

NGOs, POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE IN UGANDA: A DICEY RELATIONSHIP

By Maria Nassali

ABSTRACT

This article interrogates the NGO / State relationship using a human rights framework, emphasizing the point that the right to freedom of association is inherent and necessary for improving the welfare of society and furthering democracy. However, in Uganda the law is geared much more towards the control of NGOs' political actions than it is directed to facilitating their independent space for effective oversight. Government essentially views NGOs as inputs in its development agenda. The article makes a case for NGOs' political consciousness because the protection of human rights serve to constrain the abuse of power. NGOs complement government by expanding pluralism and diversifying opinions as well as enabling citizens to participate in decisions that affect their lives and to hold it accountable in the struggle for societal transformation. Ultimately, the fate of NGOs depends on the coherence of their voice in defending their own rights through self-regulation, to circumvent undue erosion of NGO autonomy by the State.