

Summary literature review CSOs in sustainable development in Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, civil society organisations (CSOs) have played an important role in advancing sustainable development by raising public awareness, developing their own capacity, and engaging with the state. However, these organisations face a number of legal, financial, social and other structural barriers that limit their effectiveness and reach. In this research project, we explore how CSOs have advanced the sustainable development agenda in Ethiopia and examine the various obstacles they face. The aim of the research is to enhance scientific knowledge about the work, experiences and the challenges faced by Ethiopian CSOs working in the environment and development sector; and to explore how CSOs are helping the realisation of sustainable development in Ethiopia. This project will provide a better understanding of how CSOs support sustainable development by raising public awareness through the dissemination of research outputs and supporting the capacity building of CSOs, research institutes, organs of justice and government officials.

This literature review contributes to a greater understanding of the context, the legal framework and the current literature on Ethiopia's governance of CSOs. Furthermore, the review identifies knowledge gaps on the governance and regulation of CSOs in Ethiopia.

Main findings

- In both international law and in the Ethiopian constitution, the protection of human rights—particularly rights to freedom of association, freedom of assembly and freedom of expression—is recognised as crucial to the advancement of CSOs and to secure their political space to operate.
- Increasingly, states are using law-based methods to restrict the political space of CSOs and to exert greater control over their operations and funding. This raises the question as to whether these legislative and regulatory measures are compatible with human rights commitments and with fundamental legal principles (such as the rule of law) enshrined in domestic constitutions and international agreements.
- Ethiopia has adopted legislation governing the registration, operations and funding of CSOs—the Charities and Societies Proclamation 2009. The Proclamation categorises CSOs and determines the kinds of work an organisation is permitted or prohibited from doing primarily based on the source of its funding, and specifically on whether the funds came from international sources. It is sympathetic to CSOs doing relief and service-provision work, while hindering those engaged in rights-based work.
- Scholarly and CSO reports on Ethiopia suggest that CSOs have responded to the new regime either by reframing their work to fit within the regulatory framework or by closing down. However, more research is needed to understand a possible shift from formal to informal operations of CSOs in the Ethiopian context.
- The influence of non-legislative mechanisms and executive powers by the Ethiopian government on CSOs is currently not well understood. CSOs are governed by a matrix of legislation and other legal mechanisms, so understanding the manner in which the state limits CSOs' space, together with the impact of these limits, is key. Further research is needed on how non-legislative mechanisms and executive powers are used to supplement (or perhaps overrule) the regulatory framework. More research is also needed on the role of various public and private actors and their attempts to work with—and influence—the development and implementation of norms, laws and policies in Ethiopia.
- There is limited research on the intersection between sustainable development and the restriction of political space. CSOs have an important role to play in realising sustainable development. However, more research is needed on the practical impact of Ethiopian governance of CSOs on organisations working on sustainable development. The state seeks to regulate the practical impact of Ethiopian governance activities of CSOs on organisations in Ethiopia by limiting the kinds of CSOs that engage in human rights and political work. This suggests that many CSOs working on sustainable development cannot adopt a rights-

based approach in their work. The implications of this, both for the CSOs and sustainable development, need to be further explored.

- While scholarly articles exist on how notions of legitimacy and de-legitimation apply to CSOs, literature on the assessment of legitimacy of CSOs facing shrinking political space is more difficult to find. As a result, questions remain on how to assess the legitimacy (meaning the accountability, effectiveness and transparency) of CSOs in Ethiopia if their operations may be hampered by the state.

Policy messages

- Advancing sustainable development necessitates advancing human agency, which in turn is seen as the primary ends and means of development. CSOs play a crucial role in helping states achieve sustainable development goals by promoting the rights and the capacities of citizens. When the political space of CSOs is limited, the agency role of CSOs in promoting the goal of sustainable development is also threatened.
- While Ethiopia has used legal tools to increase control over CSOs and to constrain some CSO activities, these measures may not be compatible with the country's constitutional commitments to human rights and the rule of law.
- It is important that (international) policymakers continue to address the situation of CSOs in Ethiopia. While the literature suggests some ways in which policymakers might achieve this (for example, through high-level meetings and political dialogue or through direct assistance to CSOs adapting to the new legislation) the effectiveness of these approaches is poorly understood.

Relevant literature

- Brechenmacher, S. (2017). *Civil Society under Assault: Repression and Responses in Russia, Egypt, and Ethiopia*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- Dupuy, K., Ron, J. and Prakash, A. (2015). Who survived? Ethiopia's regulatory crackdown on foreign-Funded NGOs. *Review of International Political Economy*, 22(2), 419–456.
- Gebre, Y. (2016). Reality checks: The state of civil society organizations in Ethiopia. *African Sociological Review*, 20(2), 2–25.
- Rutzen, D. (2015). Civil Society under Assault. *Journal of Democracy*, 26(4), 28–39.

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