# BRIEFING: ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILE OF ECSOC & ITS ENGAGEMENT WITH MEMBERS



*Familiarizing local & international Civil Society Organizations with ECSOC's roles & mandate*

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## Introduction

Following the political changes in April 2018 and the subsequent passing of the new Civil Society Organizations Proclamation in March 2019, the idea of establishing a CSO council that operates as an independent institution governed by the full participation of all CSOs and that represents and coordinates the CSO sector in Ethiopia was initiated.

The Ethiopian Civil Society Organization Council (ECSOC) is an independent institution that aims to support Ethiopian CSOs to be vibrant and capable of playing a significant role in advancing economic and social development, and more importantly to promote democratization and good governance. ECSOC is now the apex body legally representing over 4,300 civil society organizations, consortia and associations in Ethiopia. The Council has been undertaking activities through its secretariat, which went operational 11 months ago, by fulfilling its responsibilities of representing, coordinating CSOs as well as taking up advocacy roles in connection with current national matters.

Although the Council has undertaken and achieved commendable results so far, as a fairly young institute, there is still work to be done in properly introducing and familiarizing the CSO sector with it. With this in mind ECSOC and Care Ethiopia put together a briefing session for local and international CSOs to be familiarized with ECSOC's profile and its engagement with the over 4000 member CSOs. The meeting took place at the Council's boardroom on November 29, 2022.

## Overall Objective

The main purpose of conducting the briefing session was to create clarity a certain amount of clarity among local and international CSOs operating in Ethiopia regarding ECSOC and the role it is playing in the CSO sector.

## Specific Objectives

The briefing session aimed at enlightening the local and international member CSOs on the following aspects:

- Provide detailed information on ECSOC's profile
- Address questions and concerns of the member CSOs

- Collect feedback from the member CSOs in the forms of their expectations, concerns and recommendations on priority areas that the council should focus on

## Summary

The morning briefing session began with Kalewongel Minale (Ph.D), Program & Development Advisor at ECSOC welcoming participants representing both local and international CSOs. In his welcoming remark, Dr. Kalewongel underscored that ECSOC strongly believes that CSOs need to have clarity in terms of addressing some of their concerns about the confusion with regard to the scope and mandate of the Council in relation to other networks, its line of accountability as well as issues associated with its relation with the government. "We anticipate that your opinion and advice could help us understand your expectation and enable us effectively deliver strategic support to the sector, which has been laboring for decades to transform the lives and livelihoods of citizens," he said.



Membership & Communications Director at ECSOC, Ato Melaku Tadesse, presented the Council's profile and its engagement with CSOs. In his presentation, Melaku highlighted that the Council is an independent body that is working towards ensuring a vibrant Civil Society sector. He touched upon the Council's mission, vision and core values. Melaku also briefly described that the Council has been closely involved in contributing its share in ensuring a successful upcoming National Dialogue as well as peace building efforts.



Following the presentation, the meeting attendees raised questions and made comments which were addressed by Dr. Kalewongel and Ato Melaku.

The following questions and comments were raised:

1. To what extent do you think the 300 people in the GA are representative of the 4300 CSOs? There is a feeling that the number is small and representation should be increased?
2. Some of the activities the Council has implemented are not strategic. That makes the Council's engagement overlap with other networks
3. The expertise and experience of the professionals in the EXCOM is so strong that the council should maximize the use of this capacity to support its activities. The council does not seem to have exploited this capacity in the executive committee.
4. What is the Council's strategy regarding visibility profile?
5. Is the Council in a position to have payment of the annual membership dues mandatory?
6. What is the difference between ACSO & ECSOC? Their difference is not sufficiently clarified.
7. To what extent does the Council engage in advocacy issues?
8. What would happen if a problem transpires in the GA? There has to be a higher authority?
9. What types of activities is ECSOC implementing to engage the media and the private sector?
10. Where does the Council get its funding from? How does it ensure its sustainability?
11. Often what is on paper and what is being practiced are two different issues. Is the Council truly independent and neutral? How has it demonstrated its neutrality so far?
12. Do you have a mapped out CSOs network?

