



**Ethiopian Civil Society Organizations Council /ECSOC/
CSO's National Dialogue Engagement Framework
February 2023**



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Background

National dialogue is being considered by many as the principal mechanism by which the age-old demands of the people can be addressed and national consensus reached on major national issues that continue to divide/pit diverse groups and societies against each other. Recognizing the need to find a lasting peaceful end to most of these problems, Ethiopia is currently engaged in a preparatory stage to conduct an all-inclusive national dialogue process. Once this stage is concluded, the formal national dialogue process will resume where diverse stakeholders including the CSO sector participates at different levels and dimensions.

Rationale:

Civil societies, being one of the major actors in the political, economic and social spheres (specifically in the areas of democratization, peace building/conflict resolution and development), have demonstrated strong interest to participate in the country's forthcoming national dialogue. Nonetheless, due to the individual approach of organizations and hence fragmentation and possible duplication of these efforts, it becomes necessary to coordinate these engagements. It is believed that coordination of these activities will greatly enhance the effectiveness, relevance and impact of the engagement and contribute to the realization of the overall objectives.

Objectives:

This CSOs national dialogue engagement framework is prepared to give clear direction and perspective to CSOs participation in the process. Accordingly, the following are specific objectives to be attained;

- Create clarity on the roles and responsibilities of CSOs in every stage of the national dialogue to ensure effective and meaningful participation of the sector
- Increase opportunities for coordinated activities among CSOs on the national dialogue
- Ensure that CSOs engagement on national dialogue is conducted in a principled and ethical manner



Principles Governing CSOs Engagement in Ethiopia's National Dialogue

1. Neutrality

Neutrality is one of the major principles governing the civil society sectors in their efforts to attain diverse responsibilities and objectives. Especially in the context of a country that is in the middle of political instability and anxiety, where diverse groups are competing for power and polarized political discourse, it becomes necessary for civil society actors to cautiously define their role and position themselves on issues that have national significance including the national dialogue. In this regard, the CSOs that are currently warming-up to strongly engage in the national dialogue initiative need to be careful not to take sides in whatever form imaginable and at any stage of the dialogue. It should be clear that on such matters of national importance, diverse groups in society may seek to achieve various vested interests. Hence, CSOs need to carefully weigh-in and make informed decisions on requests that may arise from diverse stakeholders and not to fall into traps knowingly or unknowingly.

Nonetheless, neutrality in this context doesn't mean disengagement from participation on the national dialogue. It only means that CSOs engagement on the national dialogue need to be principled, reasonable and constructive. Once decision has been made to constructively engage in the process, CSOs need to take a firm position and avoid tailing up with either of the parties to the process.

2. Avoid Fragmentation/Duplication of Efforts

Currently CSOs are showing strong interest to engage in the national dialogue initiative. Considering their inability to participate and influence the country's political and economic trajectories in the past, it is no surprise that CSOs want to take part and play their proper role in the forthcoming national dialogue. Moreover, a national dialogue initiative lacking CSO participation almost certainly fails the inclusiveness criterion. However, a meaningful participation and contribution to the national dialogue process requires that such engagements have to be coordinated which can avoid possible duplication of efforts and save scarce resources.

3. Protection of the Process from Intervention

National dialogue processes by definition are nationally owned with support from various actors, domestic as well as international, aiming only at ensuring the success of the process. In this sense, the process has to be protected/insulated from both actors and interests so that its outcome will not end-up in serving partisan interests. In the current Ethiopian context, since most CSOs draw funding and resources from foreign sources, care must be taken for them not to unduly influence or import



foreign agenda and affect the national dialogue processes. As such, CSOs that are engaged and planning to engage in national dialogue initiative have to protect the process not only by avoiding involvement in ambiguous and pernicious activities but also by playing a watchdog role over actors that attempt to derail or spoil the process.

