The unique role CSO's have played in the Ethiopian Social Accountability Program (ESAP)

(2011 – 2017)

ESAP-MA
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Introduction

The Ethiopian Social Accountability Program (ESAP) phase 2 started with the formal signing of the agreement between the World Bank (WB) and VNG International in 2011. ESAP is a program fully supported by the Government of Ethiopia (GoE), with the Ministry of Finance and Economic Cooperation (MoFEC) playing a key role in providing oversight. The main objective of ESAP-2 was to strengthen the capacity of citizens and the (local) government of Ethiopia to jointly enhance the overall quality of basic services[1]. ESAP-2 was a typical grant scheme where CSO's[2] received significant amount of funds and played a key role in basic sector development[3]. Under ESAP-2, 49 lead Social Accountability Implementing Partners (SAIPs) and another 60 sub-partners operated to facilitate improving basic services. ESAP-2 was formally completed in December 2015.

To prevent an interruption between the end of ESAP-2 and the start of a future Social Accountability (SA) program, in 2016 agreement was reached to continue SA activities at a more modest scale through an ESAP-Bridging Phase (ESAP-BP). The ESAP-BP resulted in 22 cluster contracts with in total an involvement of 80 CSO's. The ESAP-BP was initially meant to cover a period of 16 calendar months until the start of a new SA program (ESAP-3) later in 2017. However for multiple reasons the ESAP-3 program has not started yet. To avoid losing credibility and momentum among citizens and decision-makers involved in SA, development partners involved in SA agreed to continue on-going support through an extension of the ESAP-BP to prevent a gap between ESAP phase 2 and the future phase 3 risking to loose valuable SA expertise[4].

The current note highlights the unique role CSO's have played in the successful implementation of ESAP-2 and ESAP-BP. By functioning as interlocutor between citizens and authorities in the areas where they have been active, they also managed to enhance the trust base between these stakeholders in SA, widening the scope of state relationships with diverse social and vulnerable groups. This was possible in part because the program deliberately selected non-government organizations that had already been active for a long period of time in the targeted woredas. With practical experiences gained during implementation of ESAP-2 and ESAP-BP an image will be drawn of the mediating and facilitating roles CSO's have played to successfully achieve the ESAP outcomes.

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[1] The focus has been on five basic sectors: health, education, water & sanitation, agriculture and rural roads.

[2] CSO are considered organizations that are non-governmental, not for profit, not representing commercial interests, and that pursue a common purpose of public interest. Under the ESAP program CSO's operate as Social Accountability Implementing Partners (SAIPs).

[3] Under Proclamation 621/2009 CSO's are defined as *"Ethiopian Charities or Ethiopian Societies that are formed under the laws of Ethiopia, all of whose members are Ethiopians, generate income from Ethiopia and are wholly controlled by Ethiopians. However, they may be deemed as Ethiopian Charities or Ethiopian Societies if they use not more than ten percent of their funds which is received from foreign sources"*.

[4] Development partners are MoFEC, the WB and the MDTF donors, currently being the EU, Irish Aid, Austria Development Cooperation and Sweden.

Roles of CSO's under ESAP

CSO's operating under ESAP played several critical roles as capacity builders and facilitators. CSO's raised citizen's awareness about their entitlements to basic services and taught them how to positively engage with service providers and local government officials, using SA tools. CSOs also ensured that the latter were open to listen to citizens' service experiences and priority needs. By working on both sides of the state-citizen relationship, a constructive climate was created for SA interventions that took place during the implementation of ESAP.

CSO's operating under ESAP showed innovativeness by establishing solid working relations over time with stakeholders at the very local level. The fact that they had a track record in the woredas and kebeles where they implemented SA turned out to be an advantage. Before being able to implement SA at local level, the CSO's had to win the hearts and minds of the decision-makers at regional, woreda and kebele level as well as of the citizens. This was far from self-evident and required a cautious approach developing trust between the different stakeholders involved.

At regional level, agreements needed to be signed, which at times required direct intervention from MoFEC, since it was believed that such 'good governance interventions' was the responsibility of the government, not the CSO's. At woreda level, the ESAP-2 Mid-Term Review (MTR) showed that it could easily take six months of discussion, awareness raising and relationship development before any concrete SA activity could be executed. As far as the citizens were concerned, there was hesitation to speak up, for fear of repercussions. On the side of service providers and officials, there was fear that SA would stir up discontentment and deteriorate relationships with citizens. Efforts to overcome this status quo must not be underestimated. While it seems easy to point on clear successes, the ESAP-BP shows that it remains time-consuming to start-up SA in new kebeles precisely because of this status quo. CSO's established a tripartite Social Accountability Committee (SAC) to jointly and transparently manage the SA process. Once a working relationship was created, CSO's managed to address and focus on SA at field level[5].

