THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS IN DEMOCRATISATION PROCESS IN ETHIOPIA

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I.   Introduction

The existence of civil society in Ethiopia is not a new phenomenon. Civil society in the form of self-help system has long existed in the country. However, there is little written information on these systems. The emergence of modern, formal and legal Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) such as trade unions, professional associations and Non-Government Organisation (NGOs), is a recent phenomenon.

NGOs as part of CSOs, started to evolve as a result of the 1973 and 1984 Ethiopian famine where they involved in relief operations. However, later with increased financial and material support from foreign donors and with an improvement in the situation of the country, NGOs moved progressively into long-term programs focusing on addressing basic needs (provision of basic social services). Such programs had the aim of helping the poor to build their capacity to meet their own needs and resources they control. Here, poverty is understood as the lack of basic needs or income. Most NGOs in Ethiopia are still involved in such development efforts.   However, such understanding of poverty and development were not able to address problems of powerlessness, social injustice, human rights and marginalisation.

According to the new paradigm shift, democracy is a necessary condition for development. Hence, NGOs today are mostly required by different stakeholders to involve in democratisation process and to link economic and social development with social justice and other basic human rights issues. CSOs, which are purely involved in human rights and democratisation process, started to emerge since May 1991 after the down fall of the Marxist regime, known as Derg, which ruled the country for 17 years (1974 - 1991), under the leadership of Colonel Mengistu Hailemariam.

The paper therefore tries to analyse the role of CSOs in democratisation process and problems they encounter in promoting human rights and democracy.

Methodology

The following methods were used to undertake the study:

➢   Review of various documents, books and other secondary data on information of democratisation and human rights; evolution of CSOs in Ethiopia; and organisational profile of sample CSOs.

➤ It was originally planned to take a sample of 15 CSOs which were involved in democratisation process. Accordingly, to get a good representation contacting ActionAid Ethiopia (a British based NGO involved in anti-poverty development work) and Christian Relief and Development Association-CRDA (an umbrella NGO which has more than 200 members, local and international) and a few academics in the field was planned. However, it was difficult to get 15 organisations involved in democratisation process. Though, it was possible to get the names of some of these CSOs, it was difficult to know their where about thus making it difficult to get any information about their work.

The following were the 15 sample organisations selected for the study (listed in alphabetical order):

1.   Action Professionals Association for the People (APAP)
2.   Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Union (CETU)
3.   Ethiopian Economic Association (EEA)
4.   Ethiopian Free-Press Journalist Associations (EFJA)
5.   Ethiopian Human Right Council (EHRCO)
6.   Ethiopian Teachers' Association (ETA)
7.   Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA)
8.   Forum for Social Studies (FSS)
9.   Forum on Street Children Ethiopia (FSCE)
10.   HUNDEE, Oromo Grassroots Development Initiative
11.   Inter Africa Group (IAG)
12.   National Committee on Traditional Practices in Ethiopia (NCTPE)
13.   Peace and Development Committee (PDC)
14.   Society for the Advancement of Human Rights Education (SAHRE)
15.   African Initiative for a Democratic World Order (AIDWO)

➤ Brief visits were made to the sample CSOs and discussions were held with the major functionaries of these organisations. Semi structured interview questions were prepared. In addition, different reports and written materials of these CSOs were referred to.

II.   Conceptual Framework

Different concepts that are mentioned in the paper need to be defined/clarified in order to give better understanding to the subject matter. The main concepts that have been defined are 'basic rights/basic human rights', 'civil society' and 'democracy and democratic process'.

