WEBINAR PROCEEDING REPORT

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS IN ETHIOPIA

CSRC

A C L P

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Disclaimer

The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Civil Society Resource Center (CSRC), the African Civic Leadership Programme (ACLP), or the FDRE Agency for Civil Society Organizations (ACSO).

Acknowledgments

Introduction

The Civil Society Resource Center (CSRC) in collaboration with the Agency of Civil Society Organizations and the African Civic Leadership Program organized a webinar series to fill the knowledge gap on the impact of COVID-19 on the Civil Society Sector in Ethiopia. The purpose of the webinar series is to provide a platform for different Civil Society Organizations (CSO) to discuss the sector-specific difficulties caused by COVID-19. Upon discussing the challenges, the CSOs are provided the opportunity to brainstorm the best way to address these challenges, how to regroup and plan for the future, and lessons that could be learned from this experience.

The webinar series consisted of five meetings. Each webinar focused on specific challenges to ensure that each problem is discussed in depth: the first webinar analyzed the impact of COVID-19 on Human Rights and Advocacy Organizations; the second webinar assessed the impact of COVID-19 on Service Delivery Organizations; the third webinar explored the impact of COVID-19 on professional associations; the fourth webinar discussed the financial challenges that resulted from COVID-19; and finally, the fifth webinar investigated the regulatory challenges caused by COVID-19.

This proceeding presents a summary of the presentations, panel discussions, and questions and comments from participants on the impact of COVID-19 on CSO's and the contents of the webinar.

The Impact of COVID-19 on Human Rights and Advocacy Organizations

October 9, 2020
14:00 – 17:00 GMT+3

The first webinar "The impact of COVID-19 on Human Rights and Advocacy Organizations" was conducted on October 9, 2020, 2:00 PM – 5:00 PM East African Time (GMT +3). The webinar was attended by 49 participants plus two panelists, one moderator, and three hosts. The program of the webinar was structured in an opening statement by A/to Jima Dilbo and Seife Ayalew: two presentations by Meskerem Geset and Kumelachew Dagne followed by a Q&A, a panel discussion with the presenters, and a closing remark by A/to Jima Dilbo.

Opening Statement
A/to Seife Ayalew
Director of African Civic Leadership Program (ACLP)

"Thank you, honored guests, for accepting our invitation and attending our webinar. I am here on behalf of the African Civic Leadership Program. The African Civic Leadership Program is an organization that is registered in Maryland which works on various human rights issues in Ethiopia. We have worked on multiple projects that support and help the growth of various civil organizations in Ethiopia. Therefore, we have signed a memorandum of understanding with the FDRE Agency for Civil Society Organizations and we are working on multiple projects as partners. Among the projects we are working on, the main one is introducing and creating awareness about the new proclamation on Ethiopian CSO's and other laws related to the proclamation. We are preparing a manual in 4 different languages and distributing the manual in both printed form and soft copy. The four languages are Amharic, English, Oromiffa, and Tigrigna. We have also have prepared an audiobook that is available on YouTube and our websites. In relation to this, we are organizing this webinar series with the collaboration of the FDRE Agency for Civil Society Organizations and Civil Society Resource Center. The webinar series will be focused on the negative effects caused by the COVID-19 on civil society organizations and will try to promote a discussion on what the effects are, what kind of support is needed, how civil societies should organize themselves to overcome this challenge, and how they will continue their work despite the problems they are facing. We have prepared 6 seminars, which will be organized based on the focus of the organizations, such as for those working on human rights and advocacy, those working on development, or on professional association. We aim to see the impacts of the pandemic on the organizations in the coming 6 months.

The main purpose of this webinar series, besides the discussion and the sharing of ideas, is to serve as an input to research being done; a COVID-19 impact assessment on Ethiopian Civil Society Organizations. Therefore, it will serve as an

additional input to the research that will be published at the end of the webinar series. The research will provide recommendations for interested parties such as civil society organizations and policymakers. Finally, I would like to once again thank our panelists and to encourage all of our participants to ask questions and give us your comments because it will serve as excellent input for the research. Thank you very much."

A/to Jima Dilbo
Director-General of FDRE Agency for Civil Society Organizations (ACSO)

"First I would like to say welcome to all of you. As Seife mentioned, this webinar was organized mainly by African Civic Leadership Program (ACLP) and with the collaboration of the FDRE Agency for Civil Society Organizations and the Civil Society Resource Center. The main partner that brought up the idea was ACLP so I would especially like to thank them. As you all know the pandemic is continuing to be a global and national concern and one of the most affected parties by the pandemic is civil society organizations. This is especially true for those working to provide support to society's most vulnerable like children, senior citizens, and women. Also, the research directorate found under our agency was able to do a small assessment that showed that there is a severe problem facing civil society organizations. Even if today's discussion will focus on organizations working on human rights and advocacy, we should remember the issue is vast and being felt across sectors. Therefore, we have been working with ACLP and the Civil Society Resource Center for months to find research-driven solutions to the negative effects of COVID-19 on civil society, as well as to finding out if there are any good opportunities that can be found at this time, and this webinar is part of that work. In order to survive and thrive through these challenging times, we must support each other as this is not a problem we can solve on our own and we cannot leave anyone behind. We must overcome these hard times hand in hand.

Moreover, I would like to mention since the first case was found in Ethiopia on March 13, 2020, we have watched civil societies as they work extra hard to help support the society by giving monetary support and creating awareness, and we should thank them for that.

I would like to round back to today's topic, which is organizations working on human rights and advocacy. These organizations used to have so much pressure, especially regarding their source of income due to the previous law and it is a sad fact that they are facing this pandemic before they were able to recover from the

previous damage. So, I think we have chosen a good topic to start with and I hope both the panelists and participants will work to make the discussion fruitful. Thank you."

Presentations

Negative and Positive Impacts of COVID-19 on Human Rights and Advocacy Organizations

Presented by Meskerem Geset
UNHRC Rapporteur and Lawyers for Human Rights Board Chair

Background

Human rights and advocacy organizations in general usually have activities and are involved in programs that require face-to-face contact and public events with mass gatherings. This is due to the nature of the work.

Due to the previous laws and proclamations, Ethiopian human rights and advocacy civil society organizations were weakened both financially and structurally. When the law changed in 2019, they were rebuilding, and news organizations were also being operational due to new opportunities and possibilities. Internationally, COVID-19 has created a lot of confusion and issues, especially for partners and donors. It can't be said that all the effects of COVID-19 on the works of human rights and advocacy groups have been negative because it has created some opportunities, and these will need to be discussed. Looking at the status of Ethiopia, we are just starting to work on the development. On top of that, the nation has been working on political reform, which had both positive and negative impacts on access to human rights and advocacy within civil society.

On the other hand, we need to look at the time frame of these negative effects because some of the issues caused are short-term problems and can be managed in due time. However, there is no timetable for the post-COVID-19 world. There is no telling how long this pandemic is going to last. Experts theorize that it may take a long time, so that needs to be factored in when discussing the long-term effects of COVID-19.

Besides the international issues, some things need to be discussed that are specific to Ethiopia and the national response. The details of the positive and the

negative effects, long-term and short-term effects, and the national and global context will be discussed in this webinar. Finally, the lessons learned from this unique situation we find ourselves in will also be discussed.

Negative Impacts of COVID-19 on Human Rights and Advocacy Organizations

Restriction of Program Activities and Gatherings

Human rights and advocacy work requires face-to-face contact with the public and large gatherings are required. This contradicts the necessary precautions that need to be taken to prevent the spread of the pandemic. The restriction of public activities and mandatory social distancing has hindered the works that needed to be done. At the start of the pandemic in Ethiopia, the declaration of a state of emergency and the initial shock and confusion resulted in strong preventative steps being taken by the government and society to prevent the spread. People stayed at home, offices were closed, and public gatherings and meetings completely stopped. The problem was that advocacy requires gatherings and making sure the voices of the masses are heard, due to the nature of the work and the work culture we have built, in Ethiopia.

Disruption of Workflow

When people were forced to work from home, the workflow faced challenges. The idea of working from home was not executed well and not much work was done.

Travel Restrictions

There were both local and international travel restrictions, some due to legal restrictions and others based on the panic and stress caused among society. People were not traveling from one country to the other or even from one region to the other. So, national institutions with headquarters in Addis Ababa could not organize seminars or training as they used to. In addition, these institutions also work with international organizations but were not able to travel and attend any

international public events, discussions, or seminars. The loss of this opportunity limited their abilities to network, share experience, and build partnerships.

Dependency on Technology for Work

Another issue is that when we were forced to stay at home, we turned to the use of technology and we became dependent. Conferences, webinars, and meetings moved to Skype and Zoom; information and document sharing is being done over emails. Activism was moved to social media using platforms like Facebook and Twitter. This became a coping mechanism for civil society organizations. However, when it came to the context of Ethiopia many civil society organizations were not used to the culture of remote working and dependence on technology, and most were not prepared to attend meetings and conferences online. So, when the sudden shift happened, the work was not being done in an organized and efficient way. The lack of dependable infrastructure like a stable internet connection is also a problem, especially for people living in rural areas. Moreover, the internet was completely shut down due to political unrest for weeks.

Closing of International Organizations and Courts

When working on issues related to policy and advocating for human rights violations, the other issue experienced was the closure of both the international and federal courts of Ethiopia. The courts were closed for some time and when they were operational again, they were not functioning in full capacity leading to cases being delayed and new cases could not be opened. On a related issue legal support is given by several civil society organizations, but since face-to-face interaction was not permitted, that support was not available to many. Furthermore, there were not any systems designed to provide legal support online. So, the fact that different institutions were closed, and they were only working online presented an issue for civil society organizations on how to access them. When human rights organizations

are closed or limited, it lowers accountability for the violation of human rights, especially when the state of emergency proclamations and steps exasperated the human rights violations taking place.

Financial Challenges

The pandemic has created financial problems for civil society organizations as the focus of donors shifted to fighting and containing the pandemic. Additionally, organizations needed to adjust their budgets to match the current working situations because the shift to working online needed new resources, building new capacity, and hiring new staff which raised unexpected expenses. This financial difficulty created uncertainty and even led to layoffs, putting the survival of the organization in question.

Loss of Focus

Plans of organizations were changed, some projects were dropped or postponed and advocacy and human rights were pushed aside as COVID-19 related cases took the main focus. Even though we will need to work on human rights cases related to COVID-19, the organizations started to focus on humanitarian and relief response completely shifting from their original plans. Even though this has some positive impact, the human rights advocacy organizations must be sure to live up to their social responsibilities and not neglect the much-needed human rights and advocacy work.

Administrative Accountability

The other negative impact of COVID-19 is on organizational governance. Since the organization's executives are not able to meet face to face, they cannot efficiently do evaluations and follow-ups. Timely audits may become delayed. Plans

and budget plans may not be properly executed, and reports might become delayed. This creates internal issues within the organization.

Positive Impacts of COVID-19 on Human Rights and Advocacy Organizations

Designing of New and Strategic Approaches

Adapting to new plans and designing new approaches may have a negative impact if not carried out properly. However, if done in a well-planned and thought-out way this may provide a great service. It can't be said that everyone was successful, but the opportunity was presented.

New Forms of Advocacy

This crisis is an opportunity to learn from and adapt. The pandemic created a way to use new forms of advocacy, for instance, the internet is used as the biggest tool, especially social media, and short messages were also used along with fliers. Although it may not be considered direct advocacy, hotline services have come into use as well. Some organizations were very successful at this, but the results vary depending on the organization.

Research and Study Initiative

The growth of research especially when focused on evidence-based advocacy, was one of the positive impacts of this pandemic. Organizations are preparing discussions, researches, and documentation regarding the situation and human rights violations that can serve as an input for accountability and policymaking. For example, the Ethiopian Women's Association has a group called 'Gender and COVID-19', through which they have provided a weekly discussion platform on the current gender justice under COVID-19 from different perspectives. Organizations present their work and research which may serve as policy input, providing a big step in the documentation.

Building the Capacity of Digital Technology

Another positive impact that can be mentioned is the building of digital capacity which may serve in the long term, as more advocacy work is being done online. "Zim Alelem" advocacy on the abuse of children can be taken as an example.

Furthermore, organizations have made training virtual, making it more accessible to the masses. A good example of this is Lawyers for Human Rights, which have moved their training to a virtual learning platform. This can serve as grounds for growth; however, the accessibility of the internet is still a big issue.

Reduction of Time and Resources Waste

Although advocacy efforts have been affected by the restriction on travel and meetings, there has been a reduction in the waste of money and time. Many unnecessary meetings and traveling being canceled has saved money and time as people were moving online with less cost and travel.

Conclusion

To summarize, in this pandemic we have learned the value of contingency planning to prepare for the unexpected and the need for emergency funding. Additionally, we have learned the importance of digitalization and the need to bridge the digital divide that exists across socio-economic status. Moreover, we need to consider how to cope with the long-term effects of COVID-19 and how to create a sustainability plan to face hardships that come our way.

How to Move Forward and Work Around COVID-19

Presented by Kumlachew Dagne
CSRC Board Member and Drafter of the Civil Society Proclamation

COVID-19 is a new reality we all need to adapt to. From the perspective of human rights advocacy organizations, we need to see what kind of work these organizations are involved in. Human rights advocacy organizations can be classified in many ways. There are some that work on human rights violations; reporting violations, advocating for violations to stop, ensuring violators face justice and victims get reparations. An example of such an organization is Human Rights Council. This type of advocacy organization work requires the need for investigators to be present in order to observe situations and communicate with victims to create a report. However, there was an issue with travel restrictions during the state of emergency, which posed an issue for such investigative work. Additionally, having direct contact with people will put the investigators and the victims themselves at risk of exposure to COVID-19, which goes against the principle of "do no harm". We cannot expose the victims to the virus so this work could not be done. A solution to this is an online platform for victims to report their cases when human rights violations occur. Moreover, the investigations should be carried out with minimal contact and using local investigators. To do this, local investigators need to train and prepare resources at hotspots for human rights violations.

Another type of advocacy organization involves organizations that focus on creating awareness about what human rights are and what human rights violations entail. This was completed through training, seminars, and conferences. From these organizations' perspectives, COVID-19 has actually presented them with an opportunity. Since gatherings were restricted, the training, seminars, and conferences were held virtually which allowed more people to participate at any time and from any place. We can even use social media to address the masses and a good example of this is Telegram. Telegram is a social medial platform that has created access to many people. For instance, the Telegram channel called Tikvah

has about 1 million members, which shows the strength of social media and the level of people it can reach. However, several Ethiopian human rights organizations do not use these platforms much and they should work on that. They can even partner with organizations such as Tikvah to reach a wider audience. The other criticism against human rights groups is that they are limited in their reach and are focused in the urban area only, so using social media can be used to reach a wider audience with a more flexible timetable.

There are also human rights and advocacy groups that focus on doing research related to human rights. These organizations are impacted by the travel restrictions and social distancing when gathering information. This problem can be solved using technology and the internet through online surveys and applications, thereby collecting data for research to assess the effects of the pandemic on human rights. This approach of collecting data should be developed and needs to grow even post COVID-19.

In addition to the other opportunities mentioned above, ample free time and not being limited to one location can be seen as another opportunity presented by COVID-19. Since external activities are limited, there is more time to perform internal assessments which will help in reviewing studies and optimizing plans and strategies. There is also the opportunity to organize and prepare documents in order to build a database that is managed properly. Nevertheless, this all requires the growth of Ethiopia's digital culture, which at best can be described as weak, if not non-existent.

Another opportunity of the pandemic is that certain human rights issues, which were overlooked previously, are now being raised as important concerns. An example of this is the uninhabitable prison conditions due to overcrowding. While this issue existed before COVID-19, the presence of the pandemic and its social distancing requirements gave the issue a public health justification.

Moreover, COVID-19 put a magnifying glass on the failures of certain governmental policies, such as health policies. Lockdowns being implemented created issues in Africa and forced governments to listen to advocates and research.

Actions that Human Rights and Advocacy Organizations should take during COVID-19.

Human rights organizations should make sure to fight corruption and ensure accountability during this pandemic. They should conduct a proper follow-up on donations gathered by governmental and non-governmental organizations and make sure the gathered resources are distributed in a fair and equal way.

Another issue is the focus of the governments' health policy. The health policy is now solely focused on pandemic response, which may lead to other health rights unrelated to the pandemic being neglected. Therefore, human rights organizations should advocate for all health rights and ensure nothing, or no one is left behind especially those working in social and economic rights. On a related note, they also should ensure that marginalized and vulnerable groups like the elderly, refugees, internally displaced people, and those with disabilities are not neglected in the COVID-19 response.

Furthermore, COVID-19 presented an opportunity for advocacy organizations to work alongside the private sector, as the damage caused by the pandemic also affects the private sector. Thus, advocacy groups should work with the private sector to identify issues they might face alongside their solutions through research and study. This will help them find partners and donors willing to work with them for the long term.

Advocacy groups that work on justice faced the problem of courts being closed. Ethiopia closed its courts for months and when they did become operational, there was not a well-thought-out plan in place to help continue the

work without spreading the virus further. This is one area that advocacy groups can work on and make sure people's right to justice is upheld.

Another issue to discuss is the national election. Since the election is about to take place while Ethiopia is still under the threat of the pandemic and while active cases are rising, there should be a discussion held on how to conduct the election without increasing the infection rate and putting people in danger. There needs to be a discussion between the Board of Election and the Health Ministry on how poll workers can work, and voters can vote without being at risk of infection. Moreover, political campaigns are also an issue that must be handled properly. Therefore, CSO's must advocate for rules and regulations from the Board of Elections to ensure everyone will be safe throughout the process and must strategize ways to keep their members who will participate in the election safe by designing protocols. CSO's must also be prepared for civil unrest following the election.

Panel Discussion

The presentations were followed by a panel discussion with the two presenters.

Questions

Gizachew
Bright Star

Firstly, several rights were suspended in relation to COVID-19, especially the rights of children from abusive homes who had no choice but to stay home. As Meskerem mentioned in passing, when these children return to school, they will require some form of psychological help related to their abuse. Will this be provided and what assistance will be provided to allow them to rejoin the community? My second question is to Meskerm as you work with the UN. What is the international preparation for the issues regarding post-COVID-19 life specifically related to children?

Negash Teklu
PHE Ethiopia

One of the important issues raised regards the strengthening of digital work. How can we build this in a quick, easy, and accessible way? Additionally, there is a mass of the population who do not have access to technology, yet are facing the worst of the pandemic. How can we bridge this digital gap so that it is not just an echo among the elite?