The ESAP program has been operational in all regions and the two metropolitan areas of Ethiopia covering 223 woredas and multiple kebeles. By operating in remote areas and working with vulnerable groups including women, elderly, disabled people and persons with HIV/Aids, CSO's have been able to draw the attention of other citizens and service providers to the specific needs of these groups. CSO's were also able to mobilize these groups, to share their experiences and articulate their needs and supported service providers to make information about specific services for these groups available. The CSO's then enabled the groups and their local government to have a dialogue and find ways forward together to fill gaps which were difficult to be addressed by the Government of Ethiopia (GoE).The CSO mobilization and facilitation power is commendable. Thousands of people who had never even been

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[5] CSO's also managed to attract attention of other groups that could play a prominent role in SA. Currently more and more woreda and regional councils are interested in the SA activities. Further developing the relations with councils is one of the spearheads of the ESAP-BP and a future ESAP-3 program.

invited to a meeting with the government learned to share their views. Service providers who had never considered listening to peoples' views learned to become more responsive and value local views. CSO's have also been able to link Community Based Organizations (CBO's) operating at grassroots level to the SA process by inviting them to participate in crucial meetings and training them as SAC members[6]. As such, they embedded SA in the organizational and traditional structure of the society, organizing vulnerable groups where they previously were not, so that it has become possible for the government to engage them.

In order to be able to develop accountable relationships between citizens and service providers at local level, key staff of CSO's attended, before field activities started, a first training session organized by the ESAP-MA to familiarize them with the basic mechanisms and techniques of SA. CSO staff learned about their special position as mediator/facilitator where perception of local dynamics turned out to be a crucial skill to bring users and suppliers of services closer together. They became confident with and learned how to promote and facilitate the five stages of the SA process, to enable citizens to use the different SA tools and to organize the SAC with a tri-partite representation of users, suppliers and decision makers of the services. Recurrent learning benchmark sessions throughout the implementation of ESAP made it possible for CSO's to exchange views and experiences with each other, as well as with Financial Transparency and Accountability (FTA) counterparts operating at woreda and regional level. In this way unique SA knowledge and expertise were gradually developed and shared among CSO staff[7].

CSO's in turn managed to train local service providers on SA tools application and as such prepared them to become engaged with the users of the services in a constructive manner. Before ESAP, many service providers were not well aware of the service standards, plans and available budget of these services to be provided to the citizens. Today, there is much more insight among providers about the role they are expected to play not in the least because of the close coordination linkages the SA process has developed with the FTA program and to a lesser extent the Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM) program, all key elements of the good governance efforts of the GoE.

The role CSO's played to improve access to information and facilitate service improvement dialogues in Interface Meetings (IM), has been key to the success of SA at field level. As intermediate, neutral and transparent bodies, CSO's played a facilitating role in problem identification by citizens and service providers, and have been crucial in building consensus on (gender responsive!) reform priorities and mutual responsibilities going forward.

During the implementation period of ESAP, a Social Network Analysis (SNA) was undertaken twice, in May 2014 and February 2016 respectively. A major aim of the SNA was to develop an understanding of the existing network of CSO's and regional BoFEDs/FTA operating under ESAP. Where in May 2014, all SA related network relations were primarily focused on the ESAP-MA, the second SNA showed that

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[6] Examples of such organizations are: iddirs, farmer cooperatives, parent-teacher associations, one to five structures, religious associations and traditional structures such as geda and clans.

[7] Some CSO's operating under ESAP organized, without intervention of the MA, SAC exchange meetings, inviting regional officials along.

individual CSO's and SAIP project coordinators managed to slowly establish a first relational infrastructure. In order to develop SA expertise, woreda coordinators to a lesser extent but especially project coordinators have gained the necessary SA expertise through network development with each other as well as the regional FTA/BoFED offices. In the autumn of 2017, the MA will undertake a third SNA which is expected to show even stronger ties and linkages among and between the different SA and FTA experts. This is expected because the ESAP-BP has started to invest in regional partnerships between the CSO's, BoFED, service sectors and councils.

A key role of the CSO's under ESAP has been the creation, training and coaching of the tri-partite SAC's both at woreda as well as at kebele level. The SAC, which members represent suppliers as well as users and decision makers of the basic services, is expected to continue to play a key role once direct CSO support ends. Sustainability of the SA process at local level can in the long run only be guaranteed by actively operating SAC's, which basically coordinate 'good governance interactions' between representatives of existing leading social groups, multiple service sectors and council[8]. These SAC's will grow stronger in their coordinating role if they are able to network to learn from each other. CSO's have started facilitating such SAC network structures as part of exchange visits organized during the ESAP-BP. As such, the CSO's operating under ESAP play a key role in developing, training and strengthening SAC's to prepare them for their future role as facilitators and initiators of SA processes.