## Group Discussion Session

Following a health break, participants were divided into three groups in which they would take half an hour to discuss and list out:

- Their expectations from the Council
- Their concerns &
- Their view of what should be given priority by the Council

The three groups each came up with the following with the following points:

### Expectations

❖ The CSO sector is currently only represented by only 300 members in the GA. There needs to be fair number of CSOs representing those operating in the Nation.
❖ There needs to be clarity on the different roles and responsibilities of ECSOC & ACSO
   o Prepare a comparative table
   o Put clear value preposition/ selling point
❖ Continuous and regular engagement of CSOs on on strategic issues (research topics, policy matters)

- ❖ Highly work on changing the image of CSOs sector
- ❖ Increase  visibility through awareness/ using media by community and CSOs
- ❖ Use media reguraly that can excel the Council
- ❖ Conduct research on different challenges, opportunities – then share to the members
- ❖ Recognize the private sector in terms of their involvement in corporate social responsibilities- there should be liaison with the private and CSO sector
- ❖ Create  an enableing environment for CSOs to engage in private sector to play their role in corporate social responsibility
- ❖  There is lack of clear structure that needs to be addressed – vertically, horizontally
- ❖ Thematic area – Advocacy
- ❖ Coordination – evenly distribute thematic and geographic areas to avoid repetition. There is  now an imbalance in the geographic and thematic distribtion of project activities
- ❖ Establish a digital system platform for the over 400 CSOs
    - o Where are they?
    - o Who are they?
    - o What do they do?
- ❖ ECSOC should  have a representative  at high level as it is neutral  and can stand on the side of CSOs
- ❖ Positivie image building by using potential platforms. Harness the pottential of all forms of media.

## Concerns
- ❖ Lack of sustainability strategy. To redress this make use of
    - o Membership contribution
    - o Mixed portfolio of funding
- ❖ Lack of clear accountability – ECSOC must be accountable to the parliament and General Assembly
- ❖ Absence of representation in parliament
- ❖ Might be less responsive/ representation of CSOs at required level
- ❖ Lack of clear structure (demarcation) – vertically & horizontally
- ❖ Lack of enforcing mechanisms
- ❖ Neutrality- has ECSOC ever challenged the government/ has it created a solid boundaries
- ❖ Unclear areas of responsibility and  authority
- ❖ How does ECSOC support CSOs if there are issues with ACSO or other problems – to what extent does your protection extend? How far do you go?
- ❖ Channel of communication (through networks) – how does ECSOC monitor this
- ❖ How does ECSOC support newly emerging CSOs at regional level? How does the membership works at regional and national level?

**Priority areas**

- ❖ Solicit civil society funding and enact advocacy
- ❖ Engage with the media
  - o Enhance visibility through mainstream media by civil society, private sector, state actors engagement
  - o Acquire airtime on mainstream media to profile the work of civil society organizations and contributions of the sector
- ❖ Establish an up-to-date and comprehensive  database of CSOs
- ❖ Work for clear and defined structure
- ❖ Establish strong partnership with the  private sector
- ❖ Issue of accountability should be clarified
- ❖ Ensure Organizational Sustainability and funding. Diversify funding Sources and partners
- ❖ Create a smooth relationship between ACSO and CSOs
- ❖ Establish a digital system that maps CSOs that will help in collaboration
- ❖ Advocate for policy gaps that hinder CSOs from achieving development goals
- ❖ Strive for a systemic positive image building
- ❖ Create a linkage between CSOs, with international donors (link demand & supply)
- ❖  Conduct CSO leadership and governance capacity building especially for local NGOs

## *Closing & the Way Forward*

At the closing of the briefing session, Program and Development Advisor, Kalewongel Minale stated that the Council is highly grateful for all the feedback that the CSOs representatives offered and stated ECSOC's commitment to continue strengthened work in enhancing a vibrant CSO sector. Dr Kalewongel also pledged that there would be regular similar platforms hosted to ensure clarity on the Council's roles and responsibilities.