# CALL FOR PARTNERS TO IMPLEMENT SUSTAINABLE ACTION FUND (SAF)

1. **Contract Title:** Partner to Implement the Sustainable Action Fund under the Connect, Defend, Act! Project
2. **Location:** Lilongwe, Malawi
3. **Contact details:**Organization: Hivos FoundationEmail: [proposals.hubsaf@hivos.org](mailto:proposals.hubsaf@hivos.org)  
     
   Response Address: Plot 64, Area 11**,**   
    Lilongwe,  
    Malawi.
4. **Project Brief**

All around the world, those in power, not only in autocratic governments but in established democracies as well, are increasingly imposing restrictions on civil society to freely express themselves, to protest systemic injustices and to organize themselves to defend fundamental human rights. Digital tools and platforms carry the potential to create safe and brave spaces for trust-based collaboration and increased access to information, but they remain shaped by unequal access, as well as undermined by increasingly sophisticated digital surveillance and attacks by state and non-state actors.

With support from the Government of Norway through the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), Hivos is implementing the ‘[Connect, Defend, Act!](https://hivos.org/program/connect-defend-act/)’ project. The project aims to respond to the issue of shrinking civic space and amplify civil society-led action in Malawi by supporting civil society actors in their efforts to defend and expand civic space. Civil society actors and rights holders who are taking action to defend and expand civic space are confronted with an array of political, institutional, legal, and societal forces actively working against their goals. Civil society actors have needs such as safe and trustworthy spaces for evidence-based learning and strategizing, strengthened capacity to respond to mounting digital attacks, and access to funding to increase organizational flexibility and resilience. The project has the following goals and three strategic objectives:

**4.1 Project goal**

Civil society Actors in Malawi can positively influence the openness of and respond to changes in the civic space.

**4.2 Project Objectives**

1. By promoting coalition building among diverse civil society actors, including human rights defenders, rights holder-led civil society organizations, and independent media actors, grounded in civil society-led evidence gathering and knowledge production, and facilitated by context-specific communities of action.
2. By contributing to safe and inclusive digital civic spaces for sustained collaboration and action among civil society actors through localized holistic digital security capacity strengthening, knowledge production, and active referral to digital protection providers.
3. By increasing civil society actors’ flexibility to rapidly respond to changes in civic space through organizational capacity strengthening and the provision of strategic funding for sustainable action.

The project aims to strategically support relevant actors within civil society whose work actively to contribute to civic space from the perspective of different sectors and interests, particularly including groups who are marginalized within civil society, such as women, youth, marginalized persons, indigenous people, and others. Across all activities and outcomes, the project is promoting local ownership and leadership, with Hivos taking a facilitating and supporting role that emphasizes civil society actors’ agency and existing knowledge.

* 1. **Executive Summary – Connect, Defend, Act! Project Baseline Study**

The baseline study assessed the state of civic space in Malawi, focusing on civil society coalitions, barriers faced by actors, and organizational capacity gaps. The study revealed varying perceptions of the environment among civil society organizations (CSOs), facing challenges in participating in civic activities. Key challenges include resource shortages, legal barriers, threats, intimidation, and institutional constraints. Media actors also highlighted the importance of independent media in promoting civic space, but some felt media independence was compromised by government influence. Threats to civic space were also found, with media actors experiencing physical threats, digital attacks, and legal actions.

The study also found out that Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Malawi face various digital threats, including phishing, hacking, and online harassment. Despite having a somewhat safe physical environment, half of CSOs reported a mixed public perception of their work. Digital security knowledge among CSOs varied, with 16.7% rated as "Excellent," 50% as "Fair," and 33.3% as "Poor." To combat these threats, CSOs have implemented measures like antivirus software, firewalls, strong password protocols, and regular training. CSOs indicated that they provide digital security training to their staff. However, there are gaps in organizational capacity for CSOs and media actors in Malawi. Structural barriers, such as limited donor interest, competition, geographic isolation, and bureaucratic processes, hinder access to funds.

The study also found out that half of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Malawi lack contingency plans for emergencies, indicating vulnerabilities in adapting to rapidly changing environments. CSOs felt somewhat prepared, and there were discrepancies in strategy updates, possibly due to resource constraints or inadequate capacity. CSOs' approaches to addressing capacity gaps varied, with some focusing on internal capacity building and others on external partnerships and funding. Coalitions focused on human rights and gender equality faced challenges, including lack of trust, inadequate funding, poor coordination, and political pressure. Strengthening leadership, securing stable funding, and fostering better coordination are crucial for improving coalition effectiveness in Malawi.

