

## **RISING VOICES, STRONGER FRONTLINES: THRDC's**

### **JOURNEY OF IMPACT – JAN TO JUNE 2025**



**Dear Partners, Friends, and Fellow Human Rights Defenders,**

As we reflect on the first half of 2025, I find myself inspired by the progress we've made and energized by the challenges we continue to confront with resilience and resolve. The journey of defending human rights in Tanzania is not easy. It requires more than just courage. It demands strategy, solidarity, and consistency. I am proud to say that THRDC has demonstrated all these qualities in abundance over the past six months.

This year began with an intensified push to strengthen civic space and legal protections for Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) across the country. We have made significant strides in bridging the gap between civil society and government institutions. One of our proudest moments was the presentation of the draft Model National Policy for the Protection of HRDs to the Ministry of Constitutional and Legal Affairs. This marks a historic step toward formal recognition of HRDs and sets the stage for a future where defending rights is no longer a risk but a respected role in our democracy.

At the same time, we have not forgotten the grassroots. Through the Mama Samia Legal Aid Campaign and the grassroots HRD training in Dodoma, we have reached those who often work without resources or recognition. Our goal is not only to support them but to ensure their work is seen, heard, and protected.

We have also navigated significant external pressures, such as the suspension of U.S. development assistance and increased scrutiny of civil society tax obligations. Rather than be shaken, we responded boldly. We led evidence-based advocacy to influence national tax policy and presented findings from a national survey on donor funding suspension during CSO Week 2025.

This period also marked a time of growth for our organization. We have welcomed new staff into our team bright, committed professionals who are already making meaningful contributions. Their arrival reflects our continued institutional strengthening and readiness to meet the growing demand for protection, coordination, and advocacy across all zones of the country.

I must take a moment to sincerely thank our members, development partners, government institutions, and fellow defenders. Your unwavering support and engagement continue to fuel our mission. The road ahead is still long. We are heading into a crucial electoral period, where civic space and freedoms are often most vulnerable. We are also entering a time when the localization agenda must shift from conversation to action.

Enjoy our first half of 2025 with us through this newsletter.

**Sincerely,**

**Adv. Onesmo Olengurumwa**  
**National Coordinator**



## Forging a National Policy for HRD Protection

One of the most groundbreaking achievements of this year has been THRDC's leadership in advocating for a national framework to protect Human Rights Defenders. On April 22, 2025, in Dodoma, the Coalition had a high-level Strategic Policy Dialogue in collaboration with the Ministry of Constitutional and Legal Affairs (MoCLA), CHRAGG, and key civil society actors.

The purpose of the dialogue was to present and refine the Model National Policy for the Protection of HRDs, which had been developed through consultations with legal experts, defenders, and international best practices. The Ministry officially received the draft policy, a monumental step that paves the way for legal recognition and institutional protection for HRDs in Tanzania.

This achievement symbolizes a growing recognition of HRDs as critical players in governance and justice. It also opened a door for institutional collaboration between government and civil society, laying a solid foundation for follow-up actions such as a benchmarking study tour and implementation planning.



*Group photo of the Secretariat of the MoCLA together with the THRDC team, a representative from CHRAGG, and ISHR after their meeting in Dodoma.*



## **Defending Civic Space Through Fiscal Justice**

THRDC played a critical role this year in advocating tax justice for NGOs. Civil society organizations across the country have been struggling under the weight of outdated or unclear taxation policies. In response, THRDC led high-level discussions with the TRA Commissioner General and successfully presented civil society concerns to the Presidential Tax Reform Committee.

Our intervention resulted in the formal inclusion of CSOs in national tax dialogue which was the first in the sector's history. The TRA opened space for NGOs to present tax-related grievances and explore cancellation of dormant liabilities. This is a landmark achievement in civil society fiscal advocacy, and one that could drastically improve the operational freedom of NGOs across the country.

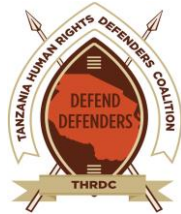


*Group Photo of the TRA Commissioner, Chairperson of the NGO's Coordination Board, NGO Registrar, NaCoNGO Chairperson, THRDC Management Team, and TRA team after a strategic meeting regarding Taxation challenges facing NGOs in Tanzania.*

## **Empowering HRDs at the Grassroots**

In May, THRDC brought together community-based human rights defenders from across the country for two - day intensive training in Arusha. The focus was on building knowledge in proper tools for monitoring human rights cases, documentation of human rights cases and reporting skills for national, regional and





even international mechanisms as human rights defenders. These sessions, grounded in practical scenarios, equipped participants with essential tools to operate safely and more effectively.

For many grassroots HRDs, this training was life-changing. Beyond knowledge, it gave them solidarity knowing that they are not alone in their fight for justice. By building capacity at the community level, THRDC continues to strengthen the frontlines of human rights defense in Tanzania.

### **Justice at the Grassroots: Mama Samia Legal Aid Campaign**

THRDC played a leading role in the Mama Samia Legal Aid Campaign during the first half of the year. In partnership with the Ministry of Constitutional and Legal Affairs and 11 member organizations, the campaign was carried out in Arusha, Tanga, and Dar es Salaam, reaching over 200 people with legal services.

Cases handled included wrongful terminations, land conflicts, GBV-related claims, and pension complaints. The campaign proved that when civil society and government collaborate, access to justice becomes more tangible. THRDC also used this opportunity to collect stories and evidence that will inform future reforms on justice accessibility and legal awareness.

### **Standing Strong Amid Aid Suspension: THRDC Leads Sector Response**

When the U.S. government announced funding suspensions early in 2025, many CSOs found themselves in crisis. THRDC swiftly initiated a nationwide survey to assess the impact of the aid cut and gather data for evidence-based advocacy.