More recently, the intermediary role of CSO's has moved up in the system. In Tigray, the regional council requested the regional sector bureaus to coordinate with CSO's involved in ESAP so as to be more responsive to issues that remain unresolved because they are beyond the responsibility and/or capacity of the woreda. The councils have started to view CSO's involved with SA as useful collaborators. The regional SAC experience in Tigray is beginning to inspire other regional governments[9].

The role SA plays in today's Ethiopian society is also underlined by the support provided by the GoE in the second Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP II) which states that *'engaging communities in the delivery of basic services has helped strengthening community engagement and thereby contributed to a better governance of public finance and expenditure as well as the delivery of essential public services'*[10].

The future perspective of SA seen by the GoE is expressed in the following paragraph. '*The on-going FTA and SA programs will be further strengthened and implemented during GTP II to deepen sustained public participation, equity and quality, transparency and accountability in government finance, public procurement and basic public service delivery'*[11].

All CSO' which operated under ESAP-2 and ESAP-BP are registered and supervised by the Charities and Societies Association (ChSA) and operate in line with Proclamation 621/2009. The Proclamation uses a

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[8] CSOs have played a role in bringing water and energy sectors to the table to solve issues at health and education facilities. Such sector coordination is known to be weakly developed at woreda level.

[9] A case study on the regional SAC in Tigray is available from the MA.

[10] Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) II (2015/16 – 2019/20, volume 1, page 49.

[11] Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) II (2015/16 – 2019/20, volume 1, page 201.

definition where charities are for public benefit, while societies are for promoting the rights and interests of their members. Under ESAP, by far the majority of the CSO's have been Ethiopian resident charities, which consist of charities that dwell in Ethiopia and receive more than 10% of their funds from foreign country sources. Ethiopian charities however generate 90% of their income through Ethiopian sources[12]. Only four out of 49 lead partners that operated under ESAP-2 had a status as Ethiopian charity. The other 45 were Ethiopian resident charities. At several instances the ChSA gave Ethiopian resident charities operating under ESAP-2 and ESAP-BP, an official warning that they were not allowed to operate under ESAP[13]. The ChSA appears to place SA under rights based work, which is reserved for Ethiopian Charities. It is however observed that reference to intermediary roles played by CSO's, such as in the case of SA, is not covered under the Proclamation[14]. The GoE has expressed more than once that it prefers to work with Ethiopian charities rather than Ethiopian resident charities under a future program. The problem however is that the four Ethiopian charities that operated under ESAP-2 were not necessarily the best performing institutions, which happened to be a reason for not continuing the working relation with them under ESAP-BP. The challenge seems to be that solid performing Ethiopian resident charities are apparently not the preferred partners of the GoE under a future program. How to break through this stalemate should be a serious topic for discussion among decision makers.

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[12]   Charities and Societies Proclamation No. 621/2009. Article 2(2+3).
[13]   The ESAP MA brought such cases to the attention of MoFEC and they were usually resolved.
[14]   Considering the positive view some regional councils have developed on the intermediary role of CSO's in SA. This could be tabled as an issue of debate when the Parliament reviews the proclamation.

Conclusion

ESAP-2 and ESAP-BP have resulted in a number of impressive achievements, where CSO's have brought users, suppliers and decision makers of basic services closer together, so to mutually improve the quality of and access to basic services. The most important roles of CSO's have been:

- Raising citizen awareness of their entitlements to basic public services and how to use SA tools to engage government officials;
- Inclusion of women and vulnerable groups, through mobilization and empowerment;
- Training service providers on how to engage citizens;
- Establishing a working relationship among citizen representatives, service providers and decision makers in the SAC;
- Connecting SAC's with grassroots groups;
- Mutual problem identification and prioritization by users and suppliers;
- Organization of Interface Meetings where users, suppliers and decision makers try to find solutions to common problems;
- Developing trust through a better understanding of citizen priorities and government possibilities;
- Structuring Joint Action Plan development, facilitating approval by decision makers, and supporting the organization of implementation;
- Facilitating SA monitoring and practice learning among woreda SAC's, and (in some cases) regional stakeholders;
- Disseminating the SA message in their respective locality and region through communication and knowledge management initiatives, in collaboration with FTA and government communication structures[15].

In this note the MA has systematically listed the critical role CSO's have played as interlocutors during implementation of the ESAP program to date. Their unique position has been acknowledged by the GoE as well as DP's as one of the critical success factors during the ESAP program implementation. Following this, there seems to be common ground to continue using SA expertise developed by CSO's under a future program as well, in order to continue developing the SA practice throughout Ethiopia.

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[15] Woreda and regional communication structures have been keen to collaborate with CSO's, and welcomed SA content provided by them, which matches the good governance efforts of the government.