



# Executive Summary

## Mapping Study of Civil Society Organisations in Ethiopia (2021)

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# Executive Summary

## Introduction

In May 2021, the European Union Civil Society Fund III (EU-CSF III), the multi-donor Civil Society Support Programme (CSSP2), and the Authority for Civil Society Organisations (ACSO) launched a study for the Mapping of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Ethiopia. The findings from the study are expected to provide updated, multi-dimensional information on CSOs in Ethiopia operating at national and regional levels to assist in subsequent programming by the three partners and other stakeholders.

A team of three professionals was commissioned to undertake the study covering the entire country. Experts from ACSO also joined in the field work for the data collection. The team reached a total of 324 (65 females) informants and 262 institutions (from CSOs, government, and donors) through interviews and focus group discussions. Government coordination offices and sector bureaus and ministries, regional networks of CSOs, faith-based CSOs, international CSOs, federally registered local CSOs, and donors (development partners) have been reached. The findings along the lines of investigation that were outlined in the Terms of Reference (ToR) are presented in this document. In addition to the main report, self-standing reports on the nine regional administrations and the two city administrations are included in the report.

The timing of the study presented some challenges to its smooth implementation. The conflict in Tigray and insecurity in the western part of the country affected data collection. Apart from the limited information from secondary sources, the team could not get access to Tigray during the field data collection. The COVID-19 pandemic also had a negative impact on the field data collection. Finally, the national elections that took place in June 2021 caused a delay in conducting the study as the government offices and some CSOs were involved in the election process.

## Context

The structure and operation of CSOs are mainly shaped by the political, economic, and social contexts of the country. Accordingly, this study assessed the context under which CSOs have been operating in the past five years. Despite the remarkable economic progress made in the past two decades and Ethiopia's status as one of the fastest-growing economies in the world, there are still a range of development challenges the nation needs to address. The country lags far behind according to the measure of most key development indicators such as Global Ranking for Governance, Global Gender Gap Index, Political Accountability, World Justice Project Rule of Law index, Government Integrity, and Government Effectiveness. Despite improvements in the areas of freedom of association and expression in the past three years, the country still remains in the "NOT FREE" classification according to the Political Rights and Civil Liberties index and scored low in Press Freedom.

According to the annual CSO Sustainability Index, CSOs in Ethiopia are still under the category of "Sustainability Impeded". Compared to other Sub-Saharan African Countries, the operational environment for the CSOs sector in Ethiopia needs to be improved in several areas which may include organizational capacity, financial viability, advocacy capacity, sectoral infrastructure, and relationship with the media and the private sectors. The government adopted a new CSO Proclamation in 2019 which is believed to be advanced and progressive by international standards despite a few areas of concern. In addition, the Agency for Civil Society Organizations (now Authority for Civil Society Organisations) has adopted different subsidiary directives which are important to implement the Proclamation. Regional states are also in the process of adopting their

own CSO laws which are expected to be in line with the federal CSO Proclamation. Gambella and Tigray regions have already put in place their regional laws and structures for the coordination of the operation of CSOs. With the objectives of ensuring collaboration, coordination, partnership, and experience sharing amongst regions vis-à-vis the federal ACSO in the governance of CSOs, a Federal-Regional Stakeholders' Forum has been established.

## Type and number of CSOs

The current study reveals that there are changes in the number of CSOs registered at the federal level. While there were 3,077 CSOs in 2014, the number decreased in 2019 to 1,813 as 1,264 organisations terminated operation for various reasons, the key factor being the impact of the former CSO law. From 2019 to June 2021, a total of 1,438 entirely new CSOs acquired registration from ACSO, hence the total number of registered CSOs by June 2021 was 3,252. It is interesting to note that about 45 percent of the federally-registered CSOs were founded over the last two and half years under the new legal framework. According to the most recent information from ACSO, more than 300 new CSOs have acquired registration certificates since June 2021 and hence the numbers are increasing at a fast pace.

Of the total 3,252 federally-registered CSOs, 84% are local CSOs, 14% international CSOs and the balance is constituted by the 50 consortiums of CSOs. The mix of CSOs registered since 2019 shows that a growing number of governance- and democracy-focused CSOs, both local and international, have joined the civil society community. In addition, a markedly significant number of Faith-Based Development Organisations have come into the picture. The ethnic and locality-based associations largely remain as they were in 2014 with the exception of the emergence of more organisations following administrative restructuring in the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region (SNNPR). Related to these are the new 'Intellectual Associations' formed along ethnic lines. The study identified nine such associations. It also identified 229 women and primarily women-focused CSOs, and from the 1,813 re-registered CSOs by ACSO, about 54 are associations of persons with disabilities (PWDs).

