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Introduction

Ethiopia has a long history of informal community-based organizations such as "idir" and "iqub" – self-help associations that function on a local level and provide mutual socioeconomic support to its members. Formal civil society, or groups with legal personality, is a relatively new phenomenon. Under the Ethiopian Empire administration from 1937 to 1974, civil society was slow to emerge. It was also highly limited from 1974 to 1991 under the administration of the Derg (a military junta). Modern civil society groups were founded as faith-based organizations in the 1930s, and welfare organizations such as the Red Cross began operating in Ethiopia in the 1950s. As a result of the 1973-74 and 1984-1985 famines, many more non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with a focus on relief and humanitarian services emerged. It was after the downfall of the Derg regime in 1991 that NGO numbers substantially increased.

In February 2009, the Government adopted the Proclamation to Provide for the Registration and Regulation of Charities and Societies (CSP), Ethiopia's first comprehensive law governing the registration and regulation of NGOs. Many evidences showed the 2009 law and its associated Directives violated international standards relating to the freedom of association.

However, a new 2019 CSO Proclamation, adopted under the new reform, created a more enabling legal environment for Civil Society. Based on this new proclamation, the CSOs' Council was established with the active role of the Forum. Moreover, CSO- code of conduct was developed and familiarized to stakeholders and new CSOs' directives were broadly familiarized by the Ethiopian Civil Society Forum (ECSF) in collaboration with key stakeholders.

Therefore, this newsletter is prepared to demonstrate all activities accomplished in the arena of CSOs' sector by ECSF since the preceding news later, which is available on the ECSF Website www.ecsf.et

Who is the ECSF?

The Ethiopian Civil Societies Forum (ECSF) is a non-partisan, impartial, Inclusive and voluntary national platform that aims to address the shared issues and difficulties faced by Ethiopia's Civil Societies Organizations (CSOS). A void in Ethiopia's CSO sector, including a lack of coordination, consortia, and networks, as well as the deteriorating relationship between CSOs and the Ethiopian government after the 2005 Election, were cited as reasons for the foundation of the ECSF. Documentation from the forum reveals that an informal national taskforce, presided over by PANE and held at CCRDA, was established in 2009 and that its members had discussions with the Prime Minister and the Parliament of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) about the deficiencies in the CSO sector. After the enormous work put forth by the National Taskforce comprising PANE, NEWA, PHE_EC and CCRDA through discussions with the Authority on developing a platform for a period of three years, the decision was made to prepare a Term of Reference, which later became a statute of the Forum subsequent to which it was established in May 2013. According to the forum's legislation, which invites seven executive members and fifteen members of its subcommittees, a total of twenty-two members of the leadership team were chosen as the General Assembly (GA). The General Assembly is the supreme organ of the Forum and meets once a year to make deliberations on policy issues and review achievement reports and the Governing Board is elected by the General Assembly from its members and convenes regularly to follow up the decisions passed by the General Assembly and give guidance on core issues the board members were appointed and selected from GA.

All Consortia/Networks registered with the Civil Society Authority are eligible to participate in the Forum for they become legitimate member, and any CSO without a Consortia/Network is required to be represented. The three membership types listed in this Forum's statute are Associate Members, Full Members, and Honorary Members. Any civil society group locally registered, international organizations, or governmental body may apply to become an associate member so long as they meet the requirements for membership as outlined in the Forum's statutes for rights and obligations. All coalitions/forums of Civil Societies and Networks for CSOs that are working in Ethiopia and are legitimately registered at all structural levels (Federal and Regional) are eligible for full membership. The forum's Board may grant honorary membership to both persons and institutions based on the forum's recommendations. The Forum's main goals were to create formal, non-statutory institutional arrangements that would allow CSOs to actively participate in coordinating a variety of initiatives meant to create a favorable environment for their effective participation and contribution to the nation's development endeavors; create an institutional platform to ensure effective administration, management, and representations of CSOs registered and operating in Ethiopia; and establish the groundwork for these associations.

Strategic Pillars of the Forum

Since its founding, the forum has been putting its five core strategic pillars into practice which was eloquently portrayed in the forum's previous strategic plan (2016-2020). Currently it has revised and approved a five-year Strategic Plan (2023-2027).

These Strategic Pillars are stated as follow:

- Theme 1. Research

- Theme 2. Policy Advocacy
- Theme 3. Membership Development and Service
- Theme 4. Institutional Capacity Development

The main roles and responsibilities of the Forum are outlined in Article 6 of its Statute, which mainly focuses on facilitating CSOs' cooperative engagements in the development of the systems and infrastructures required for their affairs as well as their substantive involvement in Ethiopia's development. In order to do this, the forum works closely with partners such as the Ethiopian government, bilateral agencies and private sectors.