Gashaw Shibabaw
Theater Arts Professional Association

I would like to talk about the use of technology in government and civil societies as a way of reducing expenses. For example, sending one letter requires an unnecessary amount of resources to be used such as cars and people, an effort that can be reduced by using fax machines. Therefore, we should develop a culture

of using technology for both governmental work and civic society to boost efficiency and save money.

This next question is targeted at civil society. The pandemic posed a great challenge for those of us working in the Arts. Our plan was to assist those internally displaced and we raised around 500 million Birr, but when we are about to start the program the pandemic hit. Now, the art community has been greatly affected so is there a way we can help the community with the participants here?

The third issue is that there are several expectations from the civil society when it comes to coping with the pandemic, starting with informing ourselves, the community, and advocating for others. Between schools reopening and a national election, are we prepared to advocate for and inform the community? The art society is ready, so how can we collaborate?

On the other hand, it is election season so how can we protect people from the pandemic during the campaign? Cases rise during the holidays, so it is not hard to imagine what could happen during something emotional like a political campaign. How will politicians gather supporters, what will rallies and peaceful protests look like and how can we protect people? As members of the civil society sector, we should protect our community and create awareness using the media. The art society should play its part regarding distributing information on preventive techniques. All stakeholders should be prepared and take initiative on these two issues immediately.

Lamrot Fekre
Action Head Ethiopia

We would like to raise two issues. Firstly, before the first cases of COVID-19, there were many other issues, such as civil unrest and locust swarms, especially in remote areas. Therefore, in addition to the humanitarian problems that already existed I have my doubts about the response of the civil society to all the problems that have occurred. This is not to say nothing was done; the civil societies have tried

to the best of their abilities to address these issues. Yet, as we said, we are models and inspirations to the rest, and we sometimes see other issues being neglected when the effort intensifies on just one. An example of this is gender-based violence during COVID-19. The time gave us some opportunities for discussion due to several reasons. So, I hope to see changes and impacts not only in the civil society but the population the civil society is advocating for.

The participant before me mentioned the issues with the school regarding digitalization. We know what our goal is, but we also need to see the reality of achieving this goal. The same goes for women especially in rural areas there are places where phones are not available, Therefore, I think we need to balance the expectation and the reality and find a workable approach. On the one hand, there is an opportunity presented by COVID-19 because we cannot keep saying we are not prepared for digitalization. However, we know the way things have gone in the past. Additionally, whilst we can advocate on other platforms, this is not only about the civil society but also the people we are advocating for. We have to be prepared for the coming difficult times by adapting. The system needs change and we can do that in many ways, such as capacity building and actors working on human rights specifically will need support. This wasn't a specific question; I was trying to reiterate and make sure we incorporate these ideas in the dialog.

Endalkachew Worku
FDRE Federal Attorney General Office

As you all know, due to previous circumstances the civil society had a limited engagement in the areas of human rights and democracy. However, after the proclamation was changed several NGOs have been created and previously established ones have become active. Unfortunately, the start of this pandemic has once again limited this progress, but I think we can now get back to work while following the recommended precautions, following the end of the state of emergency. Several NGOs can now work in raising awareness for human rights.

With regards to the approaching election, governmental capacity is limited, so how prepared are these organizations to take up this challenge? For instance, my directorate works closely with civil societies, and public legal awareness is a broad area that covers issues such as gender-based violence, human rights, and creating awareness about new laws. Thus, the work requires participation from NGOs. How prepared are NGOs to participate and have they planned how to engage? Have they made a post and during the COVID-19 plan? These are my questions, and I would like to ask if there is a way for us to cooperate and work together?

Bethlehem
Hawassa University, School of Law

      In addition to all strategies indicated to be done by CSO's, what about their role of lobbying on the strategic plans of political parties?

Answers

Meskerem Geset
UNHRC Rapporteur and Lawyers for Human Rights Board Chair

The issue of children returning to school, especially those who were assaulted, and the actions to be taken regarding rehabilitation, reintegration, and the kind of physiological needs they require is an important question. I have no knowledge regarding back-to-school programs, but with regards to assaulted children, there have been more survivors, shelters, and psychological help via phone calls made available. Similar works are being done to increase the capacity of shelters in order to help children reintegrate and cope. I would like to remind everyone that this can be one of the issues that require more attention regarding COVID-19.

The second question I was directly asked was about international efforts being made about COVID-19. Before I answer this, let me explain my role as a UN human rights council rapporteur for those of you who don't know. This is not a political or policy position. We are purely human rights analysts. Our mandate is to report, analyze and advise on human rights violations on UN member states and the actions being taken in the respecting and broadening of human rights. This is similar to how the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission is a free and independent agency. We are free and independent from UN agencies, so we are not implementing agencies. Regarding the question of what is being done, we are currently following up and working on human rights violations due to COVID-19, especially on children's rights, women's and girl's rights, children with disabilities rights. We are also preparing guidance notes on how to rectify these violations. This is being done by the UN and the AU. However, the actions of the rest of the international community are beyond the scope of my personal knowledge.

Another question is about balancing. We do need to integrate digitalization with our work as it will save money and time, but that does not mean we need to completely forgo the methods we have been using up to now because we must be

realistic. A question was raised about we can have face-to-face meetings whilst protecting ourselves and others from illness. I think we should closely follow all health guidelines given by the Health Ministry, WHO, and other public health institutions. These guidelines include things like how many people should gather at a place, how much distance we should keep, and what kind of personal protective equipment should be used. Thus, by following these precautions we can return to face-to-face meetings in a limited format.

Even though it's true that COVID-19 has caused a number of serious issues, it has also exposed our shortcomings. We had problems that existed before COVID-19. However, this pandemic made somehow amplified them. These problems are long-term issues that will need to be handled even after the pandemic passes. If not addressed properly now, they can intensify into the next big issue we face. Short-term problems created by COVID-19 might end once the pandemic ends, but the problems that are deep-rooted such as discrimination will stay with us and we will need to deal with them. We need to learn from this experience.

The current situation we are in gives us an opportunity to self-evaluate and change our ways because we cannot stick to our old ways. We need to discover new ways of doing things, evaluate our shortcomings, and change them. Thus, critical self-evaluation should be both our long-term and short-term goals.

Kumlachew Dagne
CSRC Board Member and Drafter of the Civil Society Proclamation

Most of the feedback were comments and not questions, so we will accept those as they are and use them as input. However, I would like to say some things starting with the points raised by Mr. Tadele. I agree with Meskerm in saying that we need to participate in digital meetings. This is not to say that we should stop physical and face-to-face meetings, but we must look at two things. Firstly, the number of people with internet access is not only limited to those in urban areas; according to the data, 40 million people have access to a mobile in Ethiopia. This is

observable by the number of people that are active on social media platforms such as Facebook and Telegram. In addition, it is important to remember that there were successful online movements that reached the youth and motivated them. Therefore, we must stay in the loop and participate in the digital revolution to make ourselves sought after by the youth.

Another point I would like to make is related to the issues raised by the artist about becoming more accessible and increasing our reach on social media. This can be achieved by working with influencers who have already established themselves in society and gained attention. This partnership will also create an opportunity for the influencers during this difficult time. We can also create a lasting relationship between the arts society and the civil society via face-to-face meetings, provided that all the health precautions are adhered to. Nonetheless, we should remember that these precautions reduce the risk but they do not completely eliminate it. Thus, we should prioritize works that do not require a physical presence. We will need to find a balance when considering past experiences and what has been achieved. To be frank, what kind of impact did we have by holding a conference of 300 people? How much of our message was internalized? If it was not effective, we would have changed our ways, but we cannot do that just because it used to be done. We can also reach those without internet access by using traditional media and support sectors that have been affected by the pandemic.

Finally, regarding the election, as I have previously discussed we expect some form of regulation from the Board of Elections and Health Ministry, which we should follow whilst we complete our work. As we select, train and deploy poll workers we will need to provide the necessary personal protective equipment. Furthermore, while teaching civics lessons we need to take every precaution, such as smaller class sizes. The number of people we reach would be smaller and the expense will be higher, so we must be prepared for that, but we can reduce some expenses by using digital tools. Additionally, political parties need to create regulations to reduce

the spread of the disease during debates and campaigns, and will also need to cooperate with the board of elections.

Statistically, 40% of Ethiopians use mobile phones and less than 20% can call and accept phone calls, so there is a small amount of the population who use Zoom meetings and Google meetings. Therefore, are we going to provide training such as civic training for the upcoming election? At the grassroots level, we cannot do that via Zoom meetings as this is unrealistic. I agree with Meskerem that they should co-exist side by side. For example, there are 6 people in my house all of us have a phone but there are some who don't even know how to dial the phone, and all are educated, people. There is also the network connection issue, which we have experienced multiple times in this meeting alone. As an advocacy group, we should work on the reality that we have at hand. Furthermore, we do not have a proper budget when we work on advocacy, with most working from home.

Gashaw Shibabaw
Theater Arts Professional Association

As Meskerem mentioned before, we have discussed the topic of children staying home from school and how will they return to school. So far, there are no organized systems or research projects completed on the topic. However, assault studies have shown that post-COVID-19, 21,000 children were subjected to child marriage, sexual and physical assault in the Amhara region. With regards to what happens when schools open, there is nothing being prepared by any organization, both governmental and civil society organizations, so we should focus on that.

Gizachew
Bright Star

When children return to school there will be a change in behavior, so teachers need to be aware of this. They may have trouble focusing and finding structure, and they also will not have seen their friends in a long time so they will not keep their distance. Teachers and other employees of the school need extra

training on what to expect and how to handle it so that the rights of the kids will be protected as well. In addition, we have to create awareness of children's rights at home. We should work to train teachers and parents, then place councilors and health professionals at schools. We have done this in three schools so far, and I think this should be practiced widely.

Firehun G/Yohannes

Meskerem mentioned the issue of how to prepare for the post-COVID-19 world. If we are not prepared now, we will not be ready for the challenges that the civil society sector will face down the road. While we are focused on the current COVID-19 issues, we are setting aside and neglecting other issues. I know COVID-19 is a serious problem that requires an urgent response, but other issues like human rights issues, the elderly, gender-based violence, and children's rights need to be dealt with side by side. If we don't do that, we will face enormous pressure down the road because other issues like unemployment may present themselves in the future as well. Thus, civil society organizations should start being prepared now. We also need to work on the donors by cooperating with organizations such as UN agencies. To address developmental issues, we should start asking for support starting now.

When it comes to using digital platforms, I do not think it is a matter of wanting to do it anymore, it is mandatory. We have to practice before we preach. We have seen social media being used in the wrong way, so we can work to change that for the better and make a positive influence using social media. Additionally, with the help of the Agency for Civil Society Organizations (ACSO), we can utilize mainstream media to reach a wider audience.

Azeb Kelemework
UEWCA

From UEWCA's experience, we have realized that the negative effects of COVID-19 can be aggravated by natural disasters. Therefore, all actors need to

successively discuss and act on it. I recommend for government offices and NGOs to work with local CSOs that are suffering from the lack of resources, and to become engaged in preventive activities, and giving urgent responses to the community at the grass-roots level. It is also necessary to mobilize the private sector.

Conclusion

Meskerem Geset
    UNHRC Rapporteur and Lawyers for Human Rights Board Chair

We should not lose our aim and focus because if we do that, it will bring into question the matter of our relevance in our field. Thus, we need two kinds of plans; short-term and long-term. In the short term, plans will provide us with a means of navigating and mitigating our current environment. The long-term plans will help us to work on our main goal. Finally, we will need to cooperate with each other, the private sector, and with a governmental institution. We should look at this as a way to build a bond that will last beyond this movement. The pandemic has created an unlikely partnership between us and we should exhaust this opportunity to the maximum. One thing we tend to forget is the level of readiness of our staff to work during this crisis, but we must also consider their psychological readiness.

I will end my conclusion by asking a question for us all to digest. Someone said we have become dormant, so I am asking why we have become dormant. Look at this question as self-criticism; as a member of this society and as an external observer, I have seen us externalize all of our problems and blame COVID-19 and we also blame the previous law. Is that really why we are dormant? I can say that we are sleep walking. Even those with digital access, are they using it properly? What are we waiting for? COVID-19 has been weaponized in violating human rights so we should be active and our voices should be heard.

And to A/to Jima I have one question. Compared to other nations, the lack of public funding is low. This is understandable considering our country's economic situation, but is there any plan for public funding, especially in the face of the two major issues of the previous law and COVID-19?

Closing Remarks

Jima Dilbo
Director-General of FDRE Agency for Civil Society Organizations (ACSO)

"As a conclusion, I would like to say a few things. As you all said we need to question how much of our opportunities we have used up and we should look within ourselves and evaluate our actions. It is true, the Ethiopian civil society was hindered greatly by the former law especially for those working on human rights. However, it has been 2 years since the proclamation was changed and reforms have taken place. Even though we have problems, there is a culture of externalizing the problems we are facing. This is not to say there aren't any issues being faced, but what makes human rights and advocacy groups special is the ability to withstand and thrive through challenging times, because if everything was peaceful there would not be a need for such organizations in the first place. Therefore, we have to figure out a way to turn the challenges into opportunities we can use.

The next thing I would like to discuss is public funding. We have tried to form the fund mentioned in the new proclamation following a study and by creating a new department in charge of fund administration. We have transferred some funds acquired from previously dissolved organizations and are almost done with it. We have also asked for funding from the government since the government is known for supporting civil society organizations and vice versa. After the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have made efforts for organizations to find support besides public funding. We have also requested for the civil society organizations to get support from the COVID-19 relief fund gathered publicly by the government. So, I can safely say that COVID-19 has brought on its own challenges and opportunities.

Another thing that excited me was although today's discussion was about the sustainability of the organizations and how we can keep them afloat, many issues were raised beyond the topic. We looked past ourselves and were concerned about society. Questions about children going to school and election-related issues were

raised and this gives us new hope for the work we are doing. As the prime minister said, this sector has a huge responsibility and is the gatekeeper of our democracy. Thus, the government has accepted our role and has given us this huge responsibility. But I must ask all of us again, how are we handling this responsibility, and are we using it well? Regarding the digital platform, there are several issues such as connectivity problems. Despite these issues, we need to make ourselves comfortable and get used to using this platform. Furthermore, we should not only focus on the digital platform but also use traditional mass media like radio and TV. I believe today's discussion is just opening doors for more dialogue and more studies and research. I believe we can build our democracy, advance our development, and protect ourselves against COVID-19 at the same time.

I would like to conclude with two things. the first is the matter of cooperation and coordination. We were able to prepare for today's event by working together. I would also like to thank ACLP for their help on this and other matters. This cooperation should continue, and we should support civil society. We should also partner with a private sector organization such as Ethio-telecom to gain support for several organizations. Government-owned developmental institutions should also support civil society. Finally, as a government institution, the Agency has limitations and there may be organizational issues that we can solve through time with your help. We can grow the sector to become vibrant and strong."

The Impact of COVID-19 on Service Delivery Organizations

November 13, 2020
14:00 – 17:00 (GMT +3)

The second webinar "The Impact of COVID 19 on Service Delivery Organizations" was conducted on November 13, 2020, 2:00 PM – 5:00 PM East African Time (GMT +3). The webinar was attended by 42 participants plus two panelists, one moderator, and three hosts. The program of the webinar was structured in an opening statement by A/to Gezahegn Kebede and Seyfe Ayalew: two presentations by Zerihun Lemma and Tezera Getahun followed by Q&A; a panel discussion with the presenters; and a closing remark by A/to Gezahegn Kebede.

Opening Statements

A/to Seife Ayalew
Director of African Civic Leadership Program (ACLP)

"Thank you, our honored guests, for accepting our invitation and attending our webinar. As an introduction, the African Civic Leadership Program is an organization that works on various issues in Ethiopia registered in Maryland. Recently, we are working on supporting the growth of civil societies resources in Ethiopia especially the new civil organizations. We give them technical support; we prepare manuals that help in the civil society organizations and we also prepare training that will enhance their knowledge about the civil society sector. We primarily work with FDRE Agency for Civil Society Organizations on different projects after signing a memorandum of understanding with the Agency. We especially work on the new proclamation on Ethiopian CSO's by introducing and creating awareness about the new proclamation and also translating it into different languages, so that it can be accessible to a great number of people.   The four languages are Amharic, Sidamigna, Oromiffa, and Tigrigna. The manuals are translated into these four languages including other laws. Besides this, we have prepared an audiobook that's available online so that different people can reach them on this platform. We are working with the Civil Society Resource Center by forming a strategic partnership with them and we directly support them so that they can in turn support different civil society organizations.

On another note, when deciding to organize this webinar series we disused the issue of COVID-19 and its impact on the Agency's director extensively. We then decided to organize the webinar series and talk about the impacts of COVID-19 on civil society organizations and the thematic areas they are working on. On the first webinar, in which the director of the Agency was in attendance, we talked about the impact of COVID-19 related challenges and how civil society organizations are dealing with these challenges. Secondly, we discussed how the organizations can deal with the lasting effects of COVID 19, even after the pandemic is over, in relation

to policies. So, this webinar will be a great input to the discussion. The topics discussed here today will be recorded and be printed as a proceeding report. Overall, there will be six webinars, we are left with four webinars now. Finally, I would like to once again thank our panelists and would like to encourage all our participants to ask questions and give us your comments because it will serve as excellent input for the research. Thank you very much"

A/to Gezahegn Kebede
Country Director, Oxfam International in Ethiopia

"Good afternoon everyone. First, I would like to thank you A/to Seife. I would also like to thank the three organizations, the African Civic Leadership Program, the FDRE Agency for Civil Society Organizations and Civil Society Resource Center, and the Civil Society Resource Center for organizing this important and time-sensitive webinar on behalf of the civil society, the participants and myself. Like A/to Seife mentioned before, the first webinar was conducted on the impact of COVID-19 on human rights organizations and advocacy groups, which was an important topic. Today's topic is no less important. We will be discussing the impact that COVID-19 has on service delivery organizations. It is quite clear that this pandemic has had an impact on these organizations. But today we will be discussing how they have been affected by the pandemic, how they are handling it, and how they will move forward in the future. This webinar will be a useful one. One thing we have learned from this is that nothing is going to be the same from now on. The way we work our relationships, the way we talk and walk and the way we handle things will not be the same as how we used to handle it pre COVID-19. We have learned that we need to change things. This is especially true for service delivery organizations. We need to discuss what will impact the relationship we have with society in which we are delivering different services too, the challenges we will encounter while providing the services to the society, and the expectation that the society has from us. We need to discuss this thoroughly.