During CSO Week 2025, THRDC presented the report findings in a powerful session that brought together development partners, CSOs, and government officials. The session triggered national conversations on donor dependency, localization, and financial resilience. As a result, more organizations have started exploring domestic resource mobilization and collaborative partnerships to weather the funding storm.

THRDC's proactive leadership during this moment showed that the Coalition is not only defending civic space but actively shaping its future.



### **THRDC at CSO Week 2025: Pathway To Progress**

From June 2–6, THRDC was a key player in CSO Week 2025, Tanzania’s largest civil society convening, held in Arusha. With over 800 attendees including government representatives, development partners, activists, and the media, CSO Week provided a vibrant platform for dialogue, learning, and solidarity.

THRDC co-hosted two high-level sessions: one focused on the impact of U.S. aid suspension on Tanzanian CSOs, and another on the importance of localization and ownership of the development agenda. The Coalition also showcased its Watetezi TV platform, stories from grassroots HRDs, and its recent advocacy efforts on tax reforms and legal aid.

By the end of the week, THRDC had not only shared its work but shaped the national conversation around civic resilience, funding justice, and the future of human rights defense. Our participation confirmed our status as a convener and thought leader in the civil society landscape.



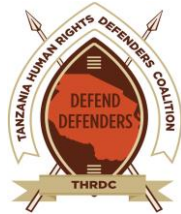
#### STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS



### Honoring Children's Rights: Day of the African Child 2025

On June 17, 2025, THRDC joined forces with its member Tanzania Child Rights Forum (TCRF), government representatives, and community organizations to commemorate the Day of the African Child at the Institute of Social Work in Dar es Salaam.





The event, officiated by Hon. Dr. Dorothy Gwajima, Minister for Community Development, Gender, Women, and Special Groups, centered on the theme: "Haki za Mtoto: Tulipotoka, Tulipo na Tunapokwenda". The discussions focused on progress made in child rights protection, persistent challenges such as violence and exploitation, and the need for increased government budget allocation toward child welfare services.

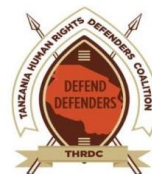
THRDC used this moment to amplify the voices of child rights defenders and showcase its contributions to community awareness campaigns like "Mtoto Vunja Ukimya". The event strengthened multi-stakeholder collaboration and reinforced our commitment to defending the rights of the youngest members of society.





**WELCOMING NEW ENERGY TO THE THRDC TEAM;** It's a new season of growth at THRDC and we're thrilled to welcome three vibrant professionals to our team:

## WELCOME TO THE TEAM



**HALIMA SONDA**  
Director of Programs

Please join us in warmly welcoming Halima Sonda as our new Director of Programs!

Halima is a highly accomplished human rights lawyer and social justice advocate with extensive experience across East and Southern Africa. Her work spans counter-trafficking, child protection, and democratization, having led impactful initiatives with leading organizations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the International Development Law Organization (IDLO), and multiple UN agencies.

She has played a pivotal role in strengthening legal frameworks to combat human trafficking and organized crime while working closely with governments, civil society, and regional bodies to promote systemic change. Halima holds an LL.M. in Human Rights and Democratization in Africa from the University of Pretoria and brings both strategic vision and a deep passion for justice to her new role.

We are excited for the leadership, insight, and dedication she brings to our mission. Welcome aboard, Halima!





## WELCOME TO THE TEAM






**FORTUNATUS A. KATOZI**  
Monitoring & Evaluation  
(M&E) Officer

We are thrilled to welcome Fortunatus Alberto Katozi to our team as the new Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) Officer and a valued member of our management team!

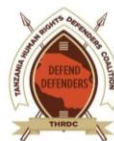
With over a decade of experience across diverse development sectors — from human rights and education to health and natural resource management — Mr. Fortunatus brings a wealth of knowledge and a proven track record in designing and managing results-driven programs.

His expertise in MERLA systems, strategic partnerships, and donor engagement will be instrumental in advancing our mission and deepening our impact.

Welcome aboard, Fortunatus, we're very excited to have you on this journey with us!

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## WELCOME TO THE TEAM



**HILLALY BALONZI**  
Members Affairs  
and  
Public Engagement Officer

We're excited to welcome Hillaly Balonzi as our new Members Affairs and Public Engagement Officer!

Hillaly brings over five years of experience in program coordination, advocacy, and partnership development, along with a strong legal and development background. His work with organizations like Care International, Global Platform, and Forum CC reflects his commitment to inclusive, sustainable development.

We look forward to the impact he'll make in strengthening member relations and public engagement. Welcome, Hillaly!

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✚ **What's Next?:** As we enter the second half of the year, our focus is sharper than ever. Upcoming key activities include:

- i. Capacity Building for Child Rights Defenders and Civil Society Organizations on Access to Regional and International Human Rights Mechanisms.
- ii. A stakeholders' workshop on the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) implementation, focusing on social and child rights thematic area.
- iii. Third Review of the Impact Report on USAID Suspension to CSOs.
- iv. Capacity Building for Civil Society Organizations and Bar Association in Tanzania: Enhancing Advocacy and Engagement Skills.
- v. National Dialogue on Policy and Legal Reforms: Enhancing Collaboration Between Government and Civil Society Organizations
- vi. Development of Coordination Framework for Identification and Implementation of Projects by Non-Governmental Organizations in Tanzania.
- vii. To continue Defending Human Rights.

Thank you for reading, sharing, and standing with us. Defending Human Rights is Not a Crime.