2.1.   What are basic rights?

According to ActionAid Ethiopia's definition rights is a legal and moral entitlement of people within defined jurisdiction. Therefore it is something to which one is entitled solely by virtue of being a person. It is that which enables one to live with dignity (ActionAid Ethiopia, 2002). Similarly, the Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO) defines basic rights as the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family. It further describes human rights as freedoms:

> "...**freedoms from** and **freedoms for**.   They are **freedoms from** oppression and exploitation, bigotry and intolerance, discrimination and abuse, arbitrary rule and injustice, intimidation and fear. They are **freedoms for** the enjoyment of life, peace and security, justice and equality; for the unfettered expression of ideas in any form; for the enlargement of everyone's capacity to create, to work and make a decent living; for movement within the country and abroad; for exercising commensurate share of power in the affairs of the government." (EHRCO 1995)

2.2   What is democracy and democratisation process?

The word 'Democracy' comes from the Greek word *demo kratia*: 'demo' means people or gathering and 'kratia' means power or rule. Hence, to the Greeks, democracy meant a system of governance that was characterised by direct exercise of political power by citizens' actual participation in city-state gatherings. The small size of the city-states made it possible for citizens to gather freely and cast a vote for or against something under discussion (Wanyama, citing Sartori, Giovanni, 2000).

Although democracy comes in many forms, nowadays, the concept generally implies majority rule, minorities and individuals' rights, equality of opportunities, equality under the law and civil rights and liberties. A democratic government is a form of government in which supreme power is held by the people and exercised directly or through elected representatives (Rohman, 1999).

Therefore,

> "The democratic process includes the recognition of the people as sovereign and as the ultimate source of any political authority; freedom to form associations and organisations for all interest groups and the unhampered advancement of their causes by all peaceful means; freedom of the press; freedom of all political parities to operate in every part of the

country; free and fair elections through which the people elect their representatives and administrators; and the total rejection of violence or war as a means of acquiring or maintaining political power." (EHRCO, 1995)

2.3.　What is civil society?

Civil society, as a concept, has a long history of different usage. In light of political theorists like John Locke, society becomes civil when it strives to define and establish political authority; in which case it determines the rules as well as norms of political legitimacy (Wanyama, citing Diamond Larry, 2000). Hence, in classical usage, civil society was equated with the state. The modern idea of civil society originated with the enlightenment of the 18th century when civil society began to be referred to as a domain parallel to but separate from the state where citizens associate according to their own interests and wishes (Inter Africa Group, citing Carthers, Thomas, 2001). Similarly, Gordon White discusses what the term currently means to most people in the world by saying "...the term 'civil society' is that of an intermediate associational realm between state and family populated by organisations which are separate from the state, enjoy autonomy in relation to the state and are formed voluntarily by members of the society to protect or advance their interests or values." The conventional dichotomy between state and civil society is important in identifying the latter as a social sphere separate from and independent of the former. Nevertheless, White warns us to take care to distinguish between civil society as an ideal-type concept which embodies the qualitys of separation, autonomy and voluntary association in their pure form and the real world of civil societies composed of associations which embody these principles to varying degrees. In support of this idea, Alan Fowler, during the INRTACT 10th Anniversary Conference in Oxford, argued against conventional wisdom, by saying that civil society is not actually a sector with well-defined boundaries. Instead, he posed a more complex notion of a civic system that interacts and overlaps with both socio political and socio economic systems (Alliance, Volume 7, Number 1, March 2002).

Hence, as White suggested,

> "We would then need to distinguish between different types or sectors of civil society: for example, between 'modern' interest groups such as trade unions or professional associations and 'traditional' ascriptive organisations based on kinship, ethnicity, culture or religion; between formal organisations and informal social networks based on patrimonial or clientelistic allegiances; between those institutions with specifically political roles as pressure or advocacy groups and those whose activities remain largely outside the political system; between legal or open associations and secret or illegal organisations such as the Freemasons, the Mafia or the Triads; between associations which accept the political status qua or those which seek to transform it by changing the political regime (such as the guerrilla movement or a reactionary religious organisation) or redefining the nation (as in the former Yugoslavia)."(White, Gordon, p 182).

For convenience, this paper focuses on local (those established in Ethiopia), legally recognised modern CSOs only. The traditional self-help CSOs were not included in the study as they have very little or no role in the democratisation process and there has been very little written information on them. The paper also disregards international CSOs which are Northern country based.

Though it is difficult to categorised the sample CSOs, some of them fall under the category of modern interest groups (e.g. APAP, CETU, EEA, ETA, EWLA, EFJA and FSS); and others under NGOs (e.g. FSCE, NCTPE, IAG and HUNDEE); and still few under human rights organisations (EHRCO, SAHRE and PDC). While 13 of these CSOs operate in Ethiopia, the other two (IAG and PDC) operate in addition in countries of the Horn of Africa.

