Evaluation Brief of the European Union's Support to Ethiopian Civil Society through the Civil Society Fund III Programme*

Context and Objectives: The Civil Society Fund III (CSF III) Programme, a European Union initiative supporting Ethiopian civil society, had a dual focus: funding 27 projects and providing technical assistance through a dedicated Technical Assistance Unit (TAU). Spanning from 2019 to 2023, with a comprehensive budget of €16 million, the program aimed to bolster the role of civil society in Ethiopia's development and democratisation processes.

Implementation: The programme's implementation featured extensive engagement, distributing €16 million across projects and to TAU's operations. During 4,818 working days, it provided crucial support to 27 beneficiary civil society organisations (CSOs) and entities like the Ethiopian Civil Society Council.

Key Findings: The evaluation highlighted the significant alignment of CSF III with Ethiopia's developmental and governance reform policies. It successfully enhanced the capacity of CSOs in various operational and advocacy aspects. However, the evaluation also identified areas requiring further improvement, particularly in training methodologies, efficiency, sustainability, and policy influencing strategies.

Main findings of the evaluation (by EQ)

EQ1: To what extent was the intervention relevant to the grant beneficiaries, in terms of the TAU's coaching, mentoring and helpdesk functions and the support provided by the EU Delegation to Ethiopia?

The CSFIII Programme was significantly aligned with Ethiopia's developmental policies and international norms, particularly enhancing the civil society sector's reform and democratic governance, despite challenges in capacity-building and limited governmental involvement impacting its full potential.

EQ2: To what extent were the capacity-building initiatives of the programme relevant? Assess the relevance of the grantee platform and whether it has been contributing to the learning and sharing of good practices among CSOs.

The CSFIII Programme's capacity-building initiatives have achieved significant success in enhancing grantees' knowledge and skills, but improvements are needed in training duration, flexibility, responsiveness, and fostering ownership among grantees of initiatives such as the grantee platform to maximise impact.

EQ3: To what extent was the relationship between inputs and outputs timely and cost-effective?

The evaluation of the CSFIII Programme's efficiency reveals planning inefficiencies, questionable cost-effectiveness, and a lack of sustainability in efficiency measures, emphasising the need for improved monitoring systems, greater flexibility of resource allocation, and enhanced collaboration for more effective future interventions.

EQ4: To what extent did the grant beneficiary CSOs build specific capacities related to their engagement in policy influencing and gender-related activities as a result of the programme implementation?

The CSFIII Programme has significantly improved knowledge, skills, and operational capacities among Ethiopian CSOs in policy influencing and gender-related activities but sustaining these capacities and enhancing knowledge transfer and income diversification strategies are crucial for long-term impact.

EQ5: To what extent were CSOs able to influence public policies and practices?

The CSFIII Programme has shown mixed results in influencing public policies and practices, with some success in specific areas but there is a need for more impactful engagement with policymakers and greater

implementation of CSO recommendations into concrete policy actions.

EQ6: To what extent did grant beneficiary CSOs channel citizens' interests and demands in an accountable manner?

The CSFIII Programme has significantly enhanced the accountability and representation of CSOs in Ethiopia, with CSOs effectively channelling citizens' interests and demands in an accountable manner, contributing to their participation in local governance and development decision-making processes.

EQ7: How coherent is the programme with the objectives of the EU Roadmap for strategic engagement with Civil Society in Ethiopia?

The CSFIII Programme demonstrates partial alignment with the EU Roadmap's strategic objectives for civil society engagement in Ethiopia, with notable advancements in policy and regulatory areas. However, there is room for improvement in terms of financial sustainability, depth of policy influence, and strategic alignment with the EU's policy framework.

EQ8: To what extent has the EU support to civil society in Ethiopia provided added value in the context of grant support in all programme areas?

The EU support for civil society in Ethiopia, while dedicated to enhancing CSO capacity and visibility, exhibits deficiencies in achieving a comprehensive and synergistic impact due to fragmented approaches, sustainability concerns, and the absence of innovative methodologies.

EQ9: To what extent are the activities, results and contributions of the EU Civil Society Fund Programme visible at national/local levels?

The CSFIII Programme has achieved notable visibility and recognition within the Ethiopian civil society sector and amongst institutional actors, but there is room for improvement in media engagement, digital presence, and public communication.

Recommendations related to EU Support to Civil Society:

Recommendation 1:
Target audience: EU Delegation to Ethiopia

- Provide continuous institutional support to the Ethiopian Civil Society Council for medium-to-long term, including technical, organisational, and financial support.
- Support the Ethiopian Civil Society Council in enacting the Code of Conduct for the sector and advising the Authority for Civil Society

Organisations on CSO registration and administration.
- Allocate action grants for the Ethiopian Civil Society Council to carry out its mandated actions.

Recommendation 2:
Target audience: EU Delegation to Ethiopia

- Prioritise gender mainstreaming and social inclusion in future programmes.
- Use gender as a cross-cutting dimension in assessments and evaluations.
- Conduct stakeholder and power analysis during project implementation.
- Collect and disaggregate data evidence.
- Foster internal reflection and learning on gender and inclusion.

Recommendation 3:
Target audience: EU Delegation to Ethiopia and other donors

- Establish permanent institutional mechanisms for coordination between civil society support programmes supported by the EU.
- Ensure value for money and avoid duplication of effort.

Recommendation 4:
Target audience: EU Delegation to Ethiopia, Ethiopian Civil Society Council, Authority for Civil Society Organisations and other donors

- Implement an ongoing updating mechanism for civil society mapping, possibly the responsibility of the Ethiopian Civil Society Council.

Recommendations related to Programme Implementation:

Recommendation 5:
Target audience: EU Delegation to Ethiopia and other donors

- Provide methodological tools online for Ethiopian CSOs on EU procedures and project management tools.

Recommendation 6:
Target audience: EU Delegation to Ethiopia, Civil Society Fund Plus, and other CSOs programmes financed by the EU

- Establish a permanent information collection system for logical frameworks that can feed into the database of indicators.

Recommendation 7:
Target audience: EU Delegation to Ethiopia, Civil Society Fund Plus

- Develop a comprehensive and targeted capacity development strategy and plan for Civil Society Fund Plus and future initiatives.

- Pay special attention to reaching out to emerging CSOs with less experience but good ideas for funding opportunities. Provide training and extensive feedback to support their development.

Recommendation 8:
Target audience: EU Delegation to Ethiopia, Civil Society Fund Plus

Main elements of the overall conclusion:

- Alignment of reference documents (National Indicative Programme, Action Document, Roadmap) with some nuances.
- The EU's policy and strategy for supporting civil society in Ethiopia is coherent, clear, and detailed.
- The EU is a key actor in supporting Ethiopian civil society, both in terms of financial volume and participation in various support programmes.
- The CSFIII programme began during a shift in dynamics between Ethiopian civil society and governmental authorities.
- Mixed conclusions, including the absence of a tripartite project steering committee, the use of call for proposals modality, lack of strategic coordination among programmes, and internal dynamics of CSFIII implementation.
- Challenges such as the need for ongoing stakeholder mapping and addressing issues of corruption, ethnic federalism, and government coherence in the future.