4. Civility

Properly implemented, CSOs can emerge a big beneficiary from the national dialogue process. A successful completion of the national dialogue by itself expands the democratic and public space where CSOs can freely engage in attaining their goals and objectives. However, for such a positive outcome, CSOs have to contribute to an enlightened/civil dialogue process, not only by refraining from engaging in destructive behaviors, but also by promoting principled, tolerant and truly dialogical environment.

5. Trust in the National Dialogue/ Engagement in good faith

Another area where the civil society has both a legal and moral responsibility as well as capacity advantage is in inspiring the general public and various stakeholders to trust the process and engage in good faith. The civil society is ideally located in disseminating information to the society at large, educating them and enhancing the trust infrastructure. CSOs have to create hope and a positive image in the minds of the people that there is only a peaceful solution to the multiple ills that continue to strike society. National dialogue is the primary mechanism to attain a constructive/progressive future and hence actors need to build trust in the process.

6. Ensure accountability

As formally registered legal entities with rights and responsibilities, CSOs take accountability for their omissions and commissions that create harmful consequences. Nonetheless, on matters of national significance such as national dialogue, it becomes difficult to correct outcomes resulting from CSO omission or commission. Hence, CSOs need to carefully swim the waters not only to avoid any harmful outcomes but also to proactively behave in a manner that enhances their and other stakeholders' accountability.

7. Enhance Inclusiveness

Considering the centrality of ensuring inclusiveness in Ethiopia's National Dialogue, civil society organizations have enormous role in encouraging diverse groups of society to take interest and participate in the process as well as advocate for the marginalized groups and social minorities to be properly represented in the actual dialogue processes.



Continuum of Engagement



		Preparation Stage			Process Stage			Implementation Stage	
Nature of CSOs Engagement in ND		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awareness creation/raising Sensitization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocacy Capacity building (CSOs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Network Building (CSOs, Media, HEI & others) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote inclusion Represent marginalized groups Active Engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitating and ensuring agenda setting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Voices of moderation Advocacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitoring Evaluation Learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consolidating the culture of dialogue
	Watchdog & Monitoring (Identify limitations and propose solutions to offset them)								
Engagement Strategy (Indicative, not exhaustive)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Panel discussion Expert Interview (Onsite and media) Experience sharing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Position statement Lobbying Press conference Assess capacity gaps (Facilitators/conveners) Training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consultative forum/ Platform Facilitate open and transparent communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Submit inclusion as an issue Present issues of women, children, disabled, etc... Participate in the process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Technical, financial, and other supports for the agenda setting, aggregation and decision making process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Propose alternatives at times of polarization or deadlocks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Follow up of the implementation of decision Reporting on the implementation Research and publication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion platforms Public space Open debate
	Public information dissemination using different media								
Think thank as a knowledge repository and hub									
Level of Engagement	Primary	Community/Grassroots							
	Secondary	Intermediate institutions and actors							
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizational level (public institutions), Representatives groups from the CSOs, Media, Religious leaders, Elders and opinion leaders 							
	Tertiary	Regional, National, International							



**Implementing
Agency**

CSOs mandated to work in the area of National Dialogue

Table 1. CSOs National Dialogue Engagement Framework

Stakeholder Mapping for Ethiopia ND

Each National Dialogue will develop its unique structure corresponding to the highly context-specific needs and aim of each process. National Dialogues attempt to bring together all relevant national stakeholders and actors (both state and non-state), based on a broad mandate to foster nation-wide consensus with respect to key conflict issues. As such, they offer a useful approach in promoting public participation and helping develop a new social contract. Often following severe national crises or open armed conflict, they are set in motion to move away from elite deal-making, allow for broader societal participation and gather popular consent and support for fundamental political reforms and constitutional change in periods of political transition. Consequently, national dialogues are increasingly seen as the most participatory and inclusive tool for conflict transformation.