1. **Location –** Lilongwe, Malawi
2. **Procedure –** Open Tender
3. **Scope of the Tender**

One of the main challenges Civil Society Actors (CSAs) face when responding to emerging threats or sudden opportunities is the limited availability of sustainable, flexible funding beyond narrow project deliverables. Many CSAs operate within a context of financial scarcity and limited organizational sustainability. To address this, the project will provide flexible resources alongside organizational strengthening and external networking support, enhancing CSAs' strategic capacity to act swiftly — either to capitalize on opportunities or to mobilize broad-based support in response to attacks on civic space.

The CDA Project supports initiatives that protect, expand, and promote open and inclusive civic space and human rights. In line with this mission, the **Sustainable Action Fund (SAF)** is established to provide targeted financial and technical support for community-driven and civil society-led initiatives that demonstrate sustainability, innovation, and impact in defending civic space. One CSO will be supported under this grant with a maximum budget of **EUR 80,000 per year**.

**7.1 Purpose of the Sustainable Action Fund**

The SAF aims to:

* Support initiatives that enhance civic space and resilience.
* Promote sustainable practices that reinforce democratic governance and human rights
* Provide flexible funding for time-sensitive or emerging civic issues.
* Strengthening the organizational capacity of local civil society organizations (CSOs).
  1. **Scope of the Fund**

The SAF will support projects in the following thematic areas:

* Civic engagement and public participation
* Human rights and freedom of expression
* Digital rights and online civic space protection
* Gender equality and inclusion within civic spaces
  1. **The Specifications**

Specifically, we are looking for organizations that meet the following criteria:

* Registered and based in **Malawi**, working either at the local, regional, or national level
* Proven track record in playing roles as facilitator/convener for civil society actors linking and learning
* Proven track record in defending human rights and civic space, particularly the rights of marginalized rights holders
* Adequate operational and financial management experience
* Clean human rights record, with no involvement in sexual violence
* Strong commitment to intersectionality, demonstrated through their work and principles
* Led by, or closely collaborating with, youth, women, local/traditional/indigenous, diverse groups, and (if applicable) persons with disabilities
* Willing to challenge the status quo of Malawi’s civic space and collaborate with other stakeholders to connect, defend, and act to protect and expand civic space

Tenders are invited and should be sent to [proposals.hubsaf@hivos.org](mailto:proposals.hubsaf@hivos.org) with the subject “Sustainable Action Fund” in the subject line by 3rd July, 2025, 1600hrs Malawi time.

Submissions should meet ALL requirements, and tenderer submitted for selected parts of the works only or which is incomplete will not be considered.

1. **Tender Validity and Format**

Submissions must be received at by 3rd July 2025, 1600hrs after which time the Tender Committee will meet to deliberate on received bids. Tenders must be emailed to [proposals.hubsaf@hivos.org](mailto:proposals.hubsaf@hivos.org)

1. **Table of details**

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| **Document** | **Rationale** | **Type of information** |
| **Completed “Tenderer’s Declaration” document** | The Tenderer signed to show that they have fully understood and accepted the tender document | See Annex A |
| **Budget**  **(in EURO)** | A budget aligned with the proposed deliverables | A detailed budget of all the key items needed to deliver the exercise |
| **Proposal** | A proposal less than 10 pages (excluding annexes). This will be scored or assessed as per the guidelines in table 14 below on evaluation | A narrative proposal less than 30 pages (excluding annexes).  This will be scored or assessed as per the guidelines in table 14 below on evaluation  The submission should be guided by the following:   * Clear Aim and Objectives: A well-defined purpose and set of objectives. * Context Analysis: A thorough examination of the What, When, Who, Where, why, and How (5W1H), demonstrating a deep understanding of the context in which the organization operates. * Holistic Approach: A comprehensive perspective on the interconnectedness of civic spaces (digital and non-digital), recognizing not only vibrant civic activities but also strong anti-military/militarization attitudes; not only the presence of dissent but the absence of fear in expressing it; not only the freedom to make decisions but the capacity to make informed decisions; not only confidence in expressing one’s own voice but solidarity in amplifying the voices of others; and not only openness in physical and digital spaces but also their interconnections, where resistance in one space supports resistance in the other. * Rights Holder Representation: Demonstrated commitment to involving, representing, and amplifying the voices of vulnerable and marginalized groups (e.g., youth, women, local/traditional/indigenous communities, diverse groups, persons with disabilities). * Utilization of CDA Baseline Study Integrate the plan of how the gaps on digital security will be used as knowledge products, learning materials, and tools for collaboration, advocacy, and campaigns. * Innovation: The degree to which the proposal proposes innovative, accessible, relevant, and user-friendly approaches * Intersectional Approach: A clear integration of intersectional (examining the different levels of powers and vulnerabilities) considerations throughout the proposed activities and outputs. |
| **Contact details of three valid referees.** | Hivos can be assured on competency of Tenderer through contacting the Referees. | Type of contract, period of performance, company name, contact name, telephone number, e-mail. |
| **Tax Clearance certificate, Reference letter from previous assignments** | The Tenderer is legally registered and financially sound with valid tax certificates | Certified copies of required company documents and valid tax certificate |

