



## TERMS OF REFERENCE

### Consultancy to Conduct a Study on Resilience Building among Civil Society Leaders in the Wake of Financial and Civic Space Turbulence

July 2026

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#### About Civic Freedoms Forum (CFF)

Civic Freedoms Forum (CFF) is a national platform whose core mission is for consolidating and coordinating civil society actions in the promotion and protection of civil liberties. Its membership comprises of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) operating at the national level with a track record and commitment to the protection of human rights, civil liberties, and democracy. See more at <https://cff.or.ke/>

#### About PEN Kenya

CFF is currently hosted by PEN Kenya, a member of CFF and a Public Benefit Organization registered since December 2001 as Poverty Eradication Network but has since changed its name to Partnerships 4 Empowerment & Networking in Kenya. PEN Kenya believes that a strong civil society sector is fundamental to the development of any country and its ability to have sustainable impact on poverty. PEN Kenya was established to contribute towards the eradication of absolute poverty in Kenya, through building and strengthening the institutional capacity of civil society organizations (CSOs) and other not-for-profit organizations and public institutions. See more at <https://www.penkenya.org/>

#### 1. Background

The civil society sector is undergoing unprecedented transformation driven by shrinking civic space, declining donor funding, changing development financing models, and increasing political and regulatory restrictions. Across Kenya and the East African region, civil society organizations (CSOs) continue to face a complex operating environment characterized by restrictive legislation, heightened state surveillance, administrative barriers, attacks on human rights defenders, and increasing demands for organizational accountability and sustainability.

The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated these challenges by disrupting organizational operations, reducing financial resources, increasing staff burnout, and altering traditional models of civic engagement. Simultaneously, the shift in global development financing has compelled many CSOs to rethink their sustainability models, leadership approaches, and institutional resilience.

These external pressures have had significant implications not only for the resilience of CSOs as institutions but also for the well-being and resilience of the leaders responsible for steering their organizations through uncertainty. Many CSO leaders have had to develop innovative coping mechanisms, diversify funding sources, strengthen organizational systems, manage staff welfare, navigate security risks, and prepare for leadership succession and retirement.

It is against this backdrop that PEN Kenya, in collaboration with the Civic Freedoms Forum (CFF), seeks to commission a consultant to undertake a comprehensive study on resilience building among civil society leaders. The study will document experiences, identify emerging trends, highlight successful resilience strategies, and generate practical recommendations for strengthening leadership resilience within the civil society sector.

## **2. Purpose of the Assignment**

The purpose of the consultancy is to generate evidence on how civil society leaders have adapted to financial uncertainty, civic space restrictions, and organizational challenges, and to identify practical strategies that can strengthen both organizational and personal resilience.

## **3. Objectives of the Study**

The specific objectives are to:

- Identify the key financial, political, institutional, and personal challenges facing CSO leaders.
- Identify the coping mechanisms adopted by CSO leaders in response to financial and civic space turbulence.
- Examine the strategies and techniques employed by CSO leaders to build resilient and sustainable organizations.
- Examine the personal resilience strategies adopted by CSO leaders, including leadership wellness, mental well-being, succession planning, and retirement preparedness.
- Develop practical recommendations that can support CSO leaders and organizations to better navigate current and future challenges.

## **4. Scope of Work**

The consultant will undertake the following tasks:

**a) Inception Phase:** Hold an inception meeting with PEN Kenya and the Civic Freedoms Forum (CFF) to clarify the scope of the assignment, expectations, and reporting arrangements. Prepare and submit an inception report outlining the study methodology, research design, data collection tools, sampling approach, work plan, and implementation timeline for approval before commencing the study.

**b) Literature Review:** Conduct a comprehensive desk review of relevant national, regional, and international literature focusing on changing global development financing trends, civic space dynamics in Kenya and the East African region, the impact of COVID-19 on civil society organizations, organizational and leadership resilience frameworks, and global best practices on CSO sustainability and adaptive leadership.

**c) Primary Data Collection:** Design and implement a mixed-methods data collection process, including at least ten (10) Key Informant Interviews with current and former CSO leaders from diverse thematic sectors and organizational sizes, as well as an online survey targeting civil society leaders. Collect qualitative and quantitative data on organizational resilience, leadership experiences, coping mechanisms, innovation, governance systems, staff wellbeing, resource mobilization, security management, succession planning, and other emerging resilience strategies.

**d) Comparative Analysis:** Analyze and compare resilience strategies adopted by Kenyan CSO leaders with selected regional and international experiences, highlighting emerging trends, innovative practices, lessons learned, and contextual factors that can strengthen the resilience of civil society organizations in Kenya.

**e) Validation:** Prepare a presentation of the preliminary findings and facilitate a stakeholder validation workshop to review the study results, gather feedback, validate key recommendations, and document stakeholder inputs for integration into the final report.

**f) Final Reporting:** Prepare and submit a comprehensive, high-quality final study report that incorporates feedback from the validation workshop and presents the study methodology, findings, comparative analysis, conclusions, and practical, evidence-based recommendations to strengthen institutional and individual resilience among Kenyan civil society leaders.

## 5. Deliverables

The consultant shall deliver:

**Inception Report:** Prepare and submit an inception report detailing the study methodology, research design, data collection tools, sampling approach, work plan, and implementation timeline for review and approval prior to the commencement of fieldwork.

**Draft Study Report:** Submit a draft report presenting the literature review, analysis of quantitative and qualitative data, findings from key informant interviews and surveys, comparative regional and global perspectives on resilience among civil society leaders, and preliminary conclusions and recommendations.

**Validation Workshop:** The 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Civic Space Protection Summit will provide a platform of validation workshop to present the preliminary findings, guide discussions to validate and enrich the study results, and document stakeholder feedback for incorporation into the final report.

**Final Study Report:** Submit a comprehensive final report incorporating feedback from the validation workshop, including an executive summary, study methodology, key findings, comparative analysis,

conclusions, practical and actionable recommendations, and annexes containing the research instruments, list of respondents, and bibliography.

## **7. Duration of the Assignment**

The consultancy shall be undertaken during the months of **August and September 2026**. The consultant is expected to complete all activities within the agreed timeframe.

## **8. Required Qualifications and Experience**

The ideal consultant should possess:

- An advanced university degree in Development Studies, Public Policy, Sociology, Political Science, Organizational Development, Leadership, Governance, or a related field.
- At least seven (7) years' demonstrated experience conducting research, evaluations, or policy studies on civil society, governance, human rights, organizational development, or leadership.
- Proven expertise in qualitative and quantitative research methodologies.
- Strong understanding of Kenya's civil society landscape, civic space dynamics, and regional governance trends.
- Experience facilitating stakeholder consultations and validation workshops.
- Excellent analytical, report writing, and communication skills.
- Demonstrated experience producing high-quality publications for development partners, NGOs, or research institutions.

## **10. Application Requirements**

Interested consultants should submit Expression of Interest including a brief profile, understanding of the Tors, methodology, work plan and estimated financial costs. Interested consultants should submit their applications by email to: [info@penkenya.org](mailto:info@penkenya.org) Copy to: [info@cff.or.ke](mailto:info@cff.or.ke) no later than **31 July 2026**. Only shortlisted candidates will be contacted.