYCO presented the project report to the Zanzibar Electoral Commission (ZEC). After this presentation, ZEC reflected that they “learned a lot of new information on human rights violations through this report” and they appointed ZAFAYCO as a resource partner in the development of the ZEC Strategic Plan 2022 – 2026.¹ Additionally, ZAFAYCO, in collaboration with the Legal and Human Rights Center, used data from this grant in the development of the Zanzibar Annual Human Rights report.

The DDA Activity will continue empowering youth-led civil society organizations through capacity development initiatives and training in the Tanzania mainland and Zanzibar to develop and strengthen internal capacities and create lasting impact.

The Data Driven Advocacy Activity is a USAID-funded project that seeks to improve and sustain the ability of Tanzania’s civil society organizations to influence policy on rights issues through the strategic use of better data and information. Freedom House, in partnership with Pact, implements the project.

¹ https://www.zec.go.tz/images/docs/finaly_SP_2022_new.pdf