III.   The evolution and growth of civil societies in Ethiopia

Civil society in the form of self-help system (traditional mutual-help associations) has long existed in Ethiopia. These systems were established with the main purpose of dealing with various social problems. The proclaimed aim of these systems is the enhance self-reliance of individuals, households and the society at large. Some of these self help systems have been registered as neighbourhood associations since the 1960's. These can be considered the forerunner of what are currently designated as CBOs (Community Based Organisations) (GOM 1998). For instance, the workers struggle that started in 1945 by Franco-Ethiopian Railway workers and intensified by other workers in the 1950's with the development of new industries was first organised and initiated through workers' self-help traditional associations, called '*iddirs'.* As time went by, such initiative of workers, together with the democratic ideas of young intellectuals, paved the way for the establishment of labour associations in Ethiopia for the first time late in the decade. The Ethiopian Teachers Association (ETA) which was established in 1949 by few school teachers in the form of traditional self-help association, can also be taken as another example. ETA became one of the strongest CSO after some years of its establishment and thousands of teachers became members.

A few self-help systems set up in former times can be mentioned. '*Debo'* is a system of mutual aid among farmers. Farmers who benefit from the help of others provide food and drinks. *'Afarsata'* is a local court of village elders which meet after a crime has been committed. It is aimed at reconciliation and payment for damage. Nowadays *afarsata* is rare and their functioning was almost impossible during the Derg regime (GOM 1998). *Equb* is a traditional financial institution whereby a group of people contribute certain amount of money regularly for instance on

a weekly or monthly basis and give the amount contributed to one member of the group who is selected by lot or according to order of priority (Sisay 2000). Among Muslims *Ezen* is a self-help system where contributions are made by each household to the mosque, during the days of a funeral (GOM 1998).   The best-known self help-system in the Ethiopian society is the *idir (*sometimes written as *iddir or edir* (Ibid 1998)*.* I*dir* is a social institution whereby a group of people who live either in a certain area or even in different places, contribute a certain membership fee on a regular bases so as to support members in case of emergencies such as the death of members' or close relatives (Sisay 2000).

During the Derg regime (1974–1991), most of the traditional associations were repressed and supplanted by Peasant Associations (PAs) and official co-operatives. They were forced to be resilient in order to withstand governmental and outside pressures which threatened to disband them. However, after almost a century of active state repression, numerous types of indigenous association continue to exit today.   For example, despite many years of systematic marginalisation and repression by successive regimes, the Timbaro People of Omo Valley retained forms of association fulfilling social, economic and leadership task. Six distinctive forms of Timbaro informal association were still active even after enforced PA's were long abandoned upon the overthrow of the Derg regime (Fowler 1997).

Modern interest groups such as labour unions and professional associations began to emerge as part of CSOs in 1963, after the Labour Relation Decree of the government was proclaimed.

Foreign and national NGOs became operational as legally established bodies around 1960, when self-help groups and the Ethiopian government were no longer able to respond to the needs of people and aid organisations become an accepted phenomenon globally. Initially there were few NGOs, notably the Ethiopian Red Cross and Save the Children Fund. Since then two waves of NGOs have come over the country. The first one was during the famine of 1973, the second during 1984/85. Most were international NGOs (GOM 1998). As these NGOs came into being they were initially engaged in relief work, primarily in the drought affected and war-torn areas of the country.

Beginning from early 1990's, with increased financial and material support from foreign voluntary organisations, the number of local NGOs multiplied. With improvements in the social situation their focus moved progressively into implementing long-term micro projects.

The institution of a relatively favourable environment for the operation of NGOs gave rise to advocacy NGOs and to the proliferation of civic institutions and networking (CRDA 2001). Hence, since then, local NGOs are showing impressive signs of maturity and new found professionalism. This progress is revealed in expressions of attitude about the role of NGOs at all levels of government. Furthermore, greater program co-ordination between NGOs and governmental units was evident of such improvements. This helped to improve, to some extent, portrayals of NGOs (as development actors) and their work, in the nation's media. Most significantly, it is apparent that the way the NGO sector views itself has an increasingly positive cast (Pact 1998).

