Civil Society Empowerment
Ethiopia Civil Society Capacity Building Project (CSCBP)

Introduction

Ethiopia is committed to an ambitious program of decentralization as part of the overall strategy for poverty reduction and enhanced rural development. The Poverty Reduction Support Credit (PRSC) supports strengthening of the financial architecture to make decentralization work by improving the formulation and execution of the budget and the channels for intergovernmental fiscal flows. The impact of improved financial architecture can be assured only if citizens understand how it is to be used, what it is expected to produce, and have a means to provide their feedback. Thus, successful decentralization depends on the creation of mechanisms through which citizens and organizations of civil society can partner with their governments to assess the effectiveness of service provision and enhance good governance.

Through individual and group activities, civil society has a central role to play in poverty reduction and democratic empowerment. At the micro-level, civil society organizations can directly provide services and skills to communities, mobilize citizens, facilitate changes in behaviors, mediate conflict foster linkages and hold local government and other service providers accountable. At the macro level, they can contribute to public education and advocacy on important public policy issues. However, from the level of communities up to organizations operating at national scale, civil society capacity is insufficient for it to discharge its role in the democratization process and to broaden and speed up socio-economic development to the desired levels. In this context, lack of capacity is understood as not having the required number and quality of institutions, working systems and human resources in view of specific functions and/or objectives civil society is expected to carry out. Thus, the Civil Society Capacity Building Project’s contribution toward the longer-term growth of civil society in Ethiopia is expected to be modest, but significant.

Project Background

As stated in the Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program (SDPRP), the Government of Ethiopia (GOE) recognizes the central role of civil society in the country’s economic, political and social development. The Government also acknowledges that citizens and their organizations currently lack sufficient capacity to engage fully in development processes. In response to capacity limitations, the GOE established the Ministry of Capacity Building (MOCB) and prepared a comprehensive National Capacity Building Program (NCPB) comprising fourteen sub-programs, including one on civil society capacity building. The Government’s commitment to decentralization is also expressed in the SDPRP and in legal enactments. The Bank is currently supporting the decentralization effort through analytical work, Public Service Capacity Building Program (PSCAP), and through the PRSC.

In February 2003, following on SDPRP and discussions between the GOE and the Bank, the MOCB officially requested the Bank’s collaboration on a civil society capacity building program leading to a credit (Civil Society Capacity Building Project – CSCBP). Following on the agreement, the MOCB established a Civil Society Capacity Building Office and, through the Bank, obtained a US$500,000 Japanese project preparation (PHRD) grant. In May 2004, the MOCB completed a draft Civil Society Capacity Building Program, which outlines an ambitious agenda for developing civil society. The draft program lays out three sub-program: (a) enabling institutional environment, (b) government and CSOs partnerships, and (c) civil society capacity building.

Capacity building and improved governance are critical underpinnings of the current World Bank Country Assistance Strategy (CAS) for Ethiopia. Nearly 20 percent of the Bank’s commitments in the 2003-2005 CAS will be devoted to building capacity in public, private and civil society organizations. CSCBP is the main vehicle for support to strengthen capacity of civil society. By strengthening institutions and nurturing organizations that give voice and power to citizens, CSCBP will help build the processes and skills required for a well functioning democratic state. In doing so, CSCBP will promote the three core objectives of the CAS namely enhance pro-poor growth, enhance human development outcomes, and reduce vulnerability.

Project Description
CSCBP is currently in the project preparation stage, thus the project description is preliminary. As it stands, however, proposed project objectives, target groups, and activities – which are pending evaluation and approval – are described below.

**Objectives:** The project aims to empower citizens and their organizations to make independent and significant contributions to improved governance and decentralized services. The project will make a particular effort to assure the voices of traditionally excluded groups such as women and youth are considered. While the scope of the project will be national, activities will mainly be implemented at the local (Woreda and Kebele) levels.

**Project Target Groups.** The definition of civil society is context-specific. Thus for the purposes of this project in Ethiopia, ‘civil society’ will embrace all non-state actors that act charitably, as advocacy organizations towards issues of public concern, or as membership organizations, exert influence on issues that are of public significance. This definition includes, *inter alia*, community-based organizations (including ad hoc community and user groups), professional organizations, mass organizations, representatives of special interest groups (e.g. chamber of commerce), non-governmental organizations, press associations, non-profit research institutes and associations, development arms of faith-based organizations, etc.

**Project Activities:** at the current stage of project design, the set of activities to be supported by the project would include:

1. **Enabling environment for CSO engagement** at all levels, including: (a) establishing and monitoring federal and regional policies/strategies to effectively guide government-citizen collaboration; (b) streamlining CSO registration, and establishing the legal and fiscal framework (NGO/CSO law, tax and import laws, etc.) and coordination mechanisms; (c) strengthening mechanisms for citizens’ voice and freedom of expression (e.g. through community radios); (d) training and sensitization of all public officials on citizens’ rights and effective collaboration between government, citizens and CSOs – including issues on gender practices and policies; (e) establishing mechanisms to provide access to information and institutionalizing transparency at all levels; (f) implementing forums for citizens’ participation in policy making and strategic planning; and (g) establishing fast-track conflict resolution mechanisms (e.g. Ombudsman).

2. **Collaboration between citizens and government for improved accountability and decentralized services,** including: (a) support to user groups (e.g. PTAs) in the management of sectoral services (e.g. education, agriculture, health, infrastructure, social courts); (b) community score cards and citizens’ report cards; (c) participatory planning, implementation and monitoring of development projects at the kebele level; (d) participatory expenditure management at the woreda and regional/city levels; (e) participatory public policy making at the national and regional levels; (f) capacity building of citizens and CSOs (formal and informal) to enable their effective participation in the above activities (e.g. in governance, resource mobilization, constituency building, etc.); and (g) conflict management between citizens and government at the regional and woreda levels. Government officials, citizens and CSOs at all levels would participate in these activities – with a focus on the kebele level – but processes would be facilitated through intermediary organizations (e.g. qualified CSOs).

3. **CS, gender and youth empowerment,** including establishing: (a) community radio and other mechanisms across the country to provide citizens’ with a means to express their opinion as well as provide them access to information; (b) nation-wide and region-wide civic education programs; (c) youth-related activities such as school clubs, out-of-school youth clubs, peer to peer learning, youth centers, etc.; (c) gender-related activities such as enhancing women’s access to the public sphere, sensitization of key opinion setters (teachers, elders and public officials at the local level) on gender issues, etc.; (d) capacity building of CSOs to improve their capacity to respond to their constituents; and (e) leadership training, especially for women and youth, at the kebele and woreda levels.

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To learn more about the current status of the project, refer to the Civil Society Empowerment Project Status website.

Important Documents

- **TOR for Background Studies**
- **Synthesis Report on Regional Consultation Workshops**
- **Associational Life, Volume 1**
  
  *Building Capacity in Ethiopia to Strengthen the Participation of Citizens’ Associations in Development: A study of the Organizational Associations of Citizens*
  
  June 23, 2004
- **Integrated Safeguards Data Sheet, Vol. 1**
  
  October 7, 2004
- **Project Information Document, Vol. 1**
  
  October 1, 2003