All the regions and the two city administrations have arrangements for the registration of local CSOs within their respective jurisdictions. Despite the undeveloped systems for screening, registration, and follow-up, the arrangements have provided expanded opportunities for citizens to organize and promote objectives. In the last five years, about 936 region-based local CSOs have received such registrations.

Community-based organizations (CBOs) play important role in addressing communal issues and mobilizing the community. In the Ethiopian context, CBOs may include Idir, Iqub, Debo, Wonfel, Mahber, women's self-help groups, village development committees, water users' associations, grazing societies, cereal bank groups, etc. However, there is no specific law that governs these associations. During the 2015-2018 political unrest, informal youth movements emerged as key political actors in the various regions, mainly in Amhara (Fano), Guraghe (Zerma), Oromia (Kero), and Sidama (Ejieta). Except for the Fano of Amhara region, others are currently less active and reportedly integrated into the regional mass-based youth associations.

## Projects and other activities implemented by CSOs

With regard to projects, the findings confirmed that Oromia has the largest numbers of CSO projects followed by SNNPR while Harari and Afar have relatively fewer numbers of projects. Compared to those identified by the 2014 mapping study, the number of projects has declined in all regions except in Tigray, Gambella, Benishangul-Gumuz Region (BGR), SNNPR and Oromia. In Tigray, the increase is about 350%, while BGR experienced an increase of around 100 percent. Somali and Harari regions experienced over 50% declines in the numbers of projects compared to the 2014 findings.

The study found that some increases in the numbers of project holder CSOs happened only in four regions (Gambella, Tigray, BGR, and Oromia) while the rest experienced a decrease in numbers of varying scales compared to the findings of the 2014 study. In SNNPR, the establishment of Sidama as a separate regional state is a key and justifiable reason for the decline of numbers of project holder CSOs. It also appears that many of the newly formed CSOs are not engaged in implementing actions based on agreements with the regional government regulatory bureaus. Where there are increases in numbers of projects compared to 2014, this could be largely due to an increase in the number of projects per CSO. The significant decline in the number of project holders in Addis Ababa may be attributed to the dissolution of local organizations due to the shortage of funds as a consequence of the former CSO law, although this assumption deserves further investigation.

Regarding budgets committed, in the 2014 report, the total funds pledged by CSOs for 2,604 projects, excluding Dire Dawa, amounted to ETB 35.76 billion. On the other hand, the current exercise identified a total of 2,885 projects for which CSOs committed ETB 78.87 billion. There was a modest increase in the number of projects (15%) between 2014 and 2021. The 121% increase in the total committed budget can be explained in relation to the increase in the average unit project budget. In 2014, it was about ETB 14 million while the current figure is ETB 19 million per project. It is only Somali and Harari regions that experienced a decline in total committed budget. This could be partly due to the presence of some CSOs operating in the region without entering agreements with the regional bodies.

The 2014 NSAs Mapping reported the approximate value of ongoing Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) projects in US\$ at 1.788 billion. By applying the average exchange rate of 28.71 for the period from 2015 to 2021, the approximate value of CSO projects for the current period comes to approximately US\$ 2.75 billion. The real value would be about US\$ 2.37 billion and that represents some increase compared to the 2014 figures. Of the ETB 78.8 billion committed, about 45 percent was from international CSOs, 25 percent from FBDs, and 28% from local CSOs.

Aggregation of the sectoral and thematic focuses of the CSO projects shows that the human development sectors of child development, education, health, food security, ecology, entrepreneurship, and economic empowerment for youth remain strategic focus areas aligned to the 10-year development plan of the country. In addition, though not commensurate with the demand of the context, it is encouraging that a growing number of CSOs are undertaking local actions for promoting governance at large. On the other hand, it appears, due to the national context, a growing number of CSOs are reverting to the implementation of emergency and social welfare support projects for the destitute, the displaced, and migrants. Much of the emergency operators are International Civil Society Organizations (ICSOs) and, perhaps, there is a need to increase the participation of local CSOs because of their relatively better knowledge of the context.