We can see that the pandemic has further exacerbated the already existing inequality in our society. We know that there is inequality in different parts of society and that's why the service delivery organizations focus on different areas. All service delivery organizations have not been affected by the pandemic in the same, however. There are some parts of the community that has been impacted more than others. For example, people living in poverty, elderly people, disabled people, and the young children who are homeless are more impacted by the pandemic

than anyone else. So, the service delivery organizations should reprogram themselves and work to help those who are in need during this time. This is why this webinar is going to be important

As Leilina mentioned before, we have two panelists. A/to Zerihun and A/to Zerihun. They will share their ideas with us and then the panel discussion will start with me as a moderator. One of the things that we have learned because of COVID-19 is virtual meetings and communication. I believe all of us are familiar with it by now. I hope the presentations will be interesting ones. Let us now go give our attention to the presenters. Once again I would like to thank you for participating in this webinar."

Presentations

The Impact of COVID-19 on Civil Society Organizations.

Presented by Zerihun Lemma
Country Director, International Institute of Rural Reconstruction (IIRR)

Globally, the number of people infected by COVID-19 is continuously increasing with over 50 million people infected. This is equivalent to the population of Kenya, Uganda, or Sudan. Of these infected cases, approximately 1.3 million have lost their lives to COVID-19 so far. In Ethiopia, there are over 99,000 confirmed cases and the death toll is 1,500 people. Although the death toll is relatively low, the number does not indicate the economic and social impact of COVID-19.

Negative Impacts of COVID-19 on Service Delivery Organizations

COVID-19 has brought on a major impact on social performance whereby the usual operation of CSOs has been disrupted. CSOs are no longer able to continue to deliver their services as they did before. As a result, some CSOs have not been able to survive. In addition, inadequate preparation for this has led to the following situations:

Confusion

Any crisis is the result of three functions: Hazard, Vulnerability, and Capacity. In order to appropriately assess the impact of COVID-19, we must take into consideration the threat level; the susceptibility of the population, and the capacity required to overcome the threat. However, there is a lack of complete information on the aforementioned fronts as a society must learn together with science. Questions regarding the cause of COVID-19, the contagion levels, the type of individual affected remained unanswered. Therefore, an accurate assessment of COVID-19 is futile, leading only to confusion on the capacity-building front.

Lack of structure designed to address this type of situation within the Civil Society Organizations (CSO's)

COVID-19 caused a drastic change in the usual work lifestyle which CSOs were not anticipating, nor structurally designed to address. CSOs demonstrated a lack of preparation as COVID-19 required employees to work from home. Aside from the lack of experience and readiness for working at home, some may have lacked the infrastructure to complete the work from home. Should they have gone to the office, there was also a lack of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and knowledge on the correct utilization of the PPE in order to ensure the safety of themselves and others around them. Additionally, transportation to reach project areas became increasingly difficult.

Coordination between different respondents

COVID-19 also made apparent the lack of coordination between different respondents. The government works on its own, and CSOs operate separately from the government. Community groups are also uncoordinated and not encouraged to work together. This is because communities are not viewed as part of the solution, but rather as beneficiaries.

Lack of fund and other supplies

Funding also became problematic as organizations are encountering their own challenges due to COVID-19. As such, there are delays in the implementation of projects, which also causes a reduction or delay in the funding for approved projects.

Positive Impact of COVID-19 on Service Delivery Organizations

COVID-19 has emphasized the importance of anticipating and preparing for any situation by ensuring that necessary structures are put in place. This required the implementation of new protocols such as electronic distance training and

meetings; regularly washing hands to protect from diseases caused by poor hygiene; and the use of masks.

What to expect in the future?

There should be proper evaluation conducted by relevant governmental and non-governmental organizations on disaster prevention. COVID-19 prevention and control behavior change projects should focus on creating a comprehensive understanding of the risk; identifying false information; producing and distributing PPE; providing the public with access to clean water and sanitation; improving connectivity status; improving the provision of health services and developing infrastructure; developing projects to prevent gender-based violence; developing projects that boost the economy and build the capacity of social systems to adequately manage the risk; implementing activities to promote sustainable development and resilience of the community; educating donors to create a conducive policy environment by engaging government officials; facilitating the full participation of civil society from the bottom up.

Recommendations for future actions for CSOs delivering services

Presented by Tezera Getahun
Executive Director Pastoralist Forum Ethiopia (PFE)

Key impacting issues on Service Delivery Organizations

Restrictions because of the state of emergency declared

In order to combat the spread of COVID-19, a state of emergency was declared. Although people were required to work from home, many do not have access to the internet or the necessary technology to complete their work adequately. The technological barrier on the majority of the CSOs shows that they do not have the capacity nor the means to set up their employees with the necessary gear.

Project/activity shifting and donor negotiation

COVID-19 led to projects being postponed due to project shifting, donor negotiations, and travel restrictions to project areas. Donors may have signed agreements for at least a year, but the project may have been shifted. Although these agreements account for contingency plans, they are usually restricted from 10% to 12%. This was not enough to sustain the implementation of projects/activities, which led to projects/activities being postponed. The projects were also postponed because of travel restrictions to project areas.

Staff awareness, attention, and stigmatization

According to a recent study, there is a 70% increase in awareness regarding the use of masks and the washing of hands to protect ourselves from COVID-19. However, social distancing is not being practiced as it should. This is because we are generally a close community and used to social gatherings and shows of affection.

Conflict and instability and natural disasters (flood, desert locus, etc.)

On top of COVID-19, there has been political unrest and natural disasters like floods and locusts in the country. These problems have further aggravated the impacts of COVID-19 on society and the CSOs.

Funding (limited, non-sustained, huge bureaucracy)

According to few service delivery organizations, funding is an important issue. This is because the funding was small, to begin with, and there was a lot of trouble to get that funding in the first place. Most of the CSOs receive funding for about four or six months at best. The bureaucracy has impacted the organizations severely. The procedure in which the donors operated is still the same as it was before COVID-19. The CSSP II has assigned a budget of ETB 20 million for 17 CSOs and 6 projects which takes 3-4 months. The MoP has also had the COVID Initiative program which budgeted ETB 8 million for 7 organizations for projects that lasted for 6months in Addis Ababa around Kolfe Keraniyo. The organizations mentioned that the arrangement for funding is low input and high output. This means that the money provided is low while the outputs and reports expected are very high. This discrepancy harms the CSOs as they do not have the capacity nor the resources to complete the work.

CSOs Contribution

Sine the COVID-19 outbreak, 9 to 11 CSOs have come together started the CSO COVID-19 COMBATING INITIATIVE. These organizations hold virtual meetings three times a week to share information, discuss what can be done and who should work on what. These discussions were then summarized and distributed to organizations and partners that are outside of the consortium.

Staff members of the organizations in the COVID-19 Combating Initiative have raised over ETB5.6 million from their salaries. This money was spent on initiatives that the government has coordinated. About ETB2.3 million was spent on material support to members of the community viewed as the most vulnerable and most impacted by COVID-19 such as disabled people, women, and the youth in Addis Ababa. This support was purely by our efforts not by donors.

In addition to the aforementioned support provided, there was ETB600 million donated by international donors. This money has been used to help the people most affected by the pandemic through different programs and projects.

Recommendations for future actions for CSOs delivering services

Technological support and communication (wi-fi modem, etc.)

In order to bridge the technological barrier experienced by CSOs, it would be useful for donors to provide WIFI modems and other telecommuting devices for the organizations.

Strengthening and acknowledging the CSO platform (adaptive strategy, staffing, training, materials, etc.)

There should improvement on strengthening the structures of CSOs. An adaptive strategy should be implemented to help them cope with any possible situation. In this way, the other problems that society faces should not be overlooked because of COVID-19. There should be training and different materials that will allow CSOs to incorporate adaptive strategies in the future.

Funding with minimal bureaucracy and improved instruments

The bureaucracy should be minimal and user-friendly when it comes to requesting donations. Even after going through all the bureaucracy, organizations

may not even be accepted which is frustrating. In addition to that, the contingency plan put in the budget should also be increased to 30 -35 % rather than 10 – 12 %.

Reporting and planning time span

Prior to COVID-19, ASCO used to require reports within three months of a new year. However, this has been extended in order to allow CSOs to have a chance to catch up with the current situation. Donors should follow this example. In addition, there should be a forum that holds donors accountable like other countries.

Conclusion

In conclusion, civil societies, the community, and the government should have a shared vision and work together to solve and address the problems the country is facing appropriately and in a timely manner.

Panel Discussion

The presentations were followed by a panel discussion with the two presenters.

Questions

Tadele Dereseh
Vision Ethiopian Congress for Democracy (VECOD)

How effective are zoom meetings? Does it work in the Ethiopian context? It might work for the elites but not the rest, so why not organize this meeting face to face while keeping our distance? Would face-to-face meetings not be more productive?

Second, this meeting is a good start but how much of it will be implemented compared to how much we say we work on? If we are true advocates, we should work at the grassroots level in order to work with the community and how do we do that? COVID-19 is not going anywhere soon so we should go back to our face-to-face meeting.

Binyam Berassu
Balaya ena Hitsanat NGO

The major challenge that our organization is facing is the funding we used to get from sponsorship. Almost all of our funds come from the U.S. by which we help the children on a monthly basis. Since the U.S has been the country that has been the most affected by the pandemic they couldn't send the funds that we needed.

The issues related to the government have been mentioned by the presenters. Specifically, in our area, we had a major cholera problem. And since there was a lack of knowledge about COVID-19, it was difficult to differentiate those to properly treat it. The children were the ones dying during this time. There was also a communication issue in the health centers and institutions. The personnel in the institutions don't usually communicate with each other and check upon the information that other personnel may have. Overall, there was a lack of awareness

about COVID-19. Due to this lack of information, people were severely affected. The lack of coordination and preparedness also contributed to the challenges.

Our donors gave us a bit of leeway to shift the annual budget so that we can work around COVID-19. Besides this, however, whenever we wanted to apply another COVID-19 issue, the bureaucracy and the requirement of bulky documents was a problem and tiresome as mentioned before.

COVID-19 is not seen as an imminent threat by the surrounding members of the community. People do not wear masks safely, and social distancing is not practiced properly. However, we are still working on raising awareness about COVID-19 around the community.

Another issue is that government officials think we can solve all the problems around the community. They ask for a budget to expand the schools around the area and such. However, the donor issues restrict us from complying with their requests.

The last thing is, we should be able to discuss these types of issues face to face while practicing social distancing.

Berhanu Abu

How to reduce the duplication of limited efforts of CSO's at a grassroots level?

Would you share with us how other hazards like political unrest and locust impacted CSO's action to address responsive aid?

Abdu Mohammed

In line with the donor, education raised earlier, if COVID-19 is here to stay we need to advocate for COVID-19 specific funding instead of shifting some limited percentage proportion of existing funding on tackling COVID-19.

Dawit Teshale

COVID-19 has given us the chance to see our alternative communication tools in the urban areas but how do you see the problem of internet connectivity from the Ethiopian perspective?

Dr. Diriba Eticha

What is the future fate of CSO's given the COVID–19 pandemic?

A/to Takele

What is the role of the media in this?

Answers

Tezera Getahun
Executive Director Pastoralist Forum Ethiopia (PFE)

The issues raised are the ones we have been facing for a while such as internet issues. For example, because of COVID-19 Ethio-telecom has provided discounts to a certain level. The C.E.O mentioned that if there wouldn't be more connection traffic, there would have been more discounts happening. CSOs should fight to make these types of services more accessible to a wide range of people. In order to be heard the voice of civil societies should be more outspoken.

I would like to address the comment on the grassroots duplication effort of CSOs. I would like the person who raised this issue to take the initiative and coordinate CSOs to discuss how to bring about incremental value instead of duplication. For example, if one organization focuses on distributing sanitizers, the other organization should focus on disseminating masks and another should focus on giving training and creating awareness, etc. This is an incremental value that will bring about a great outcome which is not typical of Ethiopia. An organization will build a school and then continue to try and meet other needs like books, pencils, and pens, etc. I think in cases like this, another organization should come in and help with that instead of putting all the burden on one organization. This is how the duplication effort can be addressed.

Regarding the future fate of CSOs, I think the adaptive strategy that I mentioned before will properly address the issue. COVID-19 will stay with us for a while so there should be an adaptive strategy should be designed and put in place for CSOs to use. This adaptive strategy can focus on how to live with COVID-19 and how we can sustain ourselves without heavily depending on donors. This type of culture should be strengthened and encouraged. There is a lot of competition worldwide when it comes to finding donors. Thus, instead of going through a lot of trouble to get a small amount of funding, we should be able to support ourselves rather than completely depending on international donors. CSOs have existed long

before any government came into power and will continue to exist after. Even though NGOs and big advocacy groups are the first to come to mind when thinking of CSOs, the smallest groups such as Ekub and Edir are also CSOs that have existed throughout the century. I think local leadership should be incorporated in CSOs and further expand volunteerism along with it.

One good thing that the old proclamation had is that it tried to encourage us to strengthen ourselves. For example, the Abay dam, a lot of people have voluntarily contributed a lot of money for it. Even in COVID, a lot of people have helped each other. We have the capacity to help each other but I think people are scared about the limitations. This should be strengthened. Besides this. I think we need to start working with a limited budget and half the money we are used to. Volunteerism is really important. Volunteerism is one of the major features of civil society. But most of the CSOs don't have the voluntary spirit in their core. So, I think by increasing our adaptive capability and increasing volunteerism and by taking into consideration the knowledge we have of our country we will be better. We should start this.

Zerihun Lemma
Country Director, International Institute of Rural Reconstruction (IIRR)

In my opinion, the way that we tried to handle this pandemic not just in Ethiopia, but globally is not proper. Any kind of crisis and disaster centers around the community making them not only part of the problem but also part of the solution. So, any type of response for this pandemic should be based on a community level. Like I have discussed before, a crisis is a function of three factors: Vulnerability, Hazard, and Capacity. When looking at the capacity, we can see a certain households' or a certain community's capacity to respond to COVID-19 may differ from another household or community. If one community has a better understanding of the virus, the response that will be given will be appropriate and according to the knowledge they have. However, if a certain community doesn't have the proper knowledge about COVID-19, the response will not be effective and

that community will be greatly affected and more vulnerable. So, the community should be at the center of the response. Instead of treating the community as a beneficiary, the community should be on top of the problem. It is below this there should be a local government governing the situation. A/to Brehanu mentioned the duplication of CSO's efforts and it's the community that knows what has been done in their community and what is needed. Community elders, youth groups, etc. should be the center of the solution because they know what is needed and I think this is how the duplication of efforts can be avoided.

A/to Tadele also mentioned that there is a need for a face-to-face meeting while practicing social distancing. Even though platforms like this are really important, the problem that we are trying goes down to a household level. So, we should be able to discuss this issue in a coordinated manner where all can be present. The community should also be trained on this matter. We should get together by coming face to face, using the necessary protective measures, and look for a solution for these deep-rooted problems. Since COVID-19 is going to stay with us for a while like a lot of medical professionals are saying, the community should be leading in this pandemic. As a CSO, it is our responsibility to help the community have a better understanding of COVID-19 and how the community as a whole can be a solution to the problem. The government organizations should also play their part in coordinating and supporting the CSOs at their level.

The online platforms available now are not as effective as face-to-face interaction. As most of the participants mentioned, these platforms are difficult to manage in our country. There are a lot of connectivity issues. In Ethiopia's context, these types of solutions are not sustainable. As A/to Binyam mentioned, there is a lack of coordination issue in response to COVID-19. In any crisis, if there is a lack of coordination, there will always be failures in handling the issue.

Another important thing that we need to mention is the COVID-19 specific funding. Instead of trying to be flexible with our projects and modifying the activities

of our projects because of lack of funds, we should look for COVID-19 specific funding. I think this is a good idea however whenever there is any kind of crisis, we handle it in one of two ways. If the crisis is an urgent one and needs to be given priority, the way to handle that is through coordinated immediate response. This is what we need to do when the crisis is something we can't control and can cause a lot of damage, as we are doing now. For example, by ensuring COVID-19 specific funding as previously mentioned. The other approach to handle a crisis is through mainstreaming. For example, when working on an education project, the components in which we are planning to respond to COVID-19 should be incorporated into the project. This goes for any project in the different sectors. So, in developing a project, the necessary components needed to respond to COVID-19 efficiently will be automatically put in place. Therefore, if we plan to address this crisis in these two ways, I believe we can have a better handle on the issue of COVID.

When we are looking at the future of CSOs, I think CSOs themselves are responsible for their survival. CSOs work within the community and have their own connections in the community. For example, the youths in communities have organized themselves and have done remarkable things to help their community. The question is are these organized youths sustainable? Are they coordinated? This is doubtful. So, the CSOs should work on these at a grassroots level. CSOs should work on idea generation, opinion leading in local government offices and other sectors, and even up to policymaking in a coordinated way. If CSOs are more coordinated and work together, the role of CSOs will be even more relevant.

Comments and Recommendations

Etenesh Wondimagegnehu
Brehan Le'Hitsanat

We are saying that COVID-19 is not going anywhere and will continue to be a part of our lives for a long time. I think it's good that we are recognizing that CSOs have a platform and can work to make things better in this unprecedented time. However, when we look at people in rural areas and even here in Addis, the level of awareness and preparedness on COVID-19 is almost non-existent. I recently went to a rural area and observed that people do not even wear masks there. Even here in Addis Ababa whenever there is a funeral, a meeting, or when we are interacting with our neighbors, there are no precautions taken. Consequently, a lot more work needs to be done when it comes to awareness creation. Another question is do we as CSOs have enough awareness about COVID-19 ourselves? Especially those that call themselves NGOs are not working in a coordinated manner to tackle this problem. Like a gentleman before me said, I think meeting face to face and talking about our problems and how to work together in a coordinated manner is necessary. When it comes to funding, the requirements to get the funds have gone up and the donations have gone down. I am afraid that it will even go lower than it is now. And not just for COVID-19 related works but also for other humanitarian works. I think we should come together and discuss how we can work to be more visible in the work we do.

There was also another point made about using the available platforms like Edir, sub-city offices, kebele, and youth groups. Even though some are not sustainable channels, we should use them while we have them and work with them. For example, my organization has worked with Ethiopia Red Cross in three sub-cities by distributing food items, health materials, etc. I think by using the available structures like kebele, edirs, etc. there will be a reduction in the duplication of efforts that we were discussing before. But what I'm still worried about is the

visibility of CSOs at this time and the capability of our organizations. We have been working on some issues, but we haven't been getting any recognition for it.

When it comes to COVID-19, what I would like to mention is that we need to use the available platforms and work in a coordinated manner so that there won't be any duplication of efforts. Another thing that I'm worried about is that these non-profit organizations themselves are facing a lot of problems. There should be a way that we can sustain ourselves and strengthen ourselves despite the current situation. COVID-19 has allowed us to identify what our strengths and weaknesses are and how we can fix them. What is still a question for me is our visibility.