Vision: To see effective, responsive and accountable governance in Ethiopia with active civil society participation by 2050.

Mission: To enhance constructive positive engagement and influence through research and advocacy for political development of the country.

Commendable Achievements of ECSF Summary

Since its establishment in 2013, the ECSF has registered commendable achievements that contribute towards the opening and expanding space for the Civil Society Organization to operate substantially.

- **Deepening the Institutionalization:**

The ECSF has continued to work on deepening the institutionalization that it began previously. The forum exerted unreserved effort for Better CSOs Space, and enabling environment for CSOs through institutional development of the CSOs sector. Example: (a) the establishment of the CSOs' Council to assure self-regulation, (b) Awareness Creation on the relevant Laws, Code of Conduct, safeguarding, and etc., to abide with principles, standards, and laws in the operation of the CSOs.

In partnership with Authority for Civil Society Organizations (ACSO), it has arranged ten sessions of familiarization training workshops for regional levels for CSOs and BOFED representatives, including Addis Ababa, on approved CSO Directives and CSO proclamation in the year 2022 alone.

Moreover, ECSF has positively influenced its members to engage in the National Agendas as priority area for the maximum benefit of the citizen. Regional consultation workshops were held on the role and mission of various regional actors, including regional CSO networks, in citizen state engagements, conflict resolution, peace building, and the approaching national conversation. It has also hosted regional advocacy workshops on the importance and level of participation of regional CSOs/their Networks in identifying and deciding on matters of interest, such as policy and government budget, and how legislation is formed, repealed, or changed. Furthermore, the Forum

has created artistic educational spots on peace advocacy and human rights, as well as youth volunteerism and peace projects, which have been disseminated on the Forum's and its partners' social media channels.

- **Strengthening the Networking and Engagement**

- i. Regional Network formation and capacity Building*

The Forum has begun developing new CSO regional networks operating in the Gambella and Hariri regional states, respectively. The objective was to create new ones and/or strengthen the weak CSO networks that already existed. In the Gambella region, the Forum organized regional seminars attended by regional government officials, local and international CSO representatives, in collaboration with Gambella Youth Association (GYA). The primary objectives of these seminars were to improve the regional Network's institutionalization processes and to increase membership, networking, and collaboration. As a result, until the end of the reporting period, 21 CSOs had joined the Network, with the majority of them submitting the necessary requirements for full membership. In the case of Harari, the Forum has arranged a regional consultation workshop with the participation of regional government officials and CSOs working in the region. During this workshop, a Task-Force (TF) was established to facilitate the entire processes of the establishment of the Network. Then the Task Force has shared experiences from Dire Dawa Civil Society Network and has begun the formation process at the moment

In addition, over the same time period, the Forum completed capacity building trainings for several bodies. The first one was the Authority's M&E manual and supportive supervision for experts from ACSO, regional delegated bureaus, and zonal NGO Desk specialists. Second, successful Board Development' training for members of the Board of Management of seven regional CSO networks. Third, ACSO Service Delivery Excellence for Sixteen ACSO Staff Members, with a focus on the Professional Association Desk (PAD) and five Professional Associations representatives were among those who were engaged on the capacity-building trainings.

- ii. Annual Regional Forum formation*

Another initiative was to establish a platform for regional CSOs to meet and learn from one another. To that aim, the Forum has organized two experience-sharing and learning workshops for CSO network leaders in order to foster networking and enagement. The experience sharing workshop allowed regional CSO networks to exchange their experiences and learn ways to promote active participation of CSOs in their particular regions in significant national agendas, policies, and law-making processes. It has also assisted them in grasping concepts on

CSOs' contribution to the effectiveness of the civil society sector in harmonization of efforts made by CSOs and government actors; and how to build relationship among Regional CSO Networks as well as with the ECSF. The Forum has also convened a high-level reinforcement consultation to strengthen the CSO Network in the southern region by identifying and approaching the emerging CSO Network.

iii. Partnerships with Government substantially improved

ECSF has done a lot in advancing the Partnerships with Government, in particular, ACSO for the better engagement and enabling of CSOs for better functioning Joint Plan and Action (deliberate) of ECSF and ACSO in the implementation of key projects (familiarization of CSOs Laws); and Go-CSOs Forum at Federal Level are some of best example. These lead to sense of collaboration with Government Organ increased with ACSO and Regional-Bureau of Finance], the positive and strong partnership created scaled-up in most regional CSOs and respective CSOs Desk [Bureau of Finance]. Moreover, capacity Development programs for regulatory bodies (ex ACSO: CD Trainings on New system development, etc.].