## Funding Landscape

The great majority of CSO funding is coming from foreign aid while domestic resources are underdeveloped. The EU-CSF, the CSSP, the Ethiopian Social Accountability Programme (ESAP), the United Nations (UN) Country Offices, and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) remain the major sources of funding for local CSOs. In addition, Islamic aid has emerged as a new source in the funding landscape with financial aid to local CSOs coming from organizations such as Kuwait Horizons Charity Societies, IHH charity (Turkey), Qatar Charity International, and Sharjah International.

CSOs lack the capacity or interest to diversify their funding base through domestic resources despite the currently enabling regulatory framework. The funding relationship between CSOs and the private sector is based on the philanthropic conception which is yet to grow to a strategic partnership, and the idea and practice of corporate social responsibility needs to be promoted and strengthened. Despite remarkable improvements in some regions, funding support from government to CSOs is almost absent and lacks institutionalization where it exists. The implementation of joint projects between CSOs and the government also needs to be improved and the Urban Productive Safety Net Programme can be taken as a good exemplary initiative in this regard. Other regions may consider the policy of the Addis Ababa City Administration in allocation of land to CSOs. The legal gap in areas of social enterprise is another challenge that is affecting the establishment of businesses with social objectives and supporting the work of CSOs.

## Collaboration, Networking, and Partnerships within the Sector

Formal civil society networks are a relatively recent phenomenon in Ethiopia. Only a few CSO networks existed before the start of the 21st Century. In fact, until the enactment of the Charities and Societies Proclamation (CSP) in 2009, there was no clear legal framework for regulating the formation and operation of civil society networks. Nonetheless, poverty reduction processes and donor programmes facilitated the formation of a large number of CSO networks in the early 2000s. As per the 2014 CSO mapping study, there were 53 registered NGO/CSO networks. The ACSO registry data shows that there are 50 CSO networks registered with the Agency as of June 2021. Almost a quarter (24%) of the existing civil society networks registered at the federal level has been established since 2019 under the new CSO law.

Most of the existing civil society networks in Ethiopia are thematic in focus. While sector-wide regional CSO networks are also emerging, they are still weak. Most networks focus on building the capacity of members. Although some networks were able to work on and influence some policies, the policy advocacy engagement of networks, particularly convening the membership for collective actions on high-level strategic issues, is not strong. Most networks have weak institutional capacity, including a weak governance structure and a lack of vibrant or transformative leadership. There are also cases of conflict of interest and competition between a network and its members. Apart from formal networks, there are several project or issue-based informal or ad hoc partnerships or forums between CSOs.

The collaboration and partnership between international and local CSOs have been very weak in the last decade partly due to the effects of the 2009 ChS Proclamation. Although the new CSO law encourages international CSOs to work in partnership with and strengthen the capacity of local organizations, collaborations and partnerships between international and local CSOs are still recovering. The participation of Ethiopian CSOs in regional and global CSO networks and platforms is also very limited. The Ethiopian Civil Society Organisations' Council (ECSOC) is expected to enhance collaboration within the sector.

## Collaboration and Dialogue with Government and other Key Development Partners

Collaboration and dialogue between CSOs and the government have been increasing in the last few years, mainly due to the improving political will and policy shift on the part of the government, from a policy that was driven by suspicion and control to a constructive and collaborative engagement. There is also an increasing trend of establishing more coordination and dialogue platforms and structures, although there is a need to strengthen and sustain this. The dialogue structures include the GO-CSO Forums both at federal and regional levels; thematic coordination forums between sector agencies and CSOs; and including representatives of CSOs in government institutions and structures. However, a constructive engagement and dialogue between CSOs and lower government levels are not strong yet and the policy shift is not adequately rolled out to lower levels. Moreover, the CSO sector lacks the experience and expertise to engage in effective dialogue with the government and participate in policy making processes.

The CSO Sub-Group under the Development Assistance Group (DAG), now referred to as the Development Partners' Group, had been actively working with CSOs on enabling the environment for the sector. However, this structure has not been active in recent years. The practice of involving CSO representatives in their governing structures by some donor programmes contributes to promoting dialogue between CSOs and donors. There is also a practice of consulting CSOs in the process of designing donor strategies and programmes. However, the level of dialogue between CSOs and donor groups is inadequate. The CSO sector is undergoing significant changes and reforms in terms of type, number, and engagement. Donors' engagement with and support to the sector needs to be aligned with changing the CSO landscape.

Concerning dialogue between CSOs and the private sector, there are a few emerging collaborative engagements such as jointly organizing the NGO day events. However, collaborations and dialogues with the private sector and media are generally inadequate.