Binyam Berassu
Balaya ena Hitsanat NGO

From my experience with donors, any donor that aims to help in the development area should dedicate a certain amount of the budget whenever there is an emergency. For example, in our organization, 25% of the budget will shift towards addressing the issue whenever there is an emergency as mentioned in the letter of agreement. If donors don't allow that, I think it's pointless. I think donors should be more flexible and allow organizations to address the emergency properly. The other thing I want to mention is that most of the CSOs are dependent on donors completely. Now that there is a new proclamation that is more open, we need to work on being able to sustain ourselves and strengthen ourselves.

Another thing I want to talk about is duplication of efforts. To curb this problem, the government should organize a forum. Before any CSO starts a project, there should be officers that know exactly who works where and on what. I think this will help decrease the duplication of efforts in our sector. Usually, we don't consider the difference we're making in a specific project area but are rather concerned by our visibility as an organization. This needs to change. A recent example is that we brought a certain group of young people together and gave them the opportunity to be involved in poultry. After they started working by

themselves and sustaining themselves, an organization called People in Need (PIN) approached them and gave them the opportunity to expand their business by providing them equipment worth 4,000 dollars. They came to me when this opportunity first arose and of course I encouraged them to work with the organization and use this opportunity appropriately. Yet there are some organizations that won't allow this. Instead of benefiting the organized group, they insist that organizations such as PIN should look for other organized group because they were the ones that organized them in the first place and do not want other organizations taking credit. We are talking about coordinating better, but we need to practice it properly. We need to stop thinking like this. The community is the one that's going to benefit from the projects, so we need to put them first rather than the organization. We have small resources, so we need to come together and help each other. We are the ones that know what problems our community is facing, not the donor. So, we need to work together better. We should also focus on income-generating activities rather than completely depending on international donors because this is not working. Whenever there is unrest or problems like COVID-19, the funding may stop.

Etenesh Wondimagegnehu
Brehan Le'Hitsanat

I wanted to share some of my ideas on volunteerism and income generation activity. The new proclamation has given us the option to work ourselves and get involved in income generation activity. However, the problem with the new proclamation when it comes to income generation is that organizations can generate income/property, but we cannot own the property. For example, our organization's building is not in our name. If we wanted to rent it out, we have to get permission from GoFed. The income-generating part of the proclamation has this limitation. We have talked about this on different platforms that the government organized.

Secondly, volunteerism is not practiced well especially in CSOs and NGOs. We usually see volunteerism in religious settings but nothing further from that. People usually tend to stick with the religion one follows only. If civil society asks the people for money, we usually don't get one because our reputation has been tarnished already. I think we need to work on our image and how we present ourselves to the community. We are not visible. When our country is going through the most difficult time we are not being seen. Therefore, if we want to work on generating income ourselves and enhancing volunteerism, we need to work on our image first. We need to build our image. Even in the media, our image is portrayed in a negative light. Recently, I saw that a disabled girl went online and asked for people's help and she got more than she needs because Ethiopian people are generally giving. Yet, if I went to the mainstream media and on YouTube and asked for a contribution for my company, I wouldn't even get ETB10,000. This is because our image is spoiled as honestly speaking, we, ourselves, are not clean. We have to come together to enhance volunteerism and bring it development. So, all in all, what I want to say is that the IGA part of the proclamation has a problem in itself and when it comes to volunteerism, and we need to build our image. Even though the law has changed we are still not proactive in bringing about social change. As a civil society, we are not strong, we are not alert, we are not coordinated, and we are not visible. This is something we can't deny. Even countries that were behind us in the CSO sector have surpassed us. We should listen to what the media is saying about us and what individuals about us. We are called black boxes. People are considering us like black boxes, and I can't say we are completely innocent either, we have our problems.

The CSO sector contributes a lot to different platforms but we don't talk about it. Starting from my organization, we contribute every month from our salary for COVID-19. The CSO sector has done a lot for COVID-response but nobody talks about it. When I said visibility before, I wasn't talking about USAID visibility. The

visibility I'm talking about is about how we are handling the current situation of our country. When all those people died, we didn't speak out in any way. Even though we contributed a lot to the dam, we didn't go and visit it as a sector. As a civil society, we never spoke up about important issues happening. There was no platform to raise our voices and talk about it. I work in four regions, and the regions I worked in were not safe. If our country is not safe, what is the point? I think we need to accept that we are not visible. We have to work towards being visible. My personal experience when trying to raise funds was unsuccessful. The work we are doing is not being acknowledged and we are not visible at the moment. Our country's problem is our problem. We should work to better Ethiopia and the people. All I want to say that the contribution of the CSO sector is high, but we are not coordinating properly, we are not organizing properly, we don't have good networks and we don't have representatives. As a CSO I don't think my voice is being heard.

Tadele Dereseh
Vision Ethiopian Congress for Democracy (VECOD)

I completely agree with what W/ro Etenesh said. We shouldn't beat around the bush; we should come to reality. Nowadays, people are even contemplating if there are any CSOs in Ethiopia. We need to speak up, but we are not speaking up. This is because we are not participating as we should. These days there are a lot of people that view civil societies as organizations that develop a project proposal, get funding for the project, do the work and just report. We need to change this. We need to create stakeholders that feel responsible and accountable to help make the work we do sustainable. Our country is facing a lot of problems nowadays but CSOs are afraid to speak up about the current issues related to governance, peace, etc. If CSOs are working for Ethiopia it can't just be reporting to donors. Even the projects in project areas are mostly not sustainable. This has put our loyalty in question. So, there is a lot of problems in this sector. This sector should not be ethnically racist,

extremist, and impersonation. It should be loyal to the country it claims to work for. When everyone else is speaking up on the current issue, the CSO sector has kept quiet. Either the sector is scared or is indifferent about the issue. But it shouldn't be an issue when it comes to Ethiopia, its people, and the peace of the country. CSOs should not just be talking about current issues. We should be acting and helping the people of Ethiopia.

We should show how relevant we are and that we are the fourth government of the country. There were 2800 civil society organizations but when re-registering 1700 organizations did not register. We didn't even ask why these organizations didn't register; we were not even willing to research this. So, I think we need to come back to reality. We need to be loyal to the organization we established. We need to respect the law. This sector should stand up for everyone's right to have his/her own property, the right to live, etc. If we don't stand up for this then why are we even called a CSO?

For the question on whether we are visible or not the answer is no, we are not visible at all. We need vibrant civil society organizations for our lovely people and our lovely country. From now on I think we need to stop the webinars and google meetings and meet face to face and talk about the real issues. If we are concerned about money, this is not the sector for us. We are fed up and tired. Our name has been dragged through the mud. What Etenesh said before is the truth, it may be a hard pill to swallow but it's the absolute truth. We are the fourth government and when the government gets it wrong, we are here to fix it and when the government gets it right, we are here to appreciate it. We are the mediator between the people and the government. As a civic organization, we need to do more.

We had a good discussion today. I think it has woken some of us. The fact that we criticized each other is a good thing and should not be viewed as a negative thing. There are a lot of discussions being held separately by different

organizations. This should be collected and be available to civil societies. I think we can learn a lot from it. As previously discussed, we need coordination not competition, yet what we see is competition. We should support and encourage weak civil societies and share our experiences with them. We also need to encourage volunteerism. We are not as developed as other developed countries because instead of working for ourselves we are waiting for handouts from donors. Issues like good governance, the issue of COVID-19, the current issues of our country will not be solved by the donations we receive. There should not be soldiers on the battlefield, we need to be soldiers for the community. Lastly, what I would like to add is for you to please stop this online webinar and meet in person. I will provide the meeting hall enough for fifty people along with refreshments needed. We need to work as a civil society and stand up for the people of Ethiopia. Ethiopia is our concern. God Bless Ethiopia and its people. The work you are doing is great. Keep it up. Thank you.

Conclusion

Zerihun Lemma
Country Director, International Institute of Rural Reconstruction (IIRR)

One thing I want to talk about is the visibility of the Ethiopian CSO. It is clear that our visibility is not as it should be. W/ro Etenesh is correct about that. When it comes to the level of awareness created by CSOs is not enough. In areas inside and outside Addis, I have seen that there is a gap in this. In the beginning, because of the state of emergency people used to wear masks but now that the state of emergency has been lifted, a lot of people are not wearing masks. So, in regard to the CSO's contribution to awareness creation and behavioral change within the community, it is difficult to tell. To know the level of impact there needs to be a study for this. CSOs usually move in silence. We don't usually work together and coordinate. We usually focus on the work we are doing by ourselves. There is no coordinated effort. Above all, this crisis has been politicized. This is a global situation, not just here. Therefore, the focus was COVID-19 relating to politics rather than the efforts of CSOs in relation to COVID-19 response. For me, the main issue here is the coordination issue, like all the participants, have mentioned before.

Another topic is the new proclamation that charity and society have presented us with. It has given us the opportunity to work together and coordinate with each other. Even after COVID-19 hit, there were a lot of meetings and efforts made to mobilize us. These types of efforts need to continue, and charity and society should facilitate these when it comes to critical issues. If organizations such as CCRDA or other organizations that facilitate and work on different thematic areas work together, our visibility may get better. It is true that our image has been tarnished. To address this, we need to bring in the media and give them proper information that will paint us in a positive light. And these types of coordinated works will reveal our contributions better and make our voices heard. We are the voices of the community; we are the voices of the poor. In order to make sure that

the voices of the poor are heard, we need to be coordinated and work together. This can be led by charities and societies, CCRDA, or other thematic networks.

Tezera Getahun
Executive Director Pastoralist Forum Ethiopia (PFE)

The civil society sector has made a contribution to help with the pandemic. People have taken out of their monthly income and contributed to the response team of COVID-19. We should start looking at the positive rather than just focusing on the negative. Overall, the CSO sector has contributed more than ETB5.5 million from their own pockets.

The other topic mentioned is visibility. When we go to more rural areas, we see a lot of billboards and signboards of the donors' names and whatnot. This is a requirement for most donors, especially in the E.U., to achieve visibility through signboards. USAID has signboards in an over-the-top way in a multitude of places. We can work on visibility in a proper manner. We can work on visibility while still incorporating the philosophy of civil society. We can work on visibility by hiring the appropriate employees and by having the proper attitude and manner when going to project areas. We shouldn't get involved just because we hear that NGO's pay more than any organization. We should know what we are working towards and what we are working for when we get into the sector in the first place. We should start from ourselves and our own office and start from positive things. In my opinion, I don't think we as a sector are not visible. I know all the ups and downs in this sector because I've worked in it for over 30 years. My message today is that we should appreciate the positive aspects more and work together to curb all the problems that we are facing.

A/to Gezahegn Kebede
Country Director, Oxfam International in Ethiopia

I would like to say a few words as a conclusion. Let me ask you some questions first. Do you differentiate between NGOs and CSOs? What comes to mind

when we say NGO and CSO? As you well know most of the organizations in Ethiopia, either be it our culture or nature, have found ourselves where we are now. Formal charity organizations started being established during the famine with the support of international organizations' funds. Organizations used to come up with project proposals and start their work with the funding provided. Over almost 50 percent of the existing CSOs have not left this project mentality. Related to this, we should also examine if we have done all we can, if we are loyal to our community we are working with, and if we have been accepted in the community. There is this concept called constituency that we should think about when we think of establishing an NGO. From all the 3000 organizations that re-registered, how many, do you think, know the concept of 'constituency'. Constituency means that we are the voices of the community and we represent them. But do the community even know us? Do they accept that we are representatives for them? If we encounter some challenges, be it from the government or any other place, is there part of the community that will stand up for us? I do not know if this is true. Most CSOs focus on projects to help face challenges in the community that are addressed, but we are not doing this to primarily help the community and to put the community first. Like A/to Tadele mentioned we need to examine ourselves. When we say we represent a certain community, that community should know and believe that we are on their side and we are there as their voices. There are however organizations that don't realize this. Therefore, to curb this problem need to work together in a coordinated manner.

When we talk about the future fate of civil societies, we are the only ones that can make sure we have a good future. The government can put in place that will help us do a better job and there will be times where there will be laws that will prevent us from working efficiently. So, it's up to us to work capably within the situations we are put in. We need to abandon the project mentality and focus on rights-based works. If we start working from the perspective of human rights

violations, I think we can do a lot better. A lot of organizations these days don't work on projects because they believe that the community has the right to the service that will be provided. Instead, most CSOs choose what they want to work on simply because they want to. They believe that this certain community deserves access to water, or health care or access to education, etc., but they never say they have the right to have access to water or the right to health care, or the right to have access to education. The only way we can stand up for the rights of people whenever there is a violation of human rights is if from the beginning our organization is structured on the basis of standing up for peoples' rights. Organizations that are not based on protecting human rights can't really speak on issues of human rights violation all of a sudden. It was mentioned before that civil societies are not speaking up on the current issues happening in Ethiopia. This is because they were not established to address these issues in the first place, they were established to work on projects. That is basically what it is. So, I think we should work on violation of rights while also working on delivering service. If we are built like this, there will be nothing stopping us from speaking up whenever there are conflicts in the country, and we see human rights violations everywhere.

In order to do this, we need a structured institution that should be established in a coordinated manner. According to the new proclamation, a civil society council should be established, and the Agency is responsible for it. The council will be representing civil societies in Ethiopia. Even though there are networks like CCRDA, they are mainly based on certain interest groups and they don't represent all CSOs. This council will be representative of all CSOs and it will give us a better opportunity to speak up on issues we want to discuss. It is true that we need to do more and better as a civil society. So overall, the fate of CSOs is in our hands. We just need to do better. We shouldn't just put blame on some other party like the government or media. We need to make sure that the community has the proper knowledge about CSOs and what we do. Like all of you have mentioned

before, we need more coordination in this sector. Change will not come just by complaining. We need to do the work.

I also agree with what A/to Tezera said about appreciating the positive things as well. We also need to examine where the community is. Is the community waiting for the resources we bring to the table or does it have its own input? The community should know that civil societies are not replacements for the government, rather it is a sector that tries to make sure the government is doing its job properly. Furthermore, I don't agree that we don't have our own resources. While it is good that we have support from international donors, I believe that we do have a good number of resources ourselves starting from the governments' budget. We can mobilize these resources. Do we even know how the government uses the budget? We do have the right and responsibility to ask about this and analyze whether the budget is being used to benefit the community. But now civil societies are doing the job of the government while the government is focused on something else entirely. There are situations that we have to beg them to do their jobs. The government thinks we are doing it for our benefit. I think this is related to our image in the community. When we are facing these types of challenge there is no part of the community that will stand up for us. This is because our image has been tarnished. We also need to work on media representation. Media is a platform that can break and make our image. There are no media outlets that follow CSOs and report on the work they do specifically. So, if we want better representation in the media and actually show the public the good work we do, we need to support the journalists as well. We need to make them allies.

Finally, I would like to address the mainstreaming issue mentioned. In all projects that we design I think we need to mainstream the issue of COVID. I think this is really important and a good idea. In addition, we need to start sustaining ourselves. There are kebeles with one million people. If everyone contributed one ETB, we can help a lot of people with the money collected. But this can only happen

if there is a true constituency and the community has trust in us. We also need to be able to say no to donors. We don't need to be beggars in every situation. There are situations that we need to accept help but not always. We also need to get rid of the competitive mentality and work on being more coordinated as a sector. Like I mentioned before, when the council is being established, we all need to play our part in running the council, establishing it properly, and participating appropriately. If we focus on the issues raised today, I think we will be more successful in growing the sector.

Another issue mentioned is the lack of awareness in the community when it comes to COVID-19. What should we do about that? Someone mentioned that the community believes that this is Gods' wrath. So, people are not taking the necessary precautions to protect themselves. We should look at our messaging tactic even in religious houses. People these days don't care about COVID-19 unless they are personally affected or someone, they know is infected. How can we get people to wake up and not wait for the virus to come to their doors to start being more careful and alert about the pandemic? We need to think about this.

Additionally, W/ro Etenesh mentioned that people use the internet and social media to get donations these days, but we are unable to. This is related to our image of course but we also need to learn to use technology and the internet to our advantage. Overall, we need to work for what we want rather than depending on other parties.

Closing Remarks

A/to Gezahegn Kebede
Country Director, Oxfam International in Ethiopia

"Thank you A/to Tadele for the silver lining message. We need to work towards being coordinated instead of being competitive amongst ourselves. This is the message of the webinar today. All the points raised today are very important. And like A/to Zerihun mentioned this crisis has been highly politicized and this might prevent us from being successful when addressing it. We should just do the best we can. Even though we could have our own political views, we should put that aside and work together to properly handle the pandemic. Overall, the webinar was a good one. All of you have expressed your opinions freely. Openly discussing the problems, we are facing will help our future. We can solve our problems through time all we need is to take the first step. There are a lot of organizations that have taken this first step. We need to learn from these organizations and support them as well. We need to know the actual situations that Ethiopian civil societies are in and support them accordingly. We should work to help the organizations that we think are on a bad track and make sure that they are following the right track. Finally, I would like to thank you African Civic Leadership Program and Civil Society Resource Center for organizing this webinar and allowing us to have this time-sensitive discussion"

The Impact of COVID-19 on Civil Society in Ethiopia: Professional Associations

November 25, 2020

14::00 – 16:30 GMT +3

The third webinar "The Impact of COVID 19 on Civil Society in Ethiopia: Professional Associations" was conducted on November 25, 2020, 2:00 PM – 4:30 PM East African Time (GMT +3). The webinar was attended by 6 participants plus two panelists, one moderator, and three hosts. The program of the webinar was structured in an opening statement by A/to Ameha Mekonnen: two presentations by Manyawkal Mekonen and Debebe Hailegebriel followed by a discussion session between panelists and the moderator; and a closing remark by A/to Ameha Mekonnen.

Opening Statement

A/to Ameha Mekonnen
Executive Director of Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR)

"Thank you to the panelists and participants and welcome to this event. I am grateful to the organizers for this wonderful opportunity. I am happy to participate in this event as a moderator and to delivering the opening statement.