However, CSOs whose functions are to preserve basic rights of constituents and society at large, educate citizens and advocate popular claims and promote effective participation in the social, economic and political life of the country are just beginning to emerge. (ActionAid Ethiopia 2000).

IV.   The role of Ethiopian civil society organisations in democratisation process and promotion of civil rights

It was observed that there are only few CSOs which involve in democratisation process in Ethiopia. The writer of this study initially assumed that there would be several CSOs in the area of democratisation. Unfortunately, it proved to be difficult to have a larger representative sample. Hence, the analysis focuses only on fifteen CSOs.

The following paragraphs briefly discuss the role of these CSOs in democratisation process.

i.   Advancement of civic education and raising peoples' awareness

With the aim of ensuring realisation of peoples' rights (especially poor and marginalised people's basic rights), all the selected CSOs are involved in awareness raising programs. These are carried out through the dissemination of civic education; promoting principles, cultures and values of democracy; enlightening the public about its constitutional rights, etc.

Society for the Advancement of Human Rights Education (SAHRE) is an indigenous CSO established in 1994 and its mission is to contribute to the process of building a democratic and peaceful Ethiopian society through such strategies. In the year 2001, Action Professionals' Association for People (APAP), through its human rights popularisation activities, disseminated information about human rights and corruption to more than 25,000 people, particularly through staging drama, puppet show and public speech. Other organisations such as HUNDEE and Forum on Street Children Ethiopia (FSCE) promote such activities as a component of their larger program.

ii.   Helping people to claim for their rights

In addition to raising awareness of different groups of society, some organisations support people, especially poor and marginalised people (whose rights have been deprived), to claim for and fulfil their economic, social, cultural and political rights.

The Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA) supports women whose rights are violated, so that they may get legal protection. EWLA Legal Aid Service is a rapidly growing community service program that protects women's rights. Since its establishment in 1995 it has handled more than 4,000 cases related to rape, abduction, domestic violence, property inheritance, employment contracts, etc. and is providing the necessary legal aid services accordingly. It has also been calling to the public to protest against violence, unequal treatment and discrimination against women and to influence the government to take the necessary actions.

APAP organises different Community Level Voluntary Human Right Association in different regions of the country and provides financial and technical support. These associations provide legal aid service in their respected localities to poor people especially to poor women. The type of cases brought to the attention of the associations include, property related matters, compensation, rape, family dispute, divorce and disowning and discrimination.

iii.   Complementing the role of the government in democratisation process

Since the government cannot involve in every democratisation processes and development activities, civil society plays a great role in complementing the activity of the state by filling the gap where the government is short. This will help to make those services more relevant to the poor and more responsive to democratic influences. Civil societies also assist the government in identifying social problems, which have not been detected or addressed by the government. The level of involvement of civil society, actually, varies from region to region depending on different factors such as attitude and behaviour of local government officials. CSOs believe that these officials should ensure the freedom of association, assembly and expression. They should also believe that the state and civil societies are both accountable to the people of Ethiopia (especially the poor and marginalised people).

In this regard, some civil society organisation such as EWLA, SAHRE and Peace and Development Committee (PDC) are involved in democratisation process and advocacy work by complementing the government's effort.

EWLA is involved in the reformation of the discriminatory Family Law of 1949 along with government and other concerned bodies. It even had a chance to get a seat in parliament representing civil society in response to the lobbying by women rights activist groups.

The NCTPE is an NGO whose main objective is to eradicate Harmful Traditional Practices (HTP) in the country. As HTPs are considered critical gender related problems by the government, NCTPE has formed branch offices in all regions of the country under government structures of Women's Affairs Office to accomplish its objective.

PDC has been involved in establishing local councils of elders with a view to promoting a culture of peace by ensuring the prevalence of sustainable peace.

iv.   Reforming the state

Reforming the state would mean more deliberate collaboration with government departments in order to help them improve the services they provide (CRDA 2001). In this regard, few CSOs contribute by providing different support such as provision of appropriate training for improved institutional practices.