## Representation and Constituency Building

The civic agency or representation role of CSOs is central to their nature and existence. CSOs play this role through engaging in policy advocacy, promoting government accountability, and strengthening state-society relations or representing the voices of marginalized citizens. Within a restrictive and challenging political context, many CSOs in Ethiopia have been striving to influence policies with some level of success. However, the overall engagement and achievement of Ethiopian CSOs in policy advocacy, promoting government accountability, and strengthening state-society relations is limited. Major challenges affecting the representation and constituency building include the narrow civic and political space that has been prevalent in the country; the limited constituency base and legitimacy of CSOs, the lack of adequate commitment and capacity in the sector to effectively play its representation role, and the lack of strong collaboration and networking within the sector.

## Accountability, Transparency, and Self-regulation

At the organisational level, CSOs are accountable to registering and regulatory agencies, i.e., ACSO at the federal level and usually Attorney General's Offices (AGOs) at the regional level. Periodic reports and supportive supervision are the common tools used in exercising this accountability. Accountability of CSOs registered at the regional level to registering authorities is weak, mainly due to the lack of a clear and appropriate legal framework and lack of capacity (human resources, systems, tools, etc) in the regulatory authorities. At the project level, CSOs are in practice accountable to sector agencies and Bureaus of Finance and Economic Development (BoFED) through project agreement negotiations as well as mid and terminal evaluations.

Regarding CSOs' accountability and transparency to the public, there is some practice whereby CSOs attempt to engage communities and provide them with project information. However, CSO accountability and transparency to the public are not strong. For instance, publishing annual reports for public scrutiny is not a common practice. CSO internal accountability is usually affected by factors such as weak internal governance structures and inadequate commitment of board members.

The involvement of women in leadership positions including in the board of governance and as head of CSOs remains low compared to the number of CSOs operating in the country. The participation of women and people with disabilities in the administration and governance of CSOs should also be given due attention in the efforts to strengthen CSOs' leadership capacity.

Self-regulation within the CSO sector in Ethiopia is not well developed. The most notable CS self-regulation initiative in Ethiopia is the Code of Conduct for NGOs in Ethiopia, which came into force in March 1999 and was revised in 2005. Ten networks indicated that they have codes of conduct applicable to their respective member CSOs. Some CSOs, mainly international ones, also claim that they have their own codes of conduct. The ECSOC has recently endorsed a Code of Conduct for the sector; its effective implementation has yet to start.

## Opportunities and Strengths

The assessment identified opportunities that have implications on the effective operation of CSOs in Ethiopia. The current regulatory framework specifically and the political reform, in general, have been identified as key enabling factors supporting the operation of CSOs. The perception of government towards CSOs as partners in development has shown improvement, and the leadership of ACSO has been highly acclaimed by the representatives of CSOs in the implementation of the law. The revitalization of the GO-CSO forums at the regional level with the spirit of equal partnership and active participation of CSOs in setting agendas and leading the forums has created notable opportunities for collaborative engagement between government and CSOs. The establishment of the ECSOC with the mandate of representation and ensuring self-regulation is another critical milestone towards strengthening the CSO sector in Ethiopia. Increased activism from the youth demanding accountable government and the use of social media is also improving.

CSOs continued to play an important role in introducing new development approaches which are also taken up by the government. The capacity of CSOs to work with vulnerable groups and the provision of basic services such as health, education, livelihoods, and water is highly acknowledged by the government. In addition, CSOs make a noticeable contribution in mobilizing resources for the country.

## Challenges and Limitations

The previous CSP and the constrained relationship between CSOs and the government significantly affected the growth and diversity of the sector. Consequently, the majority of CSOs in Ethiopia are focusing on service provision despite the huge gap in democratic and inclusive governance which is key to sustainable development. The various emergencies such as internal conflicts, floods, locust infestation, refugees, and the COVID-19 pandemic posed a challenge and forced CSOs to focus on relief and service provision rather than on sustainable development activities. Often, projects are not community-driven and are dictated by donors' interests. CSOs' participation in national and regional development plans is poor and lacks institutionalization. CSOs also lack the capacity to engage government on national issues from a united position. Finally, the coordination among government institutions working with CSOs is found to be poor and needs to be strengthened.