As we all know, Ethiopian CSOs have faced several challenges and have had several ups and downs. For a long time, there was a chance that civil society might have become nonexistent. When we look at the history of civil societies, during the time of the Emperor there were no CSOs, unless we count charity organizations that were supported by or in some way connected to the Royal family. Within the Derg regime, there were limited activities regarding CSOs, but the issue of independence and influence by the government or even sometimes complete government control remained, which marred the image of civil societies. In the early days of the EPRDF era, there was good progress being made in several areas such as freedom of speech and organization. Independent organizations like the Ethiopian teachers' association and the Ethiopian workers association were established. However, after the 1997 E.C election, the government attempted to weaken the civil societies by design. A law was introduced that limited the activities of CSOs working on democracy and human rights. When governmental reform started 2 years and 8 months ago, the government admitted that the law was introduced to purposely suppress such organizations, and steps were taken to fix the situation. One major step which was prioritized was to update and reform civil society law. Our panelists had a major role in this reform.

In my opinion, there are two major challenges being faced by CSOs. The first one is the capability of the CSOs. Are they capable of accomplishing their expected duties? To do so they will need to work on internal reform and understanding the newly presented opportunities and how they can be used. Therefore, CSO's must be organized properly and must build their economic capacity, which may be

challenging. The second challenge stems from issues arising around the new national reform, and we need to find a way to respond to these issues.

Significantly, there is also the issue of the COVID-19 pandemic which is a great challenge. The civil society community must rise to face this challenge and overcome it. When the first case was confirmed, the government issued a nationwide state of emergency. The state of emergency listed in detail the precautionary measures that need to be taken by citizens, like mandatory social distancing. This meant that meetings could not be held in person, therefore several organizations were not able to accomplish the tasks and goals they had planned or begin new projects. However, the pandemic is spreading faster and it is not getting better. Now, the state of emergency has been lifted but precautions must continue and the future remains uncertain. We will need to discuss how to continue from here and how we can keep up with the pandemic and get our work done in the meantime. This series of webinars is an admirable effort and a starting point to help solve our challenges.

Today's webinar will focus specifically on the challenges faced by professional associations. In my opinion, this discussion is very important and timely. We were lucky to be able to get well-experienced panelists to have this discussion with us. Our first panelist is A/to Debebe Hailegebriel, who is a law, and human rights professional with years of experience in the field. He will discuss the operational challenges professional associations are facing. He will be followed by A/to Manyawkal Mekonnen, the director of the Ethiopian Lawyers Association and an expert who worked in the field for years, who will give us his views on how to proceed from here and how we will deal with this challenge. Each panelist will be given 20 minutes. Let us begin the discussion."

Presentations

Impact of COVID-19 on Professional Associations

Presented by Debebe Hailegebriel
CSRC Board Member and Legal Consultant

There are two ways to withstand and survive the effects of COVID-19. The first is related to finance and the other is related to day-to-day operations. The two cannot be completely separated as one does affect the other, but they will be discussed separately to make it convenient for the presentation.

As we are all aware, professional associations are created for the purpose of accomplishing two important goals. The first is to protect the rights and privileges of their members based on their profession. The second is to help the rest of society and the country, especially those organized as a civil society. What makes professional associations unique is the number of members. People working within the profession of the association may become members. This does not mean that the number of members must be large, however having a larger group is what differs them from other organizations. Professional associations also differ by the fact that they are led by members themselves. The supreme organ of the associations are the members themselves. Therefore, during the pandemic, the biggest impact regards membership fees for several reasons. Some members could not pay membership fees due to financial challenges, and others could not come to the office to pay, so membership fees could not be collected. Additionally, some professional associations organize events as a source of income, for instance, Expos and trade shows. However, events like these could not happen due to the precautionary measures to manage the pandemic.

Another issue was related to grants from donors. Donations have decreased because donors are now prioritizing COVID-related issues, but also since donors questioned the likeliness of work being done amidst the pandemic. Some donors also had questions on the management of the money they had already donated,

and whether it was being used appropriately. The other income source for associations was by providing paid training, but due to COVID, it was not possible to gather trainees physically. There are also limitations in using technology as several people do not have access. Professional associations also make money by publishing journals, and some strong associations have facilities they use to support their income. An example is the Ethiopian Economic Association, which owns a building that is rented out, yet this also has been affected. Associations were lowering rent and even forgiving their tenants for not being able to pay in some instances. Events also used to be organized in these spaces, but this also has been suspended. As a result of these challenges, there have been large economic effects of the pandemic on professional associations.

The second point is related to day-to-day operations. For instance, there have been challenges regarding recruitment for new members. The two methods of recruitment are organizing events and going door to door to find new members. Due to the pandemic, no events were being held so there were no new members were being recruited. Advocacy work has also been affected. This is a major task of professional associations and requires connecting with and talking to governmental and private organizations, yet this has been suspended during COVID-19. Meetings, which used to be essential in the works of professional associations, have also been affected. They were held for members, partners, and government officials, but due to social distancing guidelines for COVID, it was not possible to continue holding meetings. In addition to this, there were communication issues between the associations and their members, especially for those with members living outside the city and or without access to technology.

Professional associations have national and international relationships with fellow associations and may have had seminars that required international travel, but this was not possible due to COVID-related travel restrictions. Some associations like EPHA have international annual conferences which could not be

held due to travel bans and restrictions on mass gatherings by the host country. The state of emergency also restricted fieldwork. Furthermore, research work such as interviews with the public and gathering data has been affected. The Ethiopian Lawyer's Association had an international conference planned last April which was canceled due to the pandemic. This event wasn't only useful to promote the association, but it would have done a lot to support the association financially.

How to move forward and work around COVID - 19

We do not know when COVID will stop, but it has been normalized and work is proceeding as usual. We now have a 10% infection rate from people tested daily, but everything has gone back to normal. Thus, we have chosen to balance precautions with business continuity. Similarly, professional associations need to find a way to continue their work. Offices are being partially opened. A suggestion of mine is the increased use of technology, a platform that was unthinkable to use a year ago but is becoming increasingly common. The use of technology should continue once the pandemic is over, and such a shift in the work structure can be considered as one of the positive impacts of the pandemic. Additionally, some of our work may need to revert to traditional methods, such as the door-to-door model, instead of expecting people to come to us. We should also use social media to address several people online.

When it comes to the collection of membership fees, this can easily be solved by allowing members to pay via bank transfers and using systems like mobile banking. With regard to grants, a good example of a solution involves a project I was consulting on. Initially, there was confusion on how to proceed, but we came up with a clear guideline by performing a rapid assessment on how to do our work during the pandemic. This helped us adapt to the situation improved our performance. This approach was seen and recognized as a good experience worth

sharing not only locally but internationally. So, associations should review their work, recognize what they can accomplish during the pandemic and prioritize those, and adapt to the situation.

Exploring New Ways of Coping with COVID-19 Challenges by Professional Associations: Experience of Ethiopian Lawyers Association

Presented by Manyawkal Mekonnen
Director-General of Ethiopian Lawyers' Association

To provide some context, I was unable to find research regarding the effects of COVID-19 in Ethiopian CSOs specifically, but I found one focused on Africa in general. This research also included professional associations, so I will be basing my statements on this research and I will try not to repeat points made by A/to Debebe.

Introduction

COVID-19 has posed an unprecedented threat to the livelihoods of people throughout the world. Since its first appearance in China in December 2019, the pandemic has affected 57,564,083 people with 1,372,132 deaths globally. In Ethiopia, the virus was reported for the first confirmed case on March 13, 2020, and as of 21, November 2020 the country has registered 104,879 confirmed cases with a death toll of 1,620 people. Apart from the pandemic's direct impact on the wellness and lives of people, there have also been adverse effects on the economy and people's social life. In a research paper by the Ethiopian Economics Association, the pandemic has effects both domestically and in international economic transactions. Reduced labor market participation, lower productivity, and rising trade costs have been indicated as immediate domestic effects. Additionally, higher international trade costs, a drop in export demand, lower import supply, a reduction in foreign direct investment, reduction in remittances, and lower import price of oil were mentioned as effects on the international side.

The COVID-19 crisis has left no sector unaffected and CSOs both globally and nationally were immensely impacted. The effect has been much bigger on African countries and other less economically developed nations. This concept note attempts to highlight the plight of African CSOs during the pandemic and to provide a bird's eye view from the Ethiopian Lawyers Association (ELA).

African CSOs and the COVID- 19 Challenges and Responses

In general, CSOs/NGOs, Professional Associations, mass-based societies, and consortiums have been affected by the pandemic. The challenges faced by CSOs differ widely in extent and severity. Some are unable to operate and have ceased their functions whilst others have resorted to running their operations with a limited or reduced capacity. Common challenges faced by CSOs include a complete loss of funding, reduced funding, partial or full suspension of programs, and an inability to implement program activities. According to a report issued by EPIC Africa, a study to appraise the impact of COVID-19 on CSOs was carried out. The study unfolded the swift and destabilizing effect of the pandemic on African CSOs. Out of 1,015 CSOs which were involved in the study from 44 African countries, 994 CSOs (98%) reported that their operations had been affected by the pandemic. Only 20 CSOs (2%) reported minimal or no impact on their operations. The report also mentioned response measures, which include reorienting operations, leveraging domestic funding sources, accelerating digital transformation, strengthening advocacy, reinforcing relevance and credibility, building sector solidarity, and improving visibility.

Ethiopian Lawyers Association COVID-19 Experience

Overview

CSOs in Ethiopia were subjected to closures and termination of their operations due to the infamous draconian Proclamation 621/2020. Following a comprehensive reform initiated in 2018, the new CSO Proclamation No. 1113/ 2019 was declared. Currently, more than 2,600 CSOs are registered and operating under the new law. As of March 2020, 2,100 organizations have been re-registered, while 600 have registered for the first time.

The Ethiopian Lawyers Association (ELA), which was established in 1965, has re-registered under the new CSO law as a Professional Association. A professional association is defined under the new law as an entity with the objectives of protecting the rights and interests of its members, promoting professional conduct, building the capacities of members, and mobilizing contributions of its members to the community and to the country.

ELA's Operations Under the Pandemic

Adaptive Management

Since the declaration of a state of emergency on April 8, 2020, the ELA has adopted an adaptive management system, which includes managing leave days of staff, remote and virtual working and eventually reducing the number of employees who work in offices.

Virtual Networking

The ELA has been utilizing virtual networking to carry out information exchange and experience sharing. In this respect, contacts were established with the International Bar Association and Project to Expedite Justice.

Supporting the COVID-19 Response

To play its part in supporting the COVID-19 response, the ELA mobilized its members to donate sanitizers and masks to the Federal High Court and First Instance Court in Addis Ababa.

Updating Members

The ELA has been sharing up-to-date information on its status and activities and current affairs which need the attention of members. In this regard, regular email exchanges have been the major communication channel.

Reinforcing Partnership with Government Organs

The ELA strengthened closer ties with the Federal Supreme Court of Ethiopia (FSCE), the Federal Attorney General, and the House of Peoples Representatives, in order to build on the good working relations of the Association with different government bodies. The ELA is playing a crucial role by participating in three working groups entrusted with the task of carrying out law revision. The ELA expressed its concern to the FSCE about the closure of most benches of federal courts and suggested opening more benches. This suggestion was accepted and improvements were made during the six months lockdown. The ELA has been playing its professional role in making constructive contributions to draft laws reviewed by the law-making organs. Recently, the ELA wrote an official letter to the House of Peoples Representatives regarding the final draft of the Criminal Procedure and Evidence Code. The House concurred with the ELA's request and delayed approval of the law in order to give adequate deliberation, which will be organized by the ELA.

Major Challenges

Disruption of Some Project Activities

The ELA has been coordinating an EU project which is called 'Supporting the Law and Justice Sector Reform'. The project is aimed at enhancing the capacity of the Law and Justice Affairs Advisory Council of the Federal Attorney General Office. One component of the project was organizing workshops and as gatherings were not allowed from April to September, at least four consultation workshops that could have been conducted have been canceled.

Cancellation of a Project Proposal

A project proposal that was prepared and submitted to a potential donor has been canceled during the pandemic.

New Schemes

In our recent proposal preparations, we resorted to virtual training as an alternative and substitute for in-person training.

Exploring Income-generating Schemes

As a professional association, we rely on the knowledge potentials of our members. We are making efforts to undertake research for the House of Peoples Representatives, which contacted our association to submit a TOR. In addition, a business organization has requested for us to prepare a training manual and conduct training for its employees. Preparations are underway to invite qualified association members to carry out these projects.

Panel Discussion

A/to Ameha Mekonnen

A/to Debebe brought up some excellent points, speaking both on issues and solutions. He provided us with an adequate description of professional associations, including their aims and organizational structures. The problems they are facing were also seen on two fronts; financial and operational. I would like to add one issue related to finance and membership fees; the ability of the members to pay these fees. The question is, are they economically sound enough to pay? This can be directly connected to the Ethiopian Lawyers Association. As we are all aware, the courts were closed so the members were not working and did not have an income. My own organization, Lawyers for Human Rights faced the same issue. Members of the Teachers Association had their salaries reduced, therefore is it reasonable to ask such members to pay fees?

One of the solutions A/to Debebe mentioned was the use of digital platforms. For instance, my organization had plans to provide training for lawyers regarding human rights. Our plan was to provide the training in Gondar and Hawasa, and we had booked a hotel and finalized our plans. However, when the pandemic emerged and the restrictions on travel and gatherings were put in place, we were unable to proceed as planned. As a solution, we decided to re-allocate the budget from the hotel and the event space to an online learning management system and hired IT professionals to provide the training online for around 50 lawyers. We have prepared a training manual and training sessions were recorded with presentations and assessment systems. Thus, we need to do more research about digitalization and prepare toolkits that will help serve as a guide on how to handle the challenges of COVID-19.

A/to Manyawkal mentioned the managerial steps that were taken to have an uninterrupted workflow and the opportunities created by the pandemic. Additionally, he mentioned the protection of our members' interests and the use of

technology as another opportunity, which allowed organizations to look for alternative financial solutions. These are all great ideas, and I would like to bring up one or two questions. Firstly, as I insinuated previously, we have seen the effects of COVID-19 on civic societies in general, and specifically on professional associations. = Can we go deeper than that and look at effects based on thematic areas? Do we need guidelines that will serve as a reference? Secondly, as you both mentioned, most work is becoming technology dependent, but there has not been much investment in technology by the government. In fact, there was more focus on controlling online platforms, and this is still ongoing. Should we challenge such control and push for the liberalization of accessibility? Additionally, I have seen several webinars fail, especially international ones. Therefore, should we push for better services and ask the government to consider this as social responsibility?

A/to Debebe Hailegebriel

Thank you A/to Ameha. With regards to an issue, you mentioned earlier regarding the inability of members to pay membership fees, I am in full agreement with your statement as this a major ongoing problem.

With regards to the guidelines, we are very behind on this. For example, in my organization, we were able to develop and employ a guideline within one month. When it comes to financial verification, in the old days we used to verify physically but now we have made it virtual.

In terms of thematic areas, we have seen what can be done with regard to COVID-19 and what areas were impacted. When the courts closed, one of the things we argued for was that the courts can still work and be safe simultaneously. Therefore, such guidelines are necessary. The other issue is regarding IT. In my experience, the major problem is network unreliability and the issue with power outages. Poor infrastructure is slowing down the process of progress and we will need to reflect and work on improving that.

A/to Manyawkal Mekonnen

I would like to add few points regarding the specific guidelines. These guidelines should be prepared depending on the sector and based on different scenarios, not only for COVID-19 but for any type of work we perform. We should get used to and be prepared to adapt to different scenarios. Both civil societies and professional associations usually respond to crises rather than being prepared for them beforehand.

Regarding online liberalization, the problems that you mentioned are real, but the issue is much bigger than that. For instance, internet access in Ethiopia is limited, and only a small percentage of society has internet access. Thus, is it possible to do meaningful work with these limitations? One of the biggest issues we face is a matter of digital access for the general population; we should not only focus on urban areas. There is also the issue of expense; it is expensive to use the internet in Ethiopia compared to any part of Africa, therefore this issue needs serious consideration.

With regards to the issue of membership fees, these challenges also existed before the pandemic but are now heightened. New members are also finding it difficult to pay, we must support our members as I previously mentioned. I also fully agree with the ideas you raised on how to collect membership fees.

A/to Ameha Mekonnen

Regarding digital access, the issues you raised are correct; there is limited access and connection issues even within government organizations. We experienced such issues within my organization recently whilst giving training in partnership with USAID on the new correctional facilities proclamation. We provided a training session in Bahirdar for Amhara and Afar officials, and the

pandemic emerged when we were planning another event in Adama. This second event was postponed and we experienced issues when trying to successfully complete the session. There were participants from Oromia, Sidama, and Gambela, and the officials in correctional facilities from Gambela stated that they do not use the internet and do not have access as an organization. From the southern region, we were looking for 25 trainees only 10 officials had an email address. In Oromia, we expected 35 trainees, but only 7 had an email address. Additionally, when we asked for the email addresses to send links through, they were only able to do so after much difficulty. Furthermore, only 1 person from Sidama was able to gain internet access. Therefore, the problem is not just a CSO issue, we must find a solution for those who use our services too. We need to push for the government to solve this issue.

Another issue is about a debate raised regarding grant-making organizations. I have had some experience with them, and I understand that they are responsible for the money being granted, and must ensure that their grants are being used appropriately. This should be taken into consideration by CSOs. For example, Lawyers for Human Rights used to work with the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). When the pandemic emerged, we took initiative and informed the NED of the declaration of a state of emergency and the restrictions that were enforced. We were unable to conduct our consultative workshops and training sessions. Instead, we suggested focusing our energy on the preparation of guidelines, such as for strategic litigation, rather than training sessions on strategic litigation. Therefore, is it not true that such initiatives, that allow grant-making organizations to be more comfortable with providing grants, should be encouraged by CSOs?

A/to Manyawkal Mekonnen

From our experience, grant organizations are flexible; if there is a workable alternative, they are willing to adapt. As I previously said, we should not always be responding to crises, we should be prepared for them. If we are able to show grant-making organizations alternative methods of operation, I don't think that there will be much resistance from them regarding changes. Nevertheless, we will need some sort of consultation on designing projects to make sure they actually answer the problems and issues faced. I believe we will be more successful if we begin such preparations from the beginning of the design. I have participated in many consultations on a delegation level where we discussed what should be prioritized. I am aware that such projects exist, but we need them in more specific areas and CSOs should design their programs in an organized manner for effectiveness and value for money.

Closing Remarks

A/to Ameha Mekonnen,

Executive Director of Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR)

"Although we had a small number of participants, we had an effective and productive discussion. We had a well-experienced and knowledgeable panelist who educated us on several topics. I think we all learned something here and I would like to thank everyone personally. I will now pass on the responsibility of making today's discussion a reality to the CSRC, and once again I would like to thank our panelists, participants, and the organizers."