The advocacy program of Forum on Street Children Ethiopia (FSCE) has been targeting the police force, since they are duty-bound in protecting the rights of children. Hence, efforts have been made to raise the awareness of the police force on the needs and problems of children and the role they play in protecting and caring for children. In line with this, FSCE had (in the past few years) conducted intensive educational programmes at various police stations for crime prevention and investigation officers and non-commissioned police members in Addis Ababa and other major towns.

APAP, with the aim of promoting accountability and transparency in the operation of low level government administration and law enforcement organs, organised zonal level (the lowest political administration unit next to woreda) human rights education and training workshop for judges, prosecutors, administrator and police officials in different parts of the country.

v.   Challenging the state

There are very few organisations that oppose government's plans and policies, which have negative impact on the lives of the poor and would deprive their rights, using available channels.

CETU protested against the retrenchment of workers due to the government economic reform known as Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) in 1995. It has been lobbying with the government to consider alternative employment opportunities for laid off workers and to undertake privatisation process without affecting the rights of workers. CETU's claim for the workers rights was considered by the government as unlawful protest or violence against the government's policy, which had put the existence of the Confederation in danger.

EHRCO challenges government policies and some of its actions that violate human rights and the rule of law. For instance, it opposes the ethnocentric policy of the government and the dominance of the ruling party in the country's politics and the monopoly of power by this party.

vi.   Conflict resolution and peace building

There are few organisations, which are involved in resolving conflicts and contributing to bringing peace and stability in the country. Such organisations believe that peace and development go hand in hand and that stability and progress are closely intertwined.

PDC plays a proactive and reactive role in preventing and/or resolving conflicts, promoting co-operation and understanding between different social, religious, ethnic and political groups in Ethiopia and the rest of the Horn of Africa . In order to carry out its objectives, among a lot of other activities, the office has set up a team of elders in a few selected towns whose main duties and responsibilities are identifying problems of peace, human rights and democracy and attempting to alleviate these. The office provides training on traditional and modern methods of resolving conflicts and promoting peace and stability.

IAG sees poverty and related denial of economic and social human rights as a major underlying cause of tensions and conflict in the Horn of Africa, and the need for enhanced efforts to address them through dialogue and search for common ground.

vii.   Monitoring democratic process, rule of law and violations of rights

EHRCO is the only organisation in the country that monitors and reports on human rights violations such as extra-judicial killings, arbitrary detention, torture, forced disappearances, unlawful and arbitrary confiscation of property, violation of privacy, unlawful dismissal of employees, denial of the freedom of conscience, religion, expression and association, etc. Accordingly EHRCO monitoring human rights violations, has so far issued 17 regular and 51 special reports concerning the democratic process, the rule of law and human rights situation in Ethiopia.

viii.   Promoting fair and democratic election

Few CSOs, mainly EHRCO, IAG and Chamber of Commerce, are involved in election monitoring, conducting civic education programs and organising debate forums among contending parties to ensure access to information to the public on the programs and plans of action of different parties. Their role in this case, is not only contributing to fair and democratic elections but also contributing towards the development of a democratic culture, based on dialogue, accommodation and tolerance at local level of administration.

V.   Challenges faced by CSOs in democratisation process

i.   Misconception of the government

Civil societies role in democratisation process and promoting rights is regarded by government as political opposition or manoeuvring, especially when CSOs involve in criticism or exposure of government's misdeeds or incompetence.   This may be because of misconception, the government has regarding CSOs and their objective as they involve in such programs Such misconception has been evident among local government officials at lower administration levels due to low levels of awareness regarding human rights; lack of self confidence; etc. Nonetheless, , even higher officials of the Ministry of Justice (the Ministry that is responsible for registering CSOs) also believe that CSOs should not involve in democratisation process.

Another reason why CSOs face hostility from government as they involve in democratisation programs could be the fact that democratisation process is a new phenomenon.

Some of the staff of HUNDEE including the Director have been jailed by woreda administration officials allegedly being accused of