IV.Reforming the Forum and Re-positioning all ECSF Capacity building related Documents

The Forum has developed its' Second Five year Strategic Plan of the Forum developed for the year 2023-2027; revised its internal policy manuals and designed new website- that can fit with the current demands and development.

In general, the Forum has achieved a variety of results such as contributing to the institutionalization of CSE for better trust and confidence among engagement actors; promoting peace building through increased capacity of CSOs and their networks; and realizing the institutionalization of engagement within and among CSOs, government, media, and citizens in the process of enhancing trust and confidence among the actors. These results were also thought to be brought about by the realization of sub-results such as: increased capacity of CSOs and their networks for better Citizen State Engagement in the process of peace building and better trust and confidence among local engagement actors; increased capacity of regional government stakeholders and the institutional capacity of ACSO regional delegated bureaus for an improved service provision for CSOs/networks and platforms, Capacitated and networked CSOs initiated and strengthened collaboration and partnership among the civil societies, government and media.

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Major Achievements of ECSF in the past two years

In the Year 2021 and 2022 in particular, the Forum: (a) contributed towards deepening the institutionalization of citizen-state engagement; promote to have vibrant and dependable CSOs; (b) strengthened Regional CSOs Networks and Regulatory organs; (c) Improved the ability of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) engagement in the legal and judicial reforms process; and (d) Initiated and promoted Networks in the Citizen-State Engagement, active participation in Conflict Resolution Peace-building, and policy formation and implementation process in Ethiopia.

In the course of attaining the above high level outcome, the following major activities have been implemented; which include [but not limited to] the following.

1. ***Developing and promote CSOs Code of Conduct:*** This is aimed to the institutionalization of the Self-Governance in the CSO sector. The ECSF adopted CSOs Code of Conduct and strived for embedding of the code in the organizational program management and routine activities of CSOs nationwide. The code designed by the taskforce organized under the ECSF, and after series of consultation with key stakeholders and experts inputs, the code was approved by the ECSOC executive Committee and officially launched. Subsequently, the ECSF arranged three days Training-of-Trainers (ToT) for 17 experts by the Professionals developed the Code of Conduct. Then, familiarization training organized for 428 participants [F=176, M=252] drawn from Consortiums, individual CSOs, professional associations, Oromiya Women's Federation, PLHIV women-led CSOs; and CSOs operating in Addis Ababa, Oromia, Amhara, Ben.-Gumuz, Gambella, SNNPR, Somali and Dire Dawa. Moreover, the translation of the CSOs Code of Conduct in Afaan Oromo has been almost (above 98%) finalized.
2. ***Contributed to increasing responsibility and accountability of CSOs and ACSO regional delegates towards the civil society laws, by organizing familiarization training workshops for zonal/regional BOFED representatives in regions and AA and DD on the approved CSO's Directives and the CSO proclamation in the collaboration with ACSO.***

The ECSF has done a great job in creating awareness on approved CSOs Directives in two rounds.

- *In the first round awareness creation training activities were delivered in the beginning of the year 2022, in Addis Ababa and regions on the four approved Directives at a time, namely: (1) Directive No. 847/2021; (2) Directive No. 848/2021; (3) Directive No. 849/2021; and (4) Directive No. 850/2021. Prior the beginning of full implementation into the training program for regions, ECSF recruited and provided Training-of-Trainers (ToT) for*

25 individuals (Male= 20 Female =5) in two days on the CSOs Directives in collaboration with the CSOs Authority and the lead trainers were mobilized from the Authority. The participants of this ToT were 5 (five) participants were from ACSO itself; The 10 (ten) participants from the CSOs; and The other 10 (ten) experts from the regional BoFED [NGO sector coordinators in their respective Bureau]. Following the ToT Training and necessary preparations, the actual training offered for two days each to the target Cascaded for a total of **325 [66 F; 259M]** Participants from Professional Associations, Dire Dawa City Administration, and SNNP, Benishangul. Gumuz, Amhara, Gambella, Harari Regional states.

- *In the second Round [end of 2022 and first quarter of 2023], ECSF able to organize Ten (10) sessions of familiarization training workshops Organized for **472 regional CSOs, and Zonal/regional BoFED/** representatives [of 8 regions, Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa] on 8 approved CSOs' Directives and the CSO proclamation, in fact in strong collaboration with ACSO. The directives include *Directive No. 847/2021; Directive No. 848/2021; Directive No. 849/2021; Directive No. 850/2021; Directive No. 936/2022; Directive No. 937/2022; Directive No. 938/2022; and Directive No. 939/2022. [See Detail¹].**



*Oromia Regional Workshop at Adama
Jan 31 2023*

The recipients of the training were both from Government and CSOs representing at region, and Zone levels , whilst Gov't [M= 122, F=38, T=160], and Regional CSOs [M=271,F=41,T=312]. The awareness creation training activities were arranged for Benishangul Gumuz, Harari, SNNPR, Amhara, Somali, Gambella, Afar and Oromia Regions; and Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa City Administrations.

- 3. Initiate and support to sustain GO-CSOs forum among in collaboration with ACSO and other partner networks.** As the continuation of the 1st Federal level Government-CSO Forum organized in September 2020 whilst the event was managed in collaboration with ACSO. The Forum had created better sense of collaboration and understanding of the CSO leaders and Government body. Similarly the second high level Go-CSO Forum successfully held on 7th February 2023, which was managed by ECSF in a close collaboration with ACSO and ECSOC. Federal and Regional Higher Officials were took part in this important event [including HoPR,

¹ (1) Directive No. 847/2021-Civil Society Organizations' Administrative Expense Implementation Directive; (2) Directive No. 848/2021-Directive for the Administration of Civil Society Fund; (3) Directive No. 849/2021-Directive to Support and Regulate Professional Associations, (4) Directive No. 850/2021 -Directive on Liquidators, Procurement, Sale and Disposal of the Assets of Civil Society Organizations; (5) Directive No. 936/2022- Directive on merger division and dissolution; (6) Directive No. 937/2022-Directive on Income generating activities; (7) Directive No. 938/2022-Directive on registration and administration of local CSO; (8) Directive No. 939/2022- Directive on Avoiding Conflict of Interest.

MoJ, ACSO, Ministry of Peace, FEAC, some selected regional representatives, etc.]. Moreover, CSOs consortia leaders & EXCOM of the ECSOC, and selected CSOs Leaders, media institutions, Development Partners like CSSP2, etc., were part of the forum. About 90 participants attended the forum. Two papers focusing on achievements and Success, and challenges, and the way forward were presented by ACSO Deputy Director General and a Consultant from academia representing the Gov't and CSOs sector respectively. Following the presentations, constructive discussions were made on how to improve the engagement and collaboration for future national agendas to bring concrete change on development. It was observed that, there was very good understanding and sense of collaboration created between government high officials and CSOs Leaders.

4. ***Initiated and strengthened regional Networks in key National Agendas.*** The Forum has successfully organized regional consultation workshops on the role and mission of different regional actors, including regional CSOs networks in: (a) citizen state engagements and peace building and conflict resolution, (b) participation in the identification and decision making of issues of concern viz. policy and government budget, and the ways legislations, and (c) *[Upcoming]* National Dialogue. These successive consultation workshops held in 6 (six) regional states/city administration viz. SNNPR, Benishangul-Gumuz, Amhara, Gambella, Harari and Dire Dawa. Therefore, a total of 140 participants (male=101, female=39) attended the workshops whereby each workshop session was organized for two consecutive days. The workshops were participatory so that the CSOs and their regional networks were able to comprehend their roles in effective citizen state engagements, and peace building and conflict resolution initiatives. Besides, the workshops were facilitated in a way that the CSOs and their regional networks could understand their roles in advocacy actions and identification and decision making of issues of concern that matter the civil society organizations such as policy issues; watch dog to government budget; and monitoring to legislative processes and how legal instruments are made, revoked or improved.
5. ***Increased institutional capacity of ACSO, Regional delegated bureaus and regional government stakeholders:*** The Forum engagement was extended to the government office that have direct relationship, whereas the following are some of the example:
 - *Capacity building training on the M&E manual of the Authority and supportive supervision* successfully organized on 03rd Dec 2022 in Addis Ababa.



Eight ACSO staff (mainly Director Level) and all regional BoF Representatives received the training; whilst 31 participants ((M=22; F=9) involved in the training. The training was facilitated by the Consultant who designed the manual in Co-facilitation of ACSO-Monitoring and Supervision Doctorate Director.

- *Provide capacity development training for ACSO staff (Professional Association Support Desk):* A total of 18 (male=17; female=1) ACSO staff members attended a two-day basic training on effective service delivery for professional Associations. The ECSF has organized the training in collaboration with Ethiopian Professional Associations Alliance (EPAA).



The participants got effective training on the agendas of concepts and relevance of Professional Associations, formation and function of Professional Associations, Challenges of Professional Associations, trends in Professional Associations and their role in Ethiopian context, the relationship between the government and PAs in Ethiopia, how ACSO can best support PAS, and servant leadership.

6. ***Organize high level reinforcement consultation to reinforce the CSO Network operating in the southern region:*** The ECSF identified and approached one of the Emerging CSOs Network operating in Hawassa to collaborate. The ECSF has officially started communicating **Action Network**, which was established recently in Sept 2022 to operate in Sidama/SNNP region, and clarified the experiences of the Forum in coordinating CSOs and making effective advocacy for positive in the sector legal and working environment. On March 18, 2023, a brief discussion focusing on engagement, Networking and importance of inter-regional and intra-regional networks with leaders of the Action-Network and its members that engaged 18 participants [15M, 3F], comprises Founders and board members. Nowadays, the networks is actively engaging and performing like other matured regional networks in facilitating different events for ECSF and the ECSOC. We observed that, this is the result of inspirational discussion made by ECSF, the governing bodies of the Network composes experienced leaders, and are committed for the change.

7. ***Conduct National Survey on the impact of the new Civil Society laws focusing on democratization, promotion and defending of HRs and CSOs governance system.*** The national survey was conducted on the contribution of the new CSOs laws on democratization, promotion and defending of HRs and CSOs governance system activities. The findings of the assessment has generated practical evidences associated to CSOs' understanding of the CSOs law, government sectors' understanding of the new CSOs law, the most important vague provisions under the new CSO law and its implementation, agendas of integration and partnership among CSOs, and preparation of regional laws. The findings of the assessment will be used to drive policy issues and agendas for further advocacy efforts, and to justify the need for institutionalization of citizen-state engagement within and among CSOs, government, and citizens; also used for upcoming CSOs advocacy on the CSOs laws, democratization processes, and promoting human rights and good governance.
8. ***Established and strengthened Regional CSOs Networks' Annual Forum.*** Two forums successfully organized. *The first* one was initiation and creating consensus in August 2022, and the second forum was putting a strong milestone in April 2023. The experience sharing workshops enable regional CSO-networks to share experiences and collect lessons on how they can engage in promoting active participation of CSOs in their respective regions in major National Agendas, Policies, and Law making process; CSOs' contribution to the effectiveness of the civil society sector in harmonization of efforts made by the CSOs and government actors; and how to strengthen partnership among Regional CSOs Networks and with the ECSF as well. As a result, regular learning and sharing platform among regional Networks of CSOs Created; and opportunity created for possible civil society advocacy including the formulation of regional CSO laws and expanding civil society space for effective citizen-state engagement in development and peace-building endeavors.
9. ***Arrange a round of 'Board Development' training for members of the Board of Management of regional networks of CSOs:*** The ECSF has coordinated basic training for members of the Board of Management of regional CSOs Networks. Accordingly, a total of **14 trainees** (male= 13; female= 1) recruited from Seven Regional Networks attended the training which was focusing on enhancing the leadership capacity of the Board of Management, and increasing their awareness about the roles and responsibilities of Board members as per the new CSO law.
10. ***Produce Artistic educative spots on peace advocacy and human rights, Youth volunteerism and peace initiatives and broadcast via social media of the Forum and its partners:*** The ECSF has outsourced the production of a short artistic spot that promoted CSOs' advocacy efforts focusing on the agendas of peace, human rights and youth engagements. The video spot with one minute span is already produced after feedbacks are incorporated on the draft

version of the video. Hence, it will be posted on the social media channels of the Forum and shared with relevant partners for possible dissemination and public consumption.

11. Facilitate and organize consultative meetings for two selected regional CSOs to establish their respective regional networks. As per the plan, successful efforts were made to establish and/or reinforce CSOs' regional networks in Gambella and Harari regions. The ECSF took the initiation to reinforce the **GAMBELLA Regional Network** in collaboration with the Gambella Youth Association. The ECSF has organized regional workshops with the participation of the regional government officials and local and international CSO representatives. The reinforcement workshops aimed to enhance the institutionalization processes of the regional Network and promoting membership, networking and collaboration. Subsequently, 21 CSOs have joined the Network until the end of the reporting period, and most of them submitted the necessary requirement for the full membership. Moreover, **Support the establishment of CSOs Network in Harari region.** The ECSF has **organized a regional consultation workshop** with the participation of regional government officials and CSOs working in the region. At the end of the workshop, a **Task-force** was established to facilitate the entire processes of the establishment of the Network. The Task Force also functioning as a core team to expedite all relevant preconditions for the establishment of the Regional CSOs Network. *It is vital to note that, ECSF has been providing advisory service for the task-force, and will keep on this duty until the Network is established and strengthened.*

12. Organize experience sharing and information exchange platform among 30 participants from ECSF, CSOs Council and Media on the issues of the internal governance, including progress, lessons, challenges, way forward: The ECSF assumed to achieve this output by arranging virtual workshops among regional CSOs' networks, establishing and sharing tools, organizing experience sharing and information exchange platforms and consultative workshops, establishing Task Forces, and organizing familiarization workshops mainly associated to the CSOs Code of Conduct, the Civic Engagement Policy, and agendas of internal governance, self-regulation, transparency and accountability in CSOs. One of the most important activities in the reporting period involved organizing experience sharing and information exchange platform among the ECSF, CSOs Council and Media on the issues of the internal governance, including progress, lessons, challenges, way forward, etc. Accordingly, the workshop was organized in Addis Ababa with the participation of 25 (male=19; female=6). The participants were from CSO consortia (20) and Media (5). During the workshop, discussions were made among the participants on the necessity of CSOs and Media Engagement. As a starting point's presentation were made by consultant, **on the Media Mapping: HRs Promotion and Assessment of CSOs-Media Relations in Ethiopia.** Moreover, through discussion made on 'the mainstream and alternative media outlets at community, national, and regional level including virtual platforms along with profile of media organizations including

variables attributing to their level of influence are also assessed'. Subsequently experiences and best lessons, challenges and means employed to address the challenges were thoroughly discussed by the participants [consortia and Media leaders] - based on their organizational practice. Finally, the event was concluded by developing action points that could frame and guide the way forward, how they can maintain similar platforms and contribute to strengthen CSOs' accountability, internal-governance, and self-regulation. Action Points generated at the end of the CSOs Media Engagement workshop which is very critical for the future engagement and better collaborations and actions.

13. Strengthen the effort of promoting Human Rights. Some two major sample achievements are discussed as follows.

- a. Promoting Human Right Based Approach (HRBA) for CSOs:* Just immediate to the open-up of the Civic Space to operate in the human right arena, the ECSF had organized Trainers of Training on Human Right Based Approach (HRBA) for CSOs focusing on development programs, in collaboration with United Nations Commission for Human Right (UNCHR). The training was offered to 110 participants [M=81& F=29] in two rounds in Addis Ababa from 14-17, January 2020, with the facilitation of much selected experts [by profession and experience in the area].

The Major topics addressed during the training are Introduction about basic human rights, right of the children, national, legal and institutional framework and standards for protection of human right in Ethiopia, SDG and role of CSO in achieving SDG agenda etc.



The training was very successful, because it opened –up the eye of human right defenders in the CSOs sector as the facilitation of training delivered by the facilitation of experts from UNCHR.

- b. Successful consultations of CSOs and AGOs held.* A consultation workshop of FDRE Ministry of Justice leaders [including Justice and Legal Research Institute and Federal Prison Administration Commission] and CSOs 35 relevant CSOs leaders was conducted to identify

and incorporate best practices in legal reform and engage CSOs in oversight and compliance to develop long-term solutions for reform processes. The workshop was focused on the role of CSOs in the legal reform processes taking cases from Kenya, South Africa, Indonesia, and the situation in Ethiopia, and Recommendations and Action points for the better collaboration in the advancement of the legal system.

14. ***Virtual Consultation workshop held on COVID-19 management.*** Online discussion forum held on inclusion of CSOs in the government's COVID19 management taskforce on March 2021. Presentation on the role of CSO's in the Government's COVID-19 Task Force. It was noted that 'CSO's are closer to the community from others keeping this in mind the task force should engaged them in order to outreach the wide society. Moreover, it was clarified that, COVID-19 is getting worst in the country at the time, which mainly due to lack of proper usage of the COVID-19 Guideline. The participants agreed on how the CSOs could advocate to a proper use of the Guideline to reduce the spread of the virus and save life.
15. ***Workshop organized with key Actors on CSOs engagement.*** A one day workshop organized on strengthening the engagement of CSOs with ACSO, MoP and the National Covid-19 prevention taskforce on March 25/2021. The ECSF had organized this high level face-to-face workshop on strengthening the engagement of CSOs by engaging ACSO, the National COVID-19 Prevention Taskforce and MoP. Prominent officials/persons/ like ACSO Director General, ECSOC Vice President, and the key representative from the National COVID-19 Prevention Taskforce participated and delivered keynote, and indicated the importance of participation of all to curb the pandemic expansion, and similarly the need to furthering collaboration among actors. Presentation was delivered on the role of CSOs engagement and the need for joint action of key stakeholders from government sectors.
16. ***Consultative meeting Organized in collaboration with Attorney General Office focusing on Human Rights.*** ECSF has organized a half-day virtual consultative meeting on March 26 2021 with the Ministry of Justice on the agenda of collaboration and partnership towards sustainable HRs promotion and protection in line with the constitution and signatory International Conventions. It was focused on '*The role and responsibilities of CSOs in the promotion and protection of Human Rights, and the area in which CSOs need collaboration of MoJ in realizing the advancement of HRs*'.
17. ***Conducted baseline Survey on the government responses to COVID-19 pandemic.*** In the reporting period, the ECSF and its co-implementers managed the rapid baseline assessment on government responses to COVID19 pandemic with respect to Human Right Principles and practices, Gender Equality, and Social Inclusion.
18. ***Conduct an awareness creation about COVID-19 related issues on different Media.*** An awareness creation spot with two different messages was prepared and disseminated through

social Medias. The Forum also planned to disseminate the spots with mainstream Media until the end of the project life time.

19. ***Capacity Building Training provided to 15 management staffs from the ECSF and its partner CSOs.*** In collaboration with CSSP2, Capacity Building Training offered for 20 participants mainly management staff of the Forum and its co-implementers for three consecutive days (January 21-to- 23). It is aimed to enhancing the skill of the trainees to the proper implementation of the project and the capacity of their organization as well. The training has contributed a lot to strengthen the capacity of the grantees and also have added values to their organizational competence in a grant and financial management processes.
20. ***Make regular monitoring and supervision for the implementation of the safeguarding policy across the coalition and CSOs at the grassroots level.*** Regular monitoring of the planned activities of the Forum was performed. The ECSF also conducted extensive Safeguarding Monitoring activities by organizing field visits, focusing on two selected implementing organizations EMRDA and MCDO who are operating the Citizen State Engagement Project in Afar and Somali regional states respectively. The report revealed that, both Implementing partners (i.e. EMRDA & MCDO) adopted and implemented the Safeguarding policy, declaration of safeguarding compliance, code of conduct and assigned safeguarding focal persons at head and field office level.
21. ***Production and Dissemination of Printing materials.*** As part of documentation of best practices and visibility of the Forum and its partners, ECSF produced Best practices brochure Newsletter and disseminated, which are available on our website www.ecsf.et.
22. ***Support to the Institutionalization of ECSOC:*** The CSOs Council has recently established and got institutional settings. It already has established its own office and hire employees. Furthermore, it started discharging its mandates by performing national agendas representing CSOs in Ethiopia. To this end, the ECSF has played indisputable roles to enable the Council such a status taking the Secretariat position. Thus will also facilitate grounds for collaboration between the Forum and the Council for their future endeavors.
23. ***One artistic educative (edutainment) spot produced and transmitted on social and mainstream media:*** The production of two spots focusing on the issue of peace and human rights would promote social values carrying-out by the consultant and finalized.
24. ***Advocate for the enactment the Civic Engagement Policy (CEP):*** The Forum has made series of lobby and advocacy (formal and informal) for the MoJ and ACSO to finalize the approval process. In short, series efforts and discussion was made with ACSO and pertinent officials in the Ministry of Justice, including official request with letter (to MoJ) and developing ToR for the necessary action by ACSO. It is reported that, the revision has made by ACSO Taskforce, and submitted to MoJ for consideration.

- 25. Organize high level consultative meetings with regional gov't organs [and relevant stakeholders] focusing on adaptation of Regional CSO Law on selected regions:** Interactive telephone conversation made with Benishangul Gumuz Bureau of Justice expert and CSO Desk head on the importance and approval of Regional CSO Proclamation. Moreover, similar discussion made with Vice Head of Oromia Bureau of Justice and Oromia NGO Desk Head. Benishangul Gumuz, Sidama and Gambella Regional States have concluded the approval the New CSOs Proclamation before the end of the year 2022. On other hand, Oromia Regional State has presented the final draft to Regional State Council. It is worth to note that, the ACSO has been providing technical support to regional Bureau of Justice to draft and refine the new CSOs proclamation. Moreover, ACSO and Regional joint stakeholders' regular Forum enable all regions to develop and finalize their new proclamation. Fortunately, all regional states finalized their new CSO Proclamation; hence we hope most of them will conclude the end of Ethiopian fiscal year.
- 26. Strengthened the engagements of Network of CSOs representing women, youth and/or PWD to enable them play vital role in legislation process:** A consultation workshop to strengthen collaboration of networks of women, youth, and/or PWDs organized. Twenty one (21) participants from Network of Ethiopian Women Associations, (NEWA), Ethiopian Youth Federation (EYF) and Federation of Ethiopian Federation of Persons with Disabilities (FENAPD) were engaged and agreed on important issues that key for better partnership and take concrete action in meeting the intended objective. Subsequently, ECSF signed a Teaming Agreement with the aforementioned three networks.
- 27. Managing nationwide project:** Two examples can be mentioned.
- A. Design and implement Covid-19 Response Project. With initiative and coordination of ECSF, 500,000 USD mobilized from CSSIP2, and more than 5.3 Mln Birr from local CSOs. Subsequently 17 Organizations coordinated and managed to implementation of Covid-19 Response project nationwide. Moreover, media, stakeholders and gov't influenced and to act in different activities that contributes to the minimization of spread of the virus, and minimizes its risk.
- B. **Successful planning and managing Sidama Referendum:** The Forum with its alliance organizations (CSOs Coalition for Election) has managed the Sidama Referendum observation by mobilizing fund [Irish AID], managing the observation and reporting the result. In the obse170 observers trained and observed the process and the voting process, covering more 201 poll stations. The CSOs in general gained experience and lesson to get engaged in the whole process of election.
- 28. Enhanced institutional capacity of the Forum:** The following key activities planned and executed to improve the institutional capacity of the Forum.

- **Developing five years Strategic Plan:** The Preparation of ECSF five years Strategic Plan for the period of 2023-2027 developed and validated. The ECSF Board approved it, and now operationalized.
- **Review of the bylaw of the forum :** The bylaw of the forum reviewed in manner that the has positioned itself focusing on Research, Policy Advocacy, Membership Development and Service, and Institutional Capacity Development, which is already approved by General Assembly.
- **Updating the ECSF policies and procedures manuals** (Financial, Procurement, HR Manuals and Procedures) accomplished by the consulting firm.
- **Adopting IPSAS:** Consultant who shall adopt the IPSAS and provide TA has already selected. Now the consulting firm has collected necessary data from the staff of the forum staff that will help them to perform their job.
- **Upgrade the Website of the ECSF:** New ECSF Website re-designed by consultant [www.ecsf.et]

Challenges

The forum has faced the following challenge in the course of attaining the aforementioned results:

- 1) Insufficient fund, and limited source of fund,
- 2) Difficulty in accessing some high-ranking officials and little weight for CSO inquiries,
- 3) Prolonged conflict affecting collaboration with CSO networks in the Northern and other parts of the country,
- 4) The high inflation, which limited the forum's ability to provide training in accordance with the planned number of participants/number of regions covered,
- 5) Time constraints in managing a large number of activities under each project.
- 6) Less cooperative culture of some institutions,
- 7) Staff turnover: this could be due to a lack of projects with a longer life cycle, making it difficult to attract/retain staff.

Lessons learned

1. Advancing partnerships with ACSO and Gov't Engagement for the sake of better functioning.
 - Example:
 - (i) Joint Plan and Action (deliberate) of ECSF and ACSO in the implementation of key projects;
 - (ii) (ii) Facilitate and co-manage the Go-CSOs Forum at Federal Level, etc.

These lead to sense of collaboration with Government Organ increased with ACSO and Regional -Bureau of- Finance], the positive and strong partnership created scaled-up in most regional CSOs and respective CSOs Desk [*Bureau of Finance*].

2. Strengthening Networking with CSOs Consortia of major regions, and maintaining the Coordination role with regional CSOs Networks.
 - Example, supporting regional CSOs to form their respective Regional Network [*Harari, SNNP+Sidama*] and provide continues support to strengthen [*Gembella*].

Way forward

1. Embedding the task of awareness creation on the CSOs laws in the ACSO and Regional counterparts and Zonal structure is indispensable.
2. Mainstream the CSOs laws and CSOs Code of Conduct in the projects and programing of the CSOs Networks for their constituencies.
3. The regional networking shall engage with the respective organs and influence to jointly ensure the implementation of the laws in way that the benefit of the citizens' ensured.
4. Continue the establishment and strengthened of national and regional engagement platforms [such as experience sharing and learning], among Networks and cascade to their members need to considered to bring about the sustainability of the project outcomes.
5. Strengthening the capacity of CSOs and their regional networks and government bodies:
 - a) *Capacity of CSOs Networks to expand or sustain the CSOs operating space is very crucial. Their capacity also to promote self-regulation for higher results and better image.*
 - b) *It needs huge work to align the capacity of most Regional Regulatory bodies, with the current status of ACSO. It is important to note that, the capacity development interventions in particular involved equipping the CSOs' and their regional networks and regional/zonal government offices and ACSO's regional delegates with different organizational skills and thoughts.*

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Ethiopian Civil Society Organizations Forum (ECSF)

Address: Addis Ababa, Bole Sub-city, Woreda 03 Around 22 Yohannes Kitifo

- P.O.Box: 24366 code 1000, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- Website: www.ecsf.et Registration # 4414
- Office Telephone number: Office: +251 186 999 08

Contact Person: Mr. Terefe Degeti, **Executive Director**

Mobile number: +251 911128689

E-mail: tdegeti@yahoo.com

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