The Impact of COVID-19 on Civil Society in Ethiopia: Financial Challenges

December 28, 2020
14:00 – 17:00 GMT +3

The Impact of COVID-19 on Civil Society Organizations in Ethiopia: Financial Challenges

The fourth webinar "The impact of COVID 19 on Civil Society Organizations in Ethiopia: Financial Challenges" was conducted on December 28, 2020, 2:00 PM – 5:00 PM East African Time (GMT +3). The webinar was attended by 29 participants plus two panelists, one moderator, and two hosts. The program of the webinar was structured in two presentations by Fassikaw M. Amera and Selamawit Menkir followed by a discussion session between panelists and the moderator; and a closing remark by A/to Dan Yirga

Presentations

The Impact of COVID 19 on Civil Society Organizations in Ethiopia: Financial Challenges (focusing on measures taken, adaptive mechanisms and ways forward)

> Presented by Selamawit Menkir
> Country Director of Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy

Possible Financial Difficulties

There was a lack of anticipation and preparedness for COVID-19 which resulted in unplanned expenses. Since the first case of COVID-19 was reported on March 13th or 14th, CSOs faced financial difficulties in newfound expenses for creating material to raise awareness; for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to ensure the safety of staff; for IT infrastructure to adapt to the new work from home lifestyle; and for logistics such as transport services and larger meeting rooms that accommodate for social distancing. However, the new working lifestyle is considered as a low-burn rate, meaning that the primary focus on virtual work and meetings seemingly costs less than pre-COVID-19. Although there might have been an initial need for an extra budget, in the long-term the expenses are less.

Best Way to Address the Challenges: Adaptive Mechanism

The first step in the adaptive mechanism was assessing and understanding the change of context caused by COVID-19. Upon understanding the effects, the second step was to search for mechanisms to prevent the spread of COVID-19 whilst continuing business as usual. Thirdly, it was imperative to analyze the resources required to ensure the protection of staff as well as adjusting projects to the new preventative measures. This requires the scrutiny of the initial project implementations, the commitments made to donors and partners in governmental organizations, and the deals made to the community the CSOs are working with. Using these analyses, the practical adjustments are shared with the pertinent

parties. Fourthly, these preventative mechanisms and adjustments are implemented in a way that is cautious and observant of COVID-19. Finally, this leads to the full adjustment and creation of the new working norm such as working from home. However, the killing of the artist Hachalu has shown us that we must not rely entirely on the internet connection as this is erratic within the Ethiopian context. As such, we must brainstorm new ways to adapt to ensure the commitments made to donors and communities are met in a timely manner.

Measures taken by CSOs

The first priority was to protect the staff and their family members from COVID-19. This was done by ensuring that the staff remains connected while working from home. As such, program commitments continued to be delivered effectively. This also required lobbying to be done with donors who initially wanted to pause their commitments in order to ensure the timely deliverance of their commitments. The donor commitments were mainly problematic in other parts of Africa, yet no major donor commitments have been wavered in Ethiopia.

Additionally, a new approach to programming was taken to guarantee that the target community is protected from COVID-19 and not retracted to poverty or human rights violations. Focusing not only on COVID-19 but alternatively increasing access to health, education, and agriculture of the community to improve their quality of life. This is achieved through outreach programs to provide the vulnerable with PPE materials and life-saving items. The distribution of items such as sanitizers, masks, food, and medicine were accomplished by mobilizing the community and lobbying donors for more funding to continue their work more successfully. As such, COVID-19 presented an opportunity to work closely with the community and gain increased support and acceptance from them.

Increased IT usage for short (<one day) meetings and training

The quick adaptation to virtual meetings has made meetings shorter and more accessible. Going forward, gathering in a hall for a meeting will only take place for seminars or sessions that will take more than a few days, shorter ones will continue to be held virtually. However, the issue of reliable internet connection as well the lack of technological capacity in the participants remain. Thus, as we continue to a more grassroots level, physical meetings may be necessary.

New or adjusted definition of result measurement, efficiency, and effectiveness required which should be agreed upon with donors

COVID-19 caused a change in input and output for projects, and as a result, a redefinition of the result measurement was necessary. Additionally, the goals of the project also needed to be rearticulated to donors and partners as these needed to be cautious of COVID. An increase in efficiency and effectiveness can be observed as several things were done to ease the challenges caused by COVID-19. For example, more working hours were added to ensure that donor commitment is not lost. This has emphasized the importance of flexibility in these times.

The need for increased CSO agility and scenario planning for management (quick and sustainable way of adapting to disasters and changing contexts)

Another thing we learned is the need for agility, adaptive management, and scenario planning in CSOs not just in Ethiopia, but around the world. We have seen organizations with scenario planning move to action faster and are quicker to adapt to new challenges than those who do not.

Increased solidarity (CSO sector and the staff was looking into options and mobilizing the community to support each other)

There has been a significant increase in solidarity amongst CSOs. We saw formerly competitive organizations attempt to work together and support one another. They tried to combine their resources to assist and mobilize their community and support the government. They also changed the course of funding which was gathered on a personal (from salary), local and national level.

Resources to see learning:

1. Solidarity the time of COVID-19 Civil Society Response to the Pandemic. https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/solidarity-in-the-time-of-covid-19_en.pdf
2. The impact of COVID on African CSO: challenges, responses and opportunities. https://desert2desert4socialcauses.com/2020/06/30/new-report-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-african-civil-society-organizations/amp/?__twitter_impression=true

In my opinion, the civil society reviews two materials that have been mentioned here, and I think this will serve as a good input.   The first was compiled in the early days of COVID, 3 months into the pandemic the latter one was done pretty recently last November. And I think these two documents will be and we can share our experiences on. Especially if it is written down or recorded like we're doing right now it will expand the stage for experience sharing. These are the few materials I found and I'm sharing the link as I believe they will help all of us.

Way Forward: How to Plan for the Future

In the future, it is important to build the capacity to work adaptively when facing new challenges. This requires frequent revision of activity and financial plans as well as regularly updated context analyses. To transform newfound challenges into opportunities, fundraising needs to be prioritized by expanding community networks. We have observed that CSOs that prioritized fundraising accomplished

their work quicker than others. Additionally, CSOs should come together and work in consortiums, especially when unpredictable disasters happen, in order to ensure the community is served appropriately. Quality management practices (customer focus; leadership; people involvement; process approach; a systematic approach to management; continual improvement; factual approach to decision making; mutually beneficial supplier relations) should also be strengthened to uphold the quality of CSOs

Exploring the Impact of COVID-19 and New Ways of Coping with the Financial Challenges by Civil Society Organizations

Presented by Manyawkal Mekonnen
Director-General of Ethiopian Lawyers' Association

First, let's look at the status of Ethiopian civil societies with the new national administration. One of the first reforms, besides changing the name of the institution that used to govern the organization, was updating the law that used to govern the sector. This was an attempt to foster an environment for the sector to involve itself in national activities relating to development, democratic peacekeeping, etc. As such, there is a relative improvement in opportunities compared to the past. We have overcome several challenges and we are growing as a sector.

As per the new law, agencies were required to re-register with the agency. Registration ended on megabit 3, 2013 EC, and the first COVID-19 case was registered on megabit 4 2013 EC, a year after the new law was implemented. The pandemic retracted the progress made in the sector which was not just limited to funding but affected all aspects of activity. As the pandemic led us into lockdown, CSOs had shut down their offices in order to protect their employees from COVID-19. However, CSOs cannot simply stop working as there are communities that are dependent on their work. CSOs must keep a larger goal in mind and be more organized than other institutions that chose to shut down after the pandemic. When the government decided only 30% of employees needed to be physically present in the office for the governmental institutions, there was a call for similar actions to be taken for CSOs, especially by the agency. However, CSOs should be able to face issues head-on without trepidation to save not only themselves but also help others.

The financial challenges caused by COVID-19 caused a disruption in CSO activities. Several CSOs experienced suspensions in funding due to uncertainty or could not find funding at all. Ongoing projects with an approved budget were paused or downscaled because of uncertainty and fear they might lose the funding, in turn causing a negative effect on the beneficiaries. Initially, there was an issue of flexibility with the donors, however, this changed as donors approved of COVID-19 related work to be done. CSOs received limited assistance from the agency's emergency fund but there was no established policy anticipating the situation caused by COVID-19. CSOs face the threat of permanent closure as the government made no attempt to aid them in their work. Additionally, despite the government implementing a law to prevent termination of employment, CSOs faced many lawsuits as they were left with no choice but to lay off employees as they became unaffordable amidst the financial problems. Refineries that support children, the elderly, and women were the first to see the consequences of the financial problems. The new law allows CSOs to participate in trade and have a source of independent income, yet most are donor dependent emphasizing the lack of knowledge to mobilize finances.

The lack of technological infrastructure and technological illiteracy is another issue COVID-19 has highlighted. As part of the agenda of the agency, it is imperative that the sector is modernized for example by shifting, for example, from physical filing systems to virtual/digital storage systems. Additionally, the agency has designed a project and hired consultants, and requesting for online submissions instead of hard copies. In this way, we hope to normalize and expand break the technological barrier that became apparent during COVID-19.

Although the sector faced many issues, CSOs were on the front line in the fight against COVID-19. National campaigns in support of the government were organized. After the initial confusion of COVID-19, a major digital transformation can

be observed by the introduction of new programs related to COVID-19. When dealing with the problems of international funding, there was an effort to find and raise domestic funds instead. This was done by increasing membership fees, crowdfunding, and through the help of SCO. These issues fostered sector-wide solidarity where CSOs that were well off supported those in need.

These responses show us an optimistic future for the sector; however, some things still need to be considered. Firstly, CSOs working with vulnerable communities such as children, and the elderly, HIV who face the threat of permanent closure should be supported to protect these communities. This demonstrated the need to ensure that financial planning should anticipate the unexpected by the creation of an emergency fund, for example. Aside from COVID-19, recent political events show that contextual changes are erratic, and the financial system should not be susceptible to these. This should be discussed with the donors as well.

Next, CSOs need an independent and reliable source of income rather than being donor dependent. A system for local donors to work together with the government in order to strengthen domestic funding and develop a culture of charity should be established. Those who want to provide funding should be informed on the intended use of their resources in a transparent way. We need a strong permeant network especially those working on similar subjects and this networking should also include financial support. Additionally, the business community needs to work on their corporate accountability together with CSOs. Strong engagement between governmental bodies and the community will help create credibility and consistency as expected from the sector. Lastly, a civil society fund should be established by the government and development partners in order to face challenges in the time of crises.

Panel Discussion

The presentations were followed by a panel discussion with the two presenters.

Questions

A/to Dan Yirga

A/to Fassikaw discussed the previous status of CSOs and the reform of the proclamation had opened up a new pathway to growth in the sector as several restrictions were removed allowing us to get our job done more efficiently. Following the pandemic, this sector had faced several challenges, some were even shut down. Even in my personal experience with EWAA, we couldn't hold our general assembly in time, and we couldn't meet our reporting compliance. This issue was not just an issue for us, several organizations have faced that challenges not limited to finances, but also logistics as meetings could not be held due to the state of emergency. Regarding finances, indeed several funds were put on hold: for example, an organization named IRI pulled funding because not only because of COVID-19 but also because of the postponed election. There are about 3000 actively registered CSOs, their challenges and need for support have been emphasized. CSOs were unable to deliver the annual audit report in time to the agency, and so we are grateful that the agency extended the deadline. Additionally, most CSOs receive their income from foreign countries, however, we need to work a permanent and independent source of income and generate our funds locally. Next, the need for digitalization is apparent as CSOs were greatly affected by anachronistic methods of record-keeping and communication.

He also described the issue of planning as we did not anticipate nor prepare for COVID-19, leading us to the issues we faced. Donors should also be flexible in their support by discussing unforeseen challenges. Also, local resource mobilization has been mentioned earlier: we should work on ensuring business tycoons take their corporate social responsibility more seriously by adding this to our advocacy

strategy. Once again, I would like to thank our presenters and I would like to open up the floor for ideas, comments, and questions.

A/to Anteneh Alebachew

Thank you A/to Ameha. You mentioned a question earlier regarding membership fees. You said COVID-19 affected not only membership fee collection but the ability for members to pay. I fully agree with that statement. Secondly, we are behind on developing guidelines. For example, in my organization, we were able to develop and employ a guideline within the span of one month. When it comes to financial verification, in the old days we used to verify physically but now we have made it virtual. In terms of thematic areas, we have seen what can be done with regards to COVID-19 and what areas were impacted. As you remember, the courts were closed. One of the things we argued was that courts should work while still being safe by finding a balance between safety and business continuity. So, we do need such guidelines. Thirdly, the technological barrier is not solely caused by a lack of technological capacity. Rather, the major issue lies in the unreliability of networks, power outages, and poor infrastructure. These issues slow down progress and we will need to reflect and work on improving that.

A/to Yonas Dejene

Ethiopian Road Safety Association

An organization will only be as strong as its financial capacity: most companies have a business continuity plan that was made in response to the pandemic, but if we had that in hand, we could have avoided several setbacks. Secondly, we should create a platform for the business community to fulfill its corporate responsibility. Our organization Ethiopian Road Safety Association believes our asset is the public. In order to get their resources, there needs to be a clear mechanism in place by facilitating tax incentives, for example. Another thing I think can be done is having sectors make them compete and show the ones perfuming to the public and incentivize efficiency and supporting the community and create proactive

engagement. We should also study the effects of digital technology and how we can strengthen ourselves. As mentioned by A/to Fassikaw, the emergency fund should not only be from the government but also include other parties. To add to what was said previously, we must strengthen our grant writing as we are missing opportunities because of this.

Dr. Ismael Habtamu

EU Ethiopia

As the panelist said we should be adaptive and host meetings online, however, I am seeing a new issue regarding digital signatures. We tried to hold our general assembly online using electronic signatures and we have also tried to create gender equality by bringing women forward. So, my question is the reform actually reaching the ground when working virtually is difficult and not accepted by the agency. The minutes, with a digital signature, which we have submitted have not been accepted by the agency yet. This hinders us in our pursuit to work virtually despite our methods being internationally accepted. We should have more discussion on the actual implementation on the ground and the challenges being faced especially with A/to Fassikaw.

A/to Kaleab Werku

Hadiya Youth Association

I have some comments on Selamawit's presentations. It was organized clear and precise it was very informative and deeply appreciated, however immediate response preparedness should be included in strategic plans looking forward. Next is multisector networks: is there a network with other sectors such as health and education? If there is a link, is there a planned work through that link? Thirdly, when organizing conferences (virtual or physical) we should provide certificates to motivate and recognize participants. In regards to the new proclamation discussed and the establishment of the civil service board, my question is having the board been established? And if it has not, what has been planned?

This was a wonderful discussion; I just want to bring up four points. Firstly, there was an instance in which developmental policy changes and COVID-19 occurred at the same time. These policy changes were quite different from the past policies where we had a public discussion over them, but this wasn't seen on GTP one. In the new policy, CSOs didn't have a chance to put their input in societal discussions so we should look at the challenges created by COVID-19 on public consultation. We need to have better societal participation in regional and national policies. Secondly, services that address the society directly on the challenges that COVID-19 brought about and how these can be overcome should be created. Next, is there work being done that targets COVID-19 itself as a social challenge? Finally, one of the things COVID-19 affected was justice courts as these were initially closed. After they were opened, there were still limitations so what work was done with regard to justice in this aspect?

Answers

A/to Fassikaw

I shall be building upon the suggestions made by the discussants and answer the questions directed towards the agency. First the issue Anteneh brought up is to what capacity can CSOs participate and wouldn't small businesses be difficult for them. Previously a CSO could only participate in businesses, with permission from the agency, if the businesses were directly related to the work the CSO is established to do. However, the law has changed where any CSO can participate in any form of legal business without permission from the agency. The only requirement is that the agency is notified within 15 days of obtaining a proper license. Independent business companies working together with CSOs should ensure sustainable continuity and function as their own entity, as well as being owned by a CSO in order to have a permanent income. The CSO should work accordingly with national laws and hold their businesses accountable by presenting reports to the agency. The reporting criteria have been developed in accordance with the proclamation of the nation's trade and TA policies. Thus, the challenge lies in figuring out what kind of businesses we should collaborate with, how to collaborate with them and where the capital should come from. We need to think about this study and consult professionals.

As mentioned by Yonas, there is a need to develop philanthropic culture and promote corporate responsibility. The new proclamation of tax allows for creating the incentive to support CSOs by allowing a tax waiver. The sector should actively lobby the government to figure out the help we need and work on a way to implement work with the revenues minister of the trade ministry. This can be a project for think tanks.

On the topic of similar regular discussions being organized, this webinar series is specific to the effect of COVID-19 on CSOs, however the opportunity to take other initiatives and discuss other issues that affect CSOs are highly

encouraged and supported by the agency. In order for this to work effectively, we need to strengthen professional associations to conduct research on different issues faced by CSOs. We are currently working on research with A/to Yonas' organization where we have organized a new department for research and would like to establish a research advisory council that points out topics for research. This should be taken as an important topic and this is one of the aims when the center was established.

The next idea brought up is the ranking of CSOs. There were attempts made to achieve this, yet it was discontinued as there were no objective criteria for the ranking. This calls for an organized and fair way to judge. Thus, we are developing a monitoring and evaluation system by hiring a consultant in partnership with the EU. We are developing manuals that help categorize CSOs into ABC categories as well as green list and yellow list categories. Additionally, the CSO council is in the last stages of establishing a joint committee to design a code of conduct for the sector and building a bridge between stakeholders, however, COVID-19 is delaying this. This will be a self-governing body for the sector where the council should classify the CSOs and rank the sector. Last Saturday we elected council members by gathering all consortium CSOs. Unfortunately, of the 1500 active CSOs in the consortium, 700 were expected, but only 250 participated. The lack of commitment and participation from the chosen representatives reflected an egregious misuse of finances.

The issue raised by Dr. Ismael about digital signatures: We have backward work processes we need to fix through reformations and capacity building. We aim to build a fair and just institution, and these kinds of issues are new to the country. Therefore, we need to review the law and how it affects banking, but we will find a solution together.

The board has not been established yet as three members of the board are to be appointed by the CSO council. As such, the delay in the establishment of the

CSO council also delayed the establishment of the board. Nonetheless, the establishment of the board remains a priority for the CSO council.

On the question of strengthening networks with other sectors: we have held a meeting together with developmental partners and the Prime Minister in which these issues were brought up. This resulted in the inclusion of CSOs in the 10-year development plan and there is room for cooperation. There is a responsibility for CSOs to work together within our respective fields: for example, CSOs working on health should work with the Ministry of Health just as CSOs that work around peace work together with the Ministry of Peace. The entry points per region are the office of finance per region and those who register them per region are attorney generals so we had a meeting with these bodies on hider 5 and 6 regions and what we agreed on is the need for link and cooperation in CSOs and we have formed a common formed and it has been signed. And there are plans to hold meetings based on focus areas and we will also need your help.