The methodology of selecting dialogue participants is obviously pivotal to inclusivity in national dialogues. In some cases, participants are appointed by a preparatory body, in others they are self-nominated by the identified constituencies or locally selected in caucus gatherings. Most cases, however, opt for a multi-step process that require; political consensus on the constituencies to be included (i.e. political parties, regions, civil society, ethnic groups and minorities) and election of delegates from those constituencies. In the Ethiopian context, though the National Dialogue Commission is expected to delineate the range of stakeholders for the National dialogue, the following stakeholders are expected to be involved:

Table 2. Stakeholder Mapping



Stakeholder Analysis Matrix

Stakeholders		CSOs-Stakeholder Engagement Strategy	Description
International stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - UN or intergovernmental organizations - The African Union (AU) - The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) - The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) 	Cooperation	<p>The cooperation of stakeholders with a high potential influence on the development of the ND should be sought to ensure their support for the success and effective execution of the ND thorough by sharing relevant information, supporting decisions, and making resources and (staff) time available for its success.</p> <p>As these stakeholders can jeopardize the success of the endeavor, particular effort may be needed for constructive engagement of their case to mainstreaming in ND and address potential concerns.</p>



National Stakeholder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ruling & Opposition parties - Non state armed groups - Public Organizations (Parliament, Legislators, Courts, Human Right Commission, Ombudsperson, ND commission) - Development Partners (CSOs) - Media, etc... - Religious leaders, Opinion Leaders, Activists, Artists, and Intellectuals (research institutes, universities etc.) 	Consultation	<p>Stakeholders with medium to high interest but low to medium potential influence on the success of National Dialogue should be consulted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To get their buy-in - To contribute their perspectives and insights on the national dialogue - To raise their commitment for active participation <p>To raise their awareness on the methods and approaches to be followed in ND</p>
		Cooperation	
		Collaboration	<p>Those with high levels of interest in and potential influence on the process of the ND will be the group to collaborate with. These stakeholders should be invited:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To participate & share their experience, thoughts & interest in the various forums/panel of discussion that may be arranged by CSOs - To work closely with the council for meaningful outcomes <p>To address issues collaboratively</p>



Regional and Local Stakeholders:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Public organizations (legislators, courts, etc...) - Medias - Opposition parties - Religious leaders - Opinion Leaders - Activists, - Artists, - Intellectuals - Local Development Partners (CSOs) 	Consultation Cooperation Collaboration	
Local Community level Stakeholders:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The community at large - Schools - Local leaders & Elders - Customary local conflict resolution body 	Communication	Stakeholders with low levels of interest and potential influence on the development should be engaged through communication, with engagement activities focusing on raising awareness about ND to get the buy in.
		Consultation	



Role of ECSOC	Description of the Engagement/Activities at National level
CSO Sector Representation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Communicating and establishing platform of discussions with the various ND stakeholders- Collecting and analyzing feedback in ND and release position statement on their behalf- Collaborate with stakeholders on issues of national dialogue- Collecting and analyzing CSOs engagement, activities and events and report on their behalf
CSO Sector Coordination and Networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Establish a team to identify, map, communicate, coordinate those CSOs working in ND and monitor, support and lead their approaches- Establish and develop partnership and alliance (ad-hoc coalition) among CSOs working in ND for effective engagement- Oversee and support the activities of CSOs in the ND- Ensure the effective implantation of Code of Conduct and the governance policy
Knowledge Production and Dissemination	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Creating CSOs' working document on the ND and disseminating the same- Designing engagement Strategy/framework and disseminating the same- Develop CSOs governance framework policy and strategy- Document stories, good practice and lesson learned
Leading advocacy on the National Dialogue	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Promote the CSOs role in the ND to various ND Stakeholders- Promote the CSOs' role and engagement framework to CSOs- Support the advocacy activities of CSOs in the ND
Protection of the CSO sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- ECSOC will seek to protect and defend both the sector and individuals as long as the CSOs working with in the CSOs engagement framework