

ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY
ORGANIZATIONS FOR
INCLUSIVE NATIONAL
DIALOGUE IN
ETHIOPIA

*Policy dialogue
Workshop*

Policy dialogue Workshop Proceeding

On the Role of CSOs for Inclusive National Dialogue in Ethiopia

1. Introduction

Since June 2022, the Ethiopian Civil Society Council (ECSOC) has engaged in various activities related to the national dialogue. As part of this, ECSOC organized a one-day high-level policy dialogue workshop on **the Role of CSOs for Inclusive National Dialogue in Ethiopia** on September 22, 2022, with the participants of 40 from various civil society organizations. The Workshop was convened at Sapphire Addis Hotel.



1.1. Overall Objective of the Workshop

The main objective of the workshop was to deepen understanding of the issue of inclusiveness in Ethiopia's National Dialogue, particularly, among the civil society actors. Specifically, it is intended to create clarity & deepen understanding of the issue of inclusiveness in Ethiopia's national dialogue; examine challenges related to inclusiveness in the national dialogue in the

Ethiopian context, and explore civil society's role in ensuring inclusiveness in Ethiopian national dialogue.

1.2. Expected Outcomes

- Enhanced understanding by the civil society organizations on inclusiveness in national dialogue
- Identify and recommend possible pathway/solutions out of the challenges identified
- Create clarity on the role civil societies should be playing in ensuring inclusiveness in the Ethiopian national dialogue.

2. Summary of the Policy Dialogue Workshop Proceeding

In the first session of the workshop, the opening remark was delivered by the Executive Director of ECSOC, Ato Henok Melesse. In his speech, Ato Henok pointed out that inclusivity is one of the basic principles of the national dialogue, though there are some misunderstandings



Henok Melesse, Executive Director, ECSOC

about its meaning and scope. As he underlined, the workshop aims to clarify these misunderstandings and confusions regarding the conceptualization of inclusivity and thereby contribute to the success of the national dialogue.

In continuation of the event, Ato Ahmed Hussein, the Vice President of the Council, and Executive Director of Pro-Development Networks (PDN) presented the Role of CSOS for Inclusive Dialogue in Ethiopia. The presentation contains five parts; introduction, the conceptual framework of inclusivity in the national dialogue, the role of CSOs for inclusive national dialogue, barriers and challenges to inclusive national dialogue in Ethiopia, and the way forwards.

As it is noted in the presentation, there is consensus among scholars and practitioners regarding the central place of inclusivity in national dialogues. It is important to facilitate more informed deliberations and secure sustainable political solutions to crises. Therefore, inclusivity should be manifested in all phases of the national dialogue, that is, at the phase of preparation, actual dialogue process, and implementation.



Ahmed Hussein, Vice President, ECSOC & Executive Director, PDN

At the preparation stage of the national dialogue, inclusivity is manifested through the mandates of the national dialogue; the composition and decision-making capacities of the preparatory body, and the participant selection methodology. Accordingly, the mandates of the national dialogue should be the result of discussions and accord among stakeholders and main social and political groups. The national dialogue preparatory body should be inclusive in the sense that there should not be a de jure or de facto exclusion, and it should not solely reflect and consider the old or existing power structure. During the phase of preparation, the participant selection method is pivotal to ensuring the inclusiveness of the national dialogue.

As it is noted, inclusivity at the preparation stage is not sufficient to make the national dialogue inclusive in its real terms. Inclusivity should be also observed at the stage of the actual dialogue too. Accordingly, the composition of the delegates that participate in the dialogue, the forms of participation (direct, indirect, and symbolic), and the nature of decision-making mechanisms (consensus votes, qualified majority, simple majority, and minority veto) should be designed in the way that ensures inclusivity in the national dialogue.

All the aforementioned issues of inclusivity that are required at the preparation and dialogue stages are helpful only to ensure process inclusivity. They may not guarantee outcome inclusivity which can be ensured by activities undertaken at the phase of implementation. As it is underlined in the presentation, inclusivity also matters in the implementation phase of the national dialogue. At this stage of the dialogue, the major texts produced, and the state institutions (re)organized at the end of the national dialogue should be responsive and representative.

Next, the presenter discussed the role of the CSOs for inclusive national dialogue in the



Left to right: Ahmed Hussein, Vice President ECSOC, Moges Demissie (PhD), Program & Development Advisor, ECSOC

Ethiopian context and argued that CSOSs can undertake advocacy, education, watchdog and monitoring, and active engagement and capacity-building activities at each phase of the national dialogue. Nevertheless, the CSO sector's current standing does not match these anticipations. As it is noted, there are a number of explanations that account for this including the fragmentation and competition among civil

society organizations, weak democratic and dialogue culture, resource constraints, misconception and or/ lack of comprehensive understanding about inclusivity as well as political polarization and the ongoing conflict in the country.

As a way forwards, the presentation suggested some issues to deal with the potential barriers and challenges for inclusive national dialogue in Ethiopia. Hence CSOs should be organized and exert coordinated efforts to support the national dialogue process. Civil Society Organizations need to undertake activities aimed at resource mobilization and the creation of public awareness. It is also equally important that CSOs work in collaboration with the national dialogue commission to strengthen their ability, attitude, and organizational efficiency. CSOs also should support the national dialogue commission and bear their watchdog roles in the preparation and adoption of the working procedures and directives including agenda setting and participant selection rules in light of ensuring inclusivity.



After the presentations and tea break, there was a discussion, and participants of the workshop raised various issues related to the national dialogue. The presenter and moderator reflected on the issues raised by the participants. Accordingly, it is underlined that national dialogue is not a panacea that resolves all problems. The national dialogue is not a process that would deal with all issues and all



problems facing a nation. Hence, it should not be overburdened and the focus to be on the basic issues and root causes of the controversies that led to the crisis. Those matters that can be legally dealt with within the existing frame shall be dealt with accordingly. For instance, the delimitation of the boundary between Addis Ababa and the Oromia Special Zone shall be seen in this light. Additionally,

the academia and the respective intellectuals, as part of the society, should be active participants in the dialogue process, and they have also additional responsibility to research the challenges of making inclusive dialogue and come up with tenable way outs and recommendations. All in all, it is stressed that CSOs have un-replaceable roles for ensuring inclusive national dialogue.

Finally, the workshop session was ended by W/o Tinebeb Berhane, the Vice President of the Council, and country representative of Action Aid Ethiopia, closing remark. In her remark, she reiterated the crucial role of the sector in ensuring inclusive national dialogue and called on all CSOs to coordinate and work together to make the national dialogue inclusive and effective.



Tinebeb Berhane, Vice President, ECSOC & Country Representative, Action Aid - Ethiopia