Access to foreign funds especially for small local CSOs is a crucial challenge that is affecting their growth. Local CSOs should give due attention to domestic resources to become stable in their financial position and strengthen their accountability and legitimacy in the eyes of their constituencies. The issues of internal democracy, leadership succession, and professionalism remained the key challenges that are affecting the strength and effectiveness CSOs in Ethiopia. Most network CSOs are affected by identity crises as they largely fail to serve their members and work independently from their members. Working relationships between local and international CSOs in project implementation and transfer of technical knowledge need to be improved. ICSOs dedicated to strengthening local CSOs, as opposed to self-implementation are yet to come into the picture. In addition, the working relationship between CSOs and independent democratic institutions such as the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC), National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE), Ethiopian Institution of the Ombudsman, and the media, needs to be strengthened.

# Recommendations

## 1. Improve the legal and institutional framework for CSO regulation

It is recommended for ACSO and concerned regional bodies to improve the legal and institutional framework for CSO regulation. More specifically, it is recommended to:

- a. Develop subsidiary and regional CSO laws: ACSO and regional authorities need to develop, through adequate consultation with CSOs, subsidiary legislation, and regional CSO laws that are consistent with the 2019 CSO Proclamation.
- b. Strengthen the capacity of and coordination between government supervising bodies: ACSO, regional bureaus of finance and regional AGOs need to enhance their institutional capacity to effectively provide supportive supervision to CSOs.
- c. Establish/strengthen GO-CSO Forums: ACSO and the ECSOC need to manage and facilitate a structured and institutionalized national GO-CSO forum at the federal level, as well as institutionalising existing regional GO-CSO forums.

## 2. Improve development partner's policies and engagement with CSOs

- a. Strengthen dialogue forums between CSOs and development partners: Consider establishing a structured tripartite dialogue forum between development partners, the government and CSOs.
- b. Adopt innovative and flexible CSO funding policies: Since the majority of existing CSOs are new, it is important for development partners to adopt funding policies and approaches that can accommodate new and emerging CSOs.
- c. Strengthen the intermediaries' approach: Based on the experiences from CSF III, CSSP2, and ESAP III, donors should be encouraged to channel funds that can reach small and informal CSOs.
- d. Focus on providing capacity development and programme-based support to national CSOs: Considering the emerging CSO landscape, which is dominated by new CSOs, donor support should prioritize capacity development and programme-based support, as opposed to providing purely project implementation support.

## 3. Strengthen funding and sustainability of CSOs

- a. Develop a culture of philanthropy: In a bid to reduce the risk of dependency on foreign aid and enhance the relationship between CSOs and the community, CSOs should promote the development of community philanthropy.
- b. Advocate for social enterprise legal framework: CSOs should advocate for and the government also should consider the establishment of a legal framework that governs social enterprises.
- c. Strengthen CSOs' engagement in investment and Income Generating Activities (IGAs): CSOs should make deliberate and enhanced efforts to engage in income generation activities to minimize their dependence on foreign funding and ensure their sustainability.

## 4. Strengthen the data and knowledge management on the situation of CSOs in Ethiopia

- a. Strengthen data management in regulatory bodies: The data management system at ACSO and regional attorney general offices should be given priority.
- b. Consider producing a yearly national CSO index: ACSO, ECSOC, and development partners should consider developing a joint initiative to produce a yearly national CSO Index that assesses the state of CSOs in the country.

## 5. Strengthen Women-Led and Women's Rights CSOs

The CSOs' sector should play an exemplary role in bringing women to leadership positions, while the government and development partners should develop special initiatives to support the strengthening of

women-led and women's rights CSOs.

6. Strengthen networking and self-regulation within the sector

a. Strengthen the capacity of the ECSOC: For an effective representation and self-regulation system, the legally recognized CSOs' Council should be strengthened in all respect.

b. Enhance partnership between local and international CSOs: Considering Article 62(7) of the CSO Proclamation, systems and mechanisms should be put in place to encourage partnership between local and international CSOs.

7. Strengthen the representation and policy advocacy role of CSOs

a. Advocate for the adoption of the draft Civic Engagement Policy: To facilitate CSOs' representation role and ensure the participation of citizens in matters affecting their lives, including development processes, CSOs should advocate for, and the government should also consider the adoption of, the draft Civic Engagement Policy.

b. Adopt the rights-based approach (RBA) and enhance engagement on governance and rights issues: With the improved enabling environment, CSOs need to adopt RBAs and enhance their engagement on governance and rights issues.

c. Strengthen common voice and engagement on higher-level strategic issues: Networks should take the lead in mobilizing the common voice of CSOs on higher-level strategic issues.

d. Strengthen the commitment and capacity of the sector in policy research and advocacy: For effective engagement of CSOs in policy processes, the gaps in commitment and capacity on policy research and advocacy within the sector need to be addressed.

