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An Evaluation of the Contribution of National Non-Governmental Organisations' Networks to Strengthening the Non-Governmental Organisations' Sector in Uganda: A Case Study of Forum for Education Non-Governmental Organisations in Uganda.

This study is an evaluation of the contribution of National Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Networks to strengthening the NGO sector in Uganda. It focuses on the case study of Forum for Education NGOs in Uganda (FENU), a national NGO network on education. NGOs have for long been widely recognised as key players in development. To further strengthen their role, NGO networks have recently emerged and continue to become known at various levels. For example by 2002, there were 20,000 international NGO networks around the world (Liebler and Ferri, 2004). In 2003, 72% of NGOs in Uganda belonged to a network, and over 100 networks were in existence (Barr, 2003). This growing trend of networks of NGOs in the development trajectory poses questions on their true relevance and significance. This study is an evaluation of the contribution of national NGO Networks to strengthening the NGO sector in Uganda. It seeks to establish the contribution of networks, examine the extent of this contribution to strengthening the NGO sector, as well as recommend best ways to enhance this contribution. The study adopted both qualitative and quantitative methodology with a case study design. Whereas the FENU network has a national coverage, Kampala district was selected as the area of study. Both random and non random sampling techniques were used to select a sample of 50 respondents. The respondents came from 29 FENU member NGOs, FENU Secretariat, NGO Board and Ministry of Education and Sports. Data collection methods included key informant interviews, questionnaires and document reviews. The data collected was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and excel and was used to present the findings.

Study findings show that networks contribute most to knowledge and information sharing. Other contributions include coordination, advocacy and capacity building of members. This network contribution results in strengthening the members' ability to influence policy processes, increase their credibility, and to a less extent improve service delivery and cost effectiveness. Networks play a key role in linking the NGO sector to the government, as well as enable NGOs to actively participate in national development and policy processes. The contribution of networks also largely aims at strengthening their member NGOs to provide a better service to their target beneficiaries, rather than direct service provision. Within networks, thematic working groups enable more active collaboration among like-minded NGOs for greater networking benefits. 34

The study recommends that networks should be clearly recognised in policy frameworks as a distinct actor within the NGO sector; that national networks work towards aligning the work of NGOs with national development priorities and plans; that networks consolidate the contribution of NGOs to the relevant sector; that networks invest in research on pertinent sector issues to inform practice and policy processes.

Key Words: National, Non-Governmental Organisations, Networks, Education,