1. **Tender Clarifications**

Should any tenderer have questions to ask or need any clarification, they should refer them in writing (which will be deemed to be by, e-mail to [proposals.hubsaf@hivos.org](mailto:proposals.hubsaf@hivos.org) not later than Wednesday 16th June 2025). Questions submitted will be issued, together with answers, through the platform which the call was published. The questions and answers as issued will give no indication of which tenderer/s asked the questions.

If for any reason during the call period it becomes necessary to vary the Call Documents, an Addendum will be issued to all prospective partners

Note that:

* Hivos may request further information from tenderers after submission of their Expression of Interest. Any additional information must be provided within five working days.
* Hivos reserves the right to award one or more tenderers for each of the sections.
* The onus is on the tenderer to ensure that their submission is complete and meets Hivos’ requirements. Failure to comply may lead to the submission being rejected without any reason being given. Therefore, please ensure that you read this document carefully and answer all questions in full.

1. **Participation**

* This is a closed tender, Hivos invites proposals from organizations that are legally registered/established in their state of origin and are entitled to perform the obligations of such contracts or engagements.
* To be eligible for participation in this tender procedure, tenderers must prove to the satisfaction of Hivos that they comply with the necessary legal, technical and financial requirements and have the ability to carry out the contract effectively.
* Any attempt by the tenderer to obtain confidential information, enter into unlawful agreements with competitors or influence the evaluation committee of Hivos during the process of examining, clarifying, evaluating and comparing tenders will lead to one or more of the following; disqualification in this tender, rejection of its offer(s)/bid, or legal consequences, or debarred from future tenders/procurements where applicable.
* Tenderers must at all times act loyally and impartially in accordance with the code of conduct of their profession. They must refrain from making public statements about the project or services without Hivos’ prior written approval. They may not commit Hivos in any way without prior written consent.
* tenderers and their staff are obliged to maintain professional secrecy; all reports, documents and information provided by Hivos are confidential and should be treated as such.

1. **Evaluation and selection criteria**

Hivos, at its sole discretion, will select the winners of this tender. In order to award the tender Hivos shall consider/perform the following evaluation and selection processes.

* Administrative compliance checks to ensure that all requested information has been submitted.
* Further evaluation shall be done based on economic and financial capacity, professional capacity and other ancillary requirements included in the tender documents.
* Price, the best value for money which is a combination of quality/price.

The table below summarizes how the scoring will be made:

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| --- | --- |
| Quality of the proposal Demonstrating a strong understanding of the analytical /contextual /logistical issues relevant for a study of this type and the objectives of the baseline study | 40% |
| Quality of the team Relevant expertise, experience, understanding of the issues, and ability to collaborate productively in an international setting | 25% |
| At least two sample reports from previous assignments | 10% |
| Budget, compliance, and references Cost and value for money | 25% |

1. **Language of the procedure**

* All written communications for this tender procedure and contract must be in English.

1. **Disclaimer**

* Hivos reserves the right to alter the date of tender evaluation process stated above and the awarding of contract.
* Hivos reserves the right to alter tender specifications and quantities.
* Hivos reserves the right to cancel this tender process at any time and not to award any contract.
* Hivos reserves the right not to enter into or award a contract as a result of this invitation to tender.
* Hivos shall consider value for money (VFM) and as such does not bind itself to accept the lowest or any tender.
* Hivos shall not be liable in respect of any costs incurred by the Tenderer in the preparation of the offer nor any associated work effort, including the production of presentation materials, brochures, product specifications or manuals for evaluation.