CSOs should actively participate in the 10-year developmental plan and engage with the community to see if the plan was successful, as per the proclamation which states that our work needs to align with governmental plans. There were opportunities for discussion particularly regarding vulnerable groups and at smaller levels. Besides the 10-year developmental plan, there is also a need for the agency to have a 10-year plan for CSOs as we are expecting to see growth from 3,000 to 14,000 CSOs in the next ten years. This needs to be revised regularly according to the situation and incorporate a national CSO research institute.

The last question regarding the closure of courts and legal aid: to reduce expenses we can promote volunteerism by establishing a volunteer engagement policy in CSOs. Students who want to help the organization and who we can help in return. We have planned a panel discussion on volunteerism and how to grow the culture.

Selamawit Menkir

Country Director of Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy
There are apparent limits in the capacity of local civil societies on things like proposal writing, grant writing skills, etc. This emphasizes the need for a strong network; when we have a strong network, we don't have to look so hard for opportunities as networks will provide them. There are ample opportunities in the regions and Addis Ababa to discuss and create awareness about the new law as organized by the agency to strengthen CSOs. The problem lies in the fact that CSOs are not participating, with over 500 absentees in the last meeting, while this sector is supposed to be the voice for others. It is imperative that we keep up with new information, strengthen the network, and keep ourselves accountable to the agency. Our job is not limited to simply finding a donor for a project and implementing that. We should work on including organizations that should be a member of networks and if they can't, they need to have a plan to compensate for that. It's not wrong to ask for help from the agency but we should not rely only on them, it is up to us as well.

When considering the 3000 CSOs, we should be mindful to not speak on them in a monolithic way: we need to look at things based on our sector, our community, and donors when discussing COVID's immediate response. There is no cookie-cutter approach: the key factors to consider are networking, quality management practices, making decisions based on research and evidence, having consistent conversations with stakeholders. Low-level information exchange such as change of officers should be communicated over the phone rather than face-to-face, I consider this preparedness plan, related to agility and flexibility, to come from leadership. We have no excuse right now: in the past, we used to blame it on the law, but that is no longer an issue. As I have said, compared to other African countries donor commitment is much stronger in Ethiopia as we had challenges

before COVID-19 that required donor support. However, as Dan said the money mint for the election was halted when the election was postponed. This is a layered issue as we are living in a transition period and we need to be creative with our solutions. The sector should be very strong and independent: aside from the financial challenges we focused on today, other issues such as poverty and human rights violations remain. For example, despite the great discussions about COVID-19, CSOs working on human rights were discussing how to prevent human rights violations during the state of emergency. This was considered a luxury as they were not considered as important as COVID-19, which emphasizes the importance of balancing immediate needs and strategic needs.

The 10-year developmental plan was not inclusive initially as mentioned during the meeting with the Prime Minister. The plan was approved without discussing with the community which raises questions on the implementation of this plan by the civil society center. COVID-19 was a good learning opportunity; each training and workshop needs to be documented and made available. This way new-comers can learn from us, and this can be done by the agencies research department. looking at things based on specialty what does it mean for CSO working in education because a school serves a higher purpose than only education. It provides protection against early marriage and it protects against rape etc.… so how do we solve this issue doing such things and being creative is up to the civil society organizations. We can't separate programs and finance one supports the others. The number of CSOs is small in comparison to the population, which is part of the reason why some are falling behind. We need strong leadership in finding a network, demanding from the network, questioning the agency, and challenging the government is up to the CSOs working on democracy, election, and human rights.

Closing Remarks

A/to Dan Yirga,

Executive Director of EHRCO

Several useful points have been pointed out some even brand-new ideas that we should focus on and work on and I will not repeat them. I would like to thank the presenters and the Civil Society Resource Center for preparing this event it was very useful and important. Also thank you to the participants you made some excellent points and I hope you too got what you needed from this event. In the future when such events are organized, we need to claim our space by participating we haven't done that yes as Selamawit and Fasikaw mentioned. I will double down and say that a big hurdle has been removed by the new law but we didn't work as we should we are not doing our job the agency is doing our job for us we need to claim our space deliver on our promises and for that we need to use such spaces well. Once again, I would like to recommend participants to take part in future events.

The Impact of COVID-19 on Civil Society in Ethiopia: Regulatory Challenges

January 25, 2021
14:00 – 17:00 GMT +3

The fifth webinar "The Impact of COVID-19 on Civil Society in Ethiopia: Regulatory Challenges" was conducted on January 25, 2021, 2:00 PM – 5:00 PM East African Time (GMT +3). The webinar was attended by 49 participants plus two panelists, one moderator, and three hosts. The program of the webinar was structured in an opening statement by two presentations by A/to Jima Dilbo and Ahmed Hussien moderated by Dr. Abadir M. Ibrahim followed by Q&A; a panel discussion with the presenters.

Opening Statements

Dr. Abadir M. Ibrahim

Head of Secretariat Legal and Justice Affairs Advisory Council

Thank you, our honored guests, for accepting our invitation and attending our webinar. As we all know, we have seen a lot of changes that COVID-19 has brought, not only in Ethiopian society but the world as a whole. Today, we are discussing the impact of COVID-19 on the Ethiopian Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and specifically the challenges brought on by the regulations introduced. Our two panelists will delve into this topic and talk about the regulatory challenges from their perspective.

Presentations

Regulatory Challenges encountered by Ethiopian Civil Society Organizations

Presented by Jima Dilbo

Director-General of FDRE Agency for Civil Society Organizations (ACSO)

Introduction

Since the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 as a pandemic, organizations have been impacted economically, politically, and socially. As a response, countries all over the world have taken different measures to protect their people and minimize the impact. Ethiopia declared a 5-month state of emergency to limit the spread of COVID-19 in accordance with Article 93 of the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Following its approval by the Council of Ministers, Proclamation 3/2020, also known as the "A State of Emergency Proclamation Enacted to Counter and Control the Spread of COVID-19 and Mitigate Its Impact.", made its passage through the House of Peoples' Representatives on Friday 10 April 2020. The main goal of the proclamation was to counter and mitigate the humanitarian social, economic and political damage that could be caused by the pandemic. The following measures included in the proclamation directly affected civil society:

- Prohibition of a public gathering of more than four people
- Prohibition of cross-country public transportation and inter-city public transportation
- Termination of employment contracts was not allowed
- Public and private schools were closed
- The use of mask and sanitary materials were mandatory
- Employees were on forced leave and only half of the staff members could be present

Although these measures were taken, the pandemic has still claimed lives and affected the population economically. A study showed that COVID-19 has impacted tourism significantly as 80% of international flights were canceled. COVID-19 has affected the socio-economic aspect of people's lives by the increased unemployment rate, inflation, poverty, permanent closure of businesses, and weakened major economic and social sectors, which indirectly affects the peace and safety of citizens. Ethiopian CSOs were affected by COVID-19 considerably as these organizations depend on international donors. The CSOs that provide services for women, children, and the elderly were impacted by COVID-19 more than any other CSOs. There were the CSOs that were forced to close due to COVID-19. Other CSOs were unable to retain their staff members or forced out of their office spaces. For people that seek special support, civil societies have served as a magic bullet because it focuses on these members of the community. According to a study conducted by Catherine Sozi, an additional 2 million people have gone into poverty and more than 15 million people are in need of a safety net in Ethiopia. The study also shows that 10 – 15% of work has been shut down and 3.2 – 4 million people will be unemployed.

Regulatory Challenges

COVID-19 emerged the day after CSOs completed re-registration at the agency. The first problem that CSOs were unable to submit their reports: those following by the European calendar failed to submit because COVID-19 started as soon as the reports were due, and those that follow the Ethiopian calendar could not submit their reports because there were still a lot of uncertainties and meetings couldn't be held because of the state of emergency declared. Additionally, this sector has been traumatized by draconian law for the last 10 years (2009 -2019). COVID-19 took place during the transition period from this draconian law to a more open one. Upon completion of re-registrations, the Agency itself and different CSOs

were unable to accomplish the initial plans they had set out for themselves because of COVID-19. For example, a CSO council was to be established in April. However, because of the state of emergency's prohibition on meetings, the establishment of the CSO council was delayed. Additionally, organizations could not maintain commitments made to their beneficiaries or meet their deadlines. This is because the COVID-19 response had to be prioritized over their initial plans. The establishment of the CSO council would have been helpful in this case.

Measures Taken to Mitigate the Challenges

1. As CSOs were not able to present their reports for the initial deadline of March 30, 2020, an extension was granted until April 30, 2020, and June 30, 2020. When that didn't work, the organizations were given the opportunity to get their audit and activity reports approved by their board members.

2. CSOs that requested to change their programs to COVID-19 response work was approved by the agency. The sector has helped prevent the spread of COVID-19 and its impact on the community. The Agency and CSOs started working on constructive engagement in January which allowed a good relationship to be established, which has helped us combat COVID-19 together. The sector mobilized more than ETB 5 million.

3. Following the state of emergency, an impact assessment survey was conducted with organizations that work with community members that need special support. The results showed that the relationship between donors and CSOs has been strained and, in some cases, terminated. It also showed the financial problems and challenges for delivery services faced by CSOs. Since the organizations could not deliver the services they promised, the community that needed their support were affected. We also saw that

women and children who were most affected by COVID-19 were women and children, making up 52.8%.

4. The Agency has drafted more than 10 guides; however, the regulatory framework has delayed its approval. Although the state of emergency has been lifted, the circumstances are not suitable for us to continue.

Measures to be taken in the future

- There should be a broad and detailed study that shows the level of impact that COVID-19 had on CSOs beyond the scope of this webinar. There are studies on the impact of COVID-19 on CSOs conducted by different parties. These studies should be collected and the results compiled to help the CSOs appropriately.

- We should identify CSOs that require help (such as those that work on service delivery to vulnerable community groups) with transparency and accountability.

- Since there is no guarantee that COVID-19 will end soon, there should be an assessment of the gaps in policies and work on them. The policies should focus on community members that need special support.

- Since people in poverty and vulnerable community members are the ones that are being impacted by inflation, the government should work on lowering the VAT and other taxes on goods. I think CSOs should work on this.

- There should be support for CSOs and we should work together to strengthen this sector. CSOs that are capable should support other CSOs that are in need.

- We should also improve digital technology capacity. Since organizations have unequal technological capacity, there should circumstances in which different digital technologies are used for meetings.

- Programs like Safety Net, that focus on the vulnerable members of our communities should be underway.

Conclusion

The Agency for Civil Society Organizations has been taking CSO-friendly approaches. The Ethiopian society neglected the impact and consequences of COVID-19 especially after the state of emergency was lifted. The rules that the Ministry of Health introduced to mitigate the spread of the virus are not being enforced. CSOs should take this responsibility because it is better to be governed by an organization than a state of emergency being declared again. Everyone should follow the guides and rules that the Ministry of Health has introduced before the spread worsens. Therefore, the CSO sector should work on creating awareness on this topic.

Regulatory Challenges encountered by Ethiopian Civil Society Organizations.

Presented by Ahmed Hussien

Executive Director of Pro Development Network (PDN)

We can look at COVID-19 in three phases: - React, Response, and Return. When the pandemic hit, governments, civil societies, private companies, and society reacted and took appropriate measures. The civil society sector had crisis management meetings to discuss survival tactics and measures for the future. Employees were told to stay home and protect themselves since being in the office did not necessitate work being done. The government declared a state of emergency and the different regions also took measures to fight COVID-19. For example, the Amhara region closed its borders unless a negative COVID-19 test result was provided. Those who were in Addis and wanted to return to their homes in the Amhara region were denied entry, causing problems. Many companies had closed down and the community was deprived of services even if they had money.

The second phase is the response. The first is adjusting to the new reality. For example, CSOs used digital technology to stay in contact and work from home. The option to go to the office rather than work from home remained for half the staff. The government also responded to the pandemic by enforcing a lockdown to some degree. Other African countries were in complete lockdown, no flights were allowed. This led to some criticism of the Ethiopian government as it was thought to be too lenient and did not take the threat seriously.

The third phase is the return. This is all about using COVID-19 as an opportunity rather than only focusing on the negative. After the state of emergency was lifted, all employees were back to work, projects and activities continued, international donors were asking for reports and we were providing quality reports. This was a phase where many things went back to normal. During this stage, CSOs came together and contributed over ETB 5 million and some clothes, shoes, etc. to those in need. My organization assessed the situation in our area and, with the help

of donors, we're able to provide the community with necessary items such as flour, oil, etc. Mobilizing resources, and contacting donors is part of this phase.

The Impact of The State of Emergency

During the 5-month state of emergency public transportation was not as available which caused frustration among private companies, public organizations, and civil societies. Training required gatherings that were prohibited by the state of emergency. Digital technology was then considered as an option, yet even this had its limitations. There were a lot of connection issues, lack of technological literacy, and lack of infrastructures such as access to the internet which prevented people from attending meetings and webinars. Even in religious institutions gatherings were not the same and all the benefits that people got from those institutions were not available anymore.

CSOs that work outside of Addis were financially burdened because of COVID-19. For example, the number of people in a vehicle was restricted to two. This limited the amount of personnel that could travel to the project sites because most CSOs couldn't afford to rent more cars. Thus, there was an increase in expenditure.

Staying home also had its toll: children staying home were facing problems, husbands and wives were fighting more, etc. We saw how staying home has affected families, women, and children in different mainstream social media.

COVID-19 compromised projects that were almost completed, and funds for CSOs were taken back. There were even CSOs that were forced to close.

As known, CSOs have income-generating activities (IGA). The beneficiaries involved in IGA were affected by COVID-19. So, CSOs were forced to give subsidies to these beneficiaries. Since employment contracts could not be terminated during the time of the state of emergency, the organization was forced to handle all of it.

Panel Discussion

The presentations were followed by a panel discussion with the two presenters.

Questions

Abel Cherinet Debella

COVID-19 strongly impacted new or emerging CSOs, whilst simultaneously increasing the vulnerability of beneficiary communities. What can be done to avoid the possible shrinking among CSOs (especially emerging ones) and address the needs of the community?

Dr. Abadir M. Ibrahim

A/to Ahmed mentioned that things in Ethiopia are returning to normal, especially outside of Addis Ababa. There is the formal reality in which COVID-19 exists; the Ministry of Health reports that cases are rising and there are restrictions set up to stop the spread. However, there is a different reality within the people. For instance, during the holiday season, people did not seem to care about the pandemic and were not following the restrictions. It can be said that Ethiopian society has moved on to the post-COVID-19 phase, with adverse implications. If the ACSO is working with the assumption that things are not back to normal, would that not hold it back? Would the ACSO not be a few steps behind on social development? What can the ACSO do to fill this gap?

How did CSO's perceive the administrative accommodation that the ACSO made available to organizations? How did your organization perceive these services provided by the ASCO, such as intervention on the Civil Society Council? If you did use the accommodation, how did it make your work easier?

What is the Agency doing to help CSO's gain access to funds from international donors? In a crisis like this, what has ACSO done to support CSO's maintain their functionality?

Yonas

The reality at the moment is scary, both in Addis and outside. As we are social workers, should we not have a business plan ready for the future? As we saw in different studies, the majority of organizations did not have a business continuity plan and still do not. As a country, what is the plan to help the current situation that is happening in Tigray? How are we supposed to combat the challenges?

With regards to resource mobilization, there are redundant efforts made by different organizations. With issues that concern the whole country, would we not be more successful in addressing the issues if we mobilized resources from the whole country instead of doing so separately? CSO's that work on these types of issues should work together to face these challenges. I view the pandemic as an opportunity, so why not support the advantages of COVID-19 through studies? For instance, a meeting like this would have been costly if we were to meet face to face. We should use this technology in the future just like other countries. How do you see this?

Answers

A/to Jima Dilbo

With regards to the first question, I think this sector is quite fortunate when it comes to the reform, however not so much with managing the impact of COVID-19. The difference in the CSO sector compared to other sectors is that the pandemic emerged when CSOs were preparing to start work in an organized manner, following the re-registration of organizations. Due to this, the sector was yet facing two distinct challenges. On a positive note, the solidarity between the CSO community has grown. CSOs have supported each other and stood together to fight the virus, through the forum and other organized platforms. The pandemic has definitely affected the newly established CSO's like any other organization. However, we did take some measures when registering organizations. Prior to the pandemic, the minimum commitment required to register was that the individual would appear before the registering officers and show their intention to register the organization. If it is a board-led organization, the board members would have to sign in person. Yet due to COVID-19, the in-person requirement was removed for safety reasons. In addition, we have started posting information on our Facebook account and sending out emails so that people are able to get the information they need easily. We have also allowed for one person to be able to start the process of registration on behalf of the board. To our surprise, there were still organizations registering; we have registered over 1000 new organizations during the pandemic. Many of them made use of the enabling environment that was available to them and registered. Therefore, regarding service delivery from the Agency side, I don't think there were any problems, but we will hear that from them.

The next question that Dr. Abadir raised is also a great concern of my own. I recently traveled outside of Addis and people are continuing as though the virus does not exist anymore. Wearing a mask has become the norm in Addis, yet outside the city, people believe that there is no virus in their community, thus are not taking

it seriously. I question what the CSO community is doing to solve this problem. There is no official body that is working to enforce guideline 30/2013 which was established by the Ministry of Health. This is quite concerning, and we should discuss what the CSO sector should do. With regards to the services provided by the Agency, I believe that we are taking the necessary preclusions and protective measures. I think it is the community's responsibility to think about this and amend this problem.

The strength of the CSO sector is its independence from governmental influence. A CSO has the power to challenge government policies and initiate new ideas for policies. The aim of the Agency is to develop the capacity of CSOs, and we have been doing this through various means. We have been providing training and sharing ideas, but not in a way that would compromise the position of the Agency of the CSPO's. Our relationship is principled based and according to the law and won't allow anything else. In relation to support, we help organizations accomplish their objectives and goals properly. Since COVID-19 is a unique circumstance, we provided support letters to organizations that help vulnerable community members. The support letters were presented for other organizations that were capable of helping these organizations. This proved to be successful as some organizations received the support they sought, such as protective equipment and food aid. However, in order to get out of this situation in a sustainable manner and with the independence of the CSO's intact, we need to help them. A lot of CSO's are now asking for help from the public and we are allowing them to do that. As long as it is legal, we allow them to collect donations using different methods. Even though it is not in our jurisdiction, we have also sent support letters to private businesses so that they can help the CSO community. Besides this, we have also reached out to international and foreign CSO's to help the local ones.

A/to Yonas made a point that if we continue this way, we will be paying for it in the future and I agree with this. Thus, the CSO sector should continue to work to

strengthen itself. In addition, the CSO council has been established. This council should work towards organizing CSO's and should be prepared to respond to the pandemic and reduce the fallout. However, if we continue as we are without change, I fear that the CSO community will not exist anymore.

A/to Ahmed Hussien

With regards to the question raised about things going back to normal and society not taking the virus seriously, I see that as a major problem. I am currently in Kombolcha, Wollo and I see people shaking hands and not wearing masks when interacting with each other. They do not care about the pandemic at all and necessary measures are not being taken. There is a lot of work that I think we need to do in this regard as a sector. CSSP has provided us with a grant to work on this issue and to spread awareness across Ethiopia. We are currently working on the prevention of the spread of COVID-19 in all regions. We are also working with different organizations and the media to get the attention of the people and encourage them to start taking the necessary precautions again. There are situations in which the taskforces formed to battle this pandemic have been dismantled. For example, in the Afar region, the task force does not exist anymore. We are working to fix these issues.

In relation to ACSO, the accommodation of the Agency has helped us significantly. They were understanding and have helped us in many ways. We were able to present our reports without penalty because we were late and other organizations were able to give their reports without the approval of their general assembly. Furthermore, we were able to get in contact with the federal task force through the facilitation of the Agency, which we deeply appreciate. We were also able to form a task force that was dedicated to helping the people of Tigray in this difficult time. The Agency accepted us and registered us, and we were able to work with the peace minister and foreign affairs office. This was a practice developed

because of COVID-19, and it also helped us during this unfortunate period. Therefore, I believe that the Agency should keep that up as we appreciate the help very much.

CSO's has been affected by the pandemic significantly. There should be extraordinary measures taken because we serve society directly. All other sectors should help with this, including the government, and we in the CSO community should work together and uplift each other.

Comments and Recommendations

Edin Ibrahim

The major effects of COVID-19 on our organization are a lack of funds to support our operations.

Yemane Guesh

SYHLA

I think it is important for local CSOs to explore the possible opportunities of this pandemic in order to continue our intervention for our community.

Dr. Abadir M. Ibrahim

Whenever the CSO sector is mentioned, we often think of formal NGO sector organizations that take donations from international donors for their work. However, the one thing I want to mention is that the majority of charity work is done independently by civil societies and different groups. Charity work in the Ethiopian civil society is carried out using local money and local power. I think we always forget this.

Yonas

The majority of people usually resist the use of digital technology in this sector. However, we should insist on it, as we are living in a digital world. A lot of employees in agencies are working remotely while some have their employees in the office. We must get used to conducting meetings and webinars online because of the various advantages of doing so. We should be accepting of digital technology since it is in our palms. With regards to the business continuity plan, this is not just a concept that we must think about and develop, the whole country must also consider this.

A/to Ahmed Hussien

Digital technology has many advantages; we are all attending this webinar from different parts of the country. However, the majority of CSO's may not be able

to attend meetings and webinars, so this is a great platform to address the problem. There are situations where CSO's are invited to several meetings in one day. Digital technology will allow them to attend these meetings from the comfort of their home, and they do not have to stress about traveling to multiple locations. Thus, we should use this properly and save our time.

Conclusion

A/to Jima Dilbo

The problem we are currently facing is worldwide. The only way we can solve this is by working together and supporting each other. This problem is not something that one specific sector can handle. The government, the private sector, and the civil society sector should all work together to resolve the issues caused by the pandemic. In my opinion, civil societies have a huge responsibility in this regard. This is because the business sector works around commerce and profit, and the government has power and works towards keeping that power. At the end of the day, each of them has a personal goal they are trying to achieve. However, the civil society sector works for a public cause, therefore it should primarily take the responsibility of handling the pandemic, and serve as an example to other sectors. The organizations within the CSO sector should work together and show a united front to handle this pandemic. For instance, at the start of the pandemic, there was a lot of work being done to raise awareness through pamphlets and the media, but this has now stopped. We should not wait for a solution from the government and other parties, and we need to continue to work on creating awareness.

Another thing I want to mention is that we need to properly carry out an impact assessment. As I have mentioned before, we completed a small survey within the Agency, but we need a broader study. The Agency has set up a research and design department and we are trying to carry out more research. However, we must combine forces and work on this together to see the level of impact, in order to be well informed and have a response that is properly suited for this problem. We should not leave this to the government or other sectors. As a regulatory body, we will work to help CSO's in any way we can. We should also use digital technology to the fullest extent.

The last thing I would like to say is that the solidarity of the CSO sector is important and we should work towards strengthening that.

A/to Ahmed Hussien

A/to Jima has mentioned all that needs to be said. All I have to say is that CSOs should update themselves and there should be constant learning and problem solving; we need to develop these skills. The sector should learn to turn problems into opportunities.

COVID-19 is also getting more serious by the day and we should not continue like this. We should work to combat the pandemic until the end in all regions. We should update ourselves constantly, work together and adjust to different situations quickly as CSOs.

Thank you.

The Impact of COVID-19 on Civil Society in Ethiopia: The Closing Webinar

March 26, 2021
14:00-17:00 CMT +3

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The webinar on "The Impact of COVID-19 on Civil Society in Ethiopia: The closing webinar", held on March 26, 2021, was organized by the Civil Society Resource Center (CSRC) in collaboration with the Agency of Civil Society Organizations and the African Civic Leadership Program. The organizers would like to thank H.E Mr. Jimma Dilbo Denbel (Director General of ACSO), H.E Mr. Fasikaw Molla Amera (D/Director General of ACSO), Mr. Befikadu Hailu (Executive Director, CARD), and Mr. Seife Ayalew (Director of African Civic Leadership Program (ACLP))

Introduction

Recognizing the gap in knowledge about the impact of COVID-19 on Ethiopian CSO's, the Civil Society Resource Center (CSRC), in collaboration with the Agency of Civil Society Organizations (ACSO) and the African Civic Leadership Program (ACLP), is organized a webinar series on the impact of COVID-19 on the Civil Society Sector in Ethiopia. This webinar series focused on the operational, financial, and regulatory challenges that civil society organizations had to face due to the pandemic. It gave CSO's a platform to discuss the sector-specific difficulties and the measures that such organizations should take to address the problem.

The sixth webinar, "The impact of COVID 19 on CSOs: the closing webinar", was conducted on March 26, 2021, from 2:00 PM – 5:00 PM East African Time (GMT +3). The webinar was attended by 26 participants, two panelists, and one moderator. The program of the webinar included an opening statement by H.E Mr. Jima Dilbo Denbel and Mr. Seife Ayalew, three presentations by Henok Teshome, H.E Mr. Fasikaw Molla Amera, and Mr. Befikadu Hailu, and was followed by Q&A, a panel discussion with the presenters, and a closing remark by H.E. Mr. Jimma Dilbo Denbel.

As a concluding webinar, the sixth webinar covered operational, financial, and regulatory challenges discussed so far. Additionally, the webinar discussed the best way to address the challenges looking at how to regroup and plan for the future, and lessons that could be learned from this experience. The findings of the survey on "The Impact of COVID-19 on Civil Society in Ethiopia" were also presented. The survey was done by the Civil Society Center (CSC) and the Agency of Civil Society Organizations (ACSO). Besides this, CSRC aims to engage in systematically

documenting the webinar discussions and produce compiled proceedings with a set of policy recommendations for donors, civil societies, and government actors.

This report presents a summary of the presentations and the discussions from participants collected throughout the panel discussion. It also includes chat boxes dedicated to specific questions around the topic of the impact of COVID-19 on CSO's and the contents of the webinar.

Welcoming speech: Mr. Seife Ayalew, Executive Director of (ACLP)

Mr. Seife, after thanking the audience for attending the webinar, introduced the ACLP. Mr. Seife noted that the ACLP was established in 2016, in accordance with the relevant law of Maryland, and focuses on giving financial and technical assistance for CSO's working in the area of human rights and advocacy. Mr. Seife then went on to note that the ACLP had signed a memorandum of understanding with the FDRE Agency for Civil Society Organizations 6 months ago, to work on various projects as a partner. As part of this partnership, the ACLP is currently working on awareness creation and widening access to civil society laws. To this end, it has prepared a User Manual about the new civil society law and has also translated the manual into different languages including Amharic, Oromiffa, and Tigrigna, to make it accessible to a great number of people. This User Manual is also available online in an audiobook format.

Mr. Seife also noted that a survey on the 'impact of COVID 19 on Civil Society in Ethiopia' was conducted simultaneously with the webinar series on the impact of COVID-19 on CSOs. Mr. Seife indicated that the proceedings of the past five webinars, as well as today's webinar, will be transcribed and will be compiled into a proceeding report. Mr. Seife further noted that the ACLP regards this project as

successful and the results of the webinar and the survey in addition to the proceeding report will be used to prepare a 10-page policy brief.

At last, he concluded his welcoming speech by thanking panelists and participants for attending.

Opening remarks: H.E Mr. Jima Dilbo Denbel, Director General of the Agency for Civil Society Organizations (ACSO)

In his opening remark, Mr. Jima noted that he participated in the webinar series by taking a different role and stressed the importance of having such kinds of discussions to address the negative impact of COVID-19 on CSOs. He pointed out that the webinar was very helpful in mitigating the impact of COVID-19 on the sector. He further added CSO's should take adaptive measures to cope up with the new normal.

Summary of Presentations: Presentation 1: Baseline study on the impact of COVID-19 on Ethiopian CSO's by Mr. Henok Teshome

Mr. Henok commenced his presentation by pointing out that the survey had been conducted with the concerted efforts of the Civil Society Resource Center (CSRC), the Agency for Civil Society Organizations (ACSO), and the African Civil Leadership Program (ACLP). He further noted that the baseline study was conducted to fill the knowledge gap, pointing out the opportunities and ways to tackle the challenges, and putting forward recommendations.

Mr. Henok stated that the methodology that has been employed to conduct the study includes a questionnaire, compiled of 22 questions, and the input from the previously held five webinars. He further added the questionnaire had been disseminated to 100 organizations and 27 responses have been taken as valid responses for the study.

He has also listed time constraints, the small number of respondents, and the optional questions as a limitation of the study. Mr. Henok then stated that, for the study, civil society organizations have been categorized into three sections: human rights & advocacy, service delivery, and professional associations. He further added that in terms of the annual budget among the surveyed CSOs, 26% of them have more than 10 million ETB, 22% of them had less than 100,000 ETB, 26% of them have reported that their budget is between one million ETB to 10 million ETB and 26% of them have reported having an annual budget between 100,000 ETB and one million ETB. In terms of staff size, more than 50% of the respondents have less than 10 staff members and 19% of the respondents have more than 50 staff members.

Mr. Henok has further explained that COVID-19 has affected all civil society organizations in one way or another. Subsequently, he classified the challenges into three areas: financial challenges, operational challenges, and regulatory challenges.

Mr. Henok stated that due to the pandemic, 85% of CSO's working on human rights and advocacy have reported that they faced financial challenges while 43% of them were forced to cut down operations, and 11% of them were forced to shut down. This vulnerability emanates from the shock of the previous governing legal regime and foreign fund reliance. He added, among the surveyed service delivery organizations, 86% reported that they faced financial challenges while 57% were forced to cut down their operations and 14% were forced to downsize their staff as a result of the financial challenges. Among the Professional Associations surveyed, 83% reported that they have faced financial difficulties due to the COVID-19 pandemic, 66% were forced to cut down their operations and 17% were forced to shut down.

Mr. Henok then added that surveyed CSO's working on human rights faced tremendous operational challenges. Among the associations surveyed, 84% reported that COVID-19, and the subsequent restrictive measures, have affected the operational capacity of their association and 50% were forced to close their offices or community aid centers. He further went on to note that all the human rights and advocacy organizations surveyed reported that the pandemic affected the operational capacity of their organization. Among the surveyed human rights organizations, 28% reported that they were forced to close their offices or community aid centers. Among the surveyed service delivery organizations, 86% reported the pandemic affected the operational capacity of their organization, and 36% were forced to close their offices or community aid centers.

According to Mr. Henok, there were two main regulatory challenges irrespective of the types of CSO's. These challenges were fulfilling their reporting obligations because of restrictive measures, and strictly adhering to the rule which dictates them to utilize 20% of their funds for administrative cost and 80% for their projects. 63% of the respondents reported that they were unable to submit activity and financial reports on time. The 29% of human rights and advocacy organizations surveyed, 33% of professional associations surveyed, and 42% of the service delivery organizations surveyed, reported that they were unable to maintain the 20/80 balance between administrative and program costs.

Finally, Mr. Henok pointed out a way forward, advising CSO's to decrease their reliance on foreign funds and try to raise funds from domestic sources and that CSO's should try to come up with a new working arrangement and build their capacity, especially to prepare for the world post-COVID-19.

Presentation 2: The impact of covid-19 from the perspective of CARD by Mr. Befkadu Hailu, Executive director of CARD

Mr. Befikadu noted that COVID-19 has affected CARD in many aspects. According to Mr. Befikadu COVID-19 was a heavy blow, taking into account the fact that CARD was a newly established CSO. Mr. Befikadu further added that the negative impact of COVID-19 ranges from canceling vacancies to canceling projects.

Mr. Befikadu also stated that taking into account the increment of cost due to restrictive measures, maintaining a 20% -80% budget balance was unbearable.

Mr. Befikadu then went on to discuss the positive impacts of COVID-19 on CSOs. He noted that the pandemic has presented a lesson to rethink how we plan and implement the said plan. Mr. Befikadu also noted that CARD has prepared manuals and procedures to curb the negative impact of this kind of crisis.

Presentation 3: Measures taken by ACSO to mitigate the negative impacts of COVID-19 on CSO's and the challenges faced by ACSO and the lessons learned. By Fasikaw. M. Amera, D/Director, ACSO)

Mr. Fasikaw noted that to mitigate the negative impacts of COVID-19, the agency has tried to engage with CSO's flexibly. Mr. Fasikaw further added that the due date for a general meeting and board meetings has been extended for five months. Mr. Fasikaw also stated that the office of the agency was open during this time, which in turn has helped CSOs.

He then went on to point out the efforts of the agency in terms of their covid response. He noted the agency has played a tremendous role in facilitating CSO's to contribute their share in combating COVID -19 and this effort has helped to mend ties with different government bodies, which was ruptured by the repealed legal regime. He added that the agency has tried to make CSO's part of the national task force to curb the negative effects of COVID-19.

Mr. Fasikaw then noted that the workers of the agency have also contributed their salary in a concerted effort to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 within the agency and on the wider public.

Mr. Fasikaw noted that the impact of COVID-19 on the sector was apparent. According to Mr. Fasikaw, because of the impact, some organizations were forced to cancel their projects and some were forced to shut down. Mr. Fasikaw goes on to say that the adverse impact of COVID-19 has been deeply felt in the service delivery sector. Mr. Fasikaw stated that the impact did not stop the organizations, but impacted the vulnerable tier of society. Mr. Fasikaw also added that the pandemic has hampered the agency's activities. For instance, the agency was planning to get input from CSO's on drafted directivities but, COVID-19 has impeded the agency from such an activity.

Lastly, he forwarded the following recommendations for CSOs moving forward.

- CSOs need to have a flexible and adaptive working arrangement to utilize technology immensely
- CSOs should consider new ways of raising funds locally and decrease their reliance on foreign funding
- CSOs and the agency should collaborate to strengthen CSO funds
- CSO's should work with government bodies in times of crisis
- CSOs need to actively participate in the newly established CSO's council and support the journey towards self-governance
- CSOs need to work on incentivizing and institutionalizing volunteerism and philanthropy works

Questions and reflections from participants

Following the presentations, the floor was opened for questions and discussions from participants.

Mr. Tadele Derseh (participant)

Mr. Tadele raised one question and reflected on some issues.

1) The way the council was established is dubious because it lacks transparency and inclusiveness, thus, I want the reflection of the panelists in this regard.
2) What is non-partisanship in the context of the current political turmoil?

Mr. Dawit Teshale (participant)

Mr. Dawit raised three questions.

1) With regards to sampling, what is the rationale for disseminating the questionnaire to only 100 organizations?
2) What are the positive effects of COVID -19?
3) The organizers should also conduct a study on the status of CSO's.

Mr. Fasikaw. M. Amera (panelist)

Mr. Fasikaw raised two questions.

1) In the baseline study some CSO's have not faced a financial challenge, how is that possible?
2) On regulatory challenges, even if ACSO is the main regulator of the sector, there are government bodies that regulate CSO's in a different capacity hence don't you think that should be included?

Mr. Fasil Sileshi (participant)

Mr. Fasil raised two questions and reflected on some issues.

1) In terms of boosting philanthropy works and volunteerism, what are the activities carried out by the agency?
2) What is the current capacity of CSO funds?
3) Transparency and inclusiveness are the cornerstones of CSOs, thus the concerns in relation to the council should be addressed appropriately.

Reflection from the panelists

In response to the questions, suggestions, and comments the presenters made the following statements

Mr. Henok Teshome

- Regarding the question raised concerning regulatory challenges posed by sector administrators, we will take it as an input. Similarly, we also take the question raised on sampling as an input.
- To answer the question raised on how some CSOs survived the financial challenges, as mentioned by the surveyed organizations, some have reported that they resisted the financial challenges by implementing emergency funding.
- With respect to the opportunities presented by Covid-19, it has made a positive impact especially on a digital transformation, it also ringed a bell on the CSO's reliance on foreign donations and introduced the concept of working from home.

Mr. Befikadu Hailu

- With regards to the opportunity of COVID-19 to CARD, as CARD works on media literacy, one of our plans was to give training about media literacy, and when we shift this training from face-to-face to a virtual format, it has helped us in targeting the right audience for the training.

Mr. Fasikaw M. Amera

- On the topic of encouraging philanthropic works and volunteerism, the Agency has established a directorate with a full staff that will work on boosting our philanthropic works as well as the culture of volunteerism. To this end, we have prepared a document on how to promote volunteerism.
- With respect to the capacity of the CSO Council, as it was only established recently, it's not yet strong. Thus, the concerted efforts of all stakeholders are required to build a strong, resilient, and responsive council.
- With regards to the Council, the agency has made a relentless effort to make the process as transparent and inclusive as possible, and if there are still concerns, we are more than willing to address them.

The webinar came to an end at 5 pm with closing remarks and words of gratitude by Mr. Jima Dilbo Denbel, for the lively discussion by the participants.

Appendices

Appendix A: List of Attendees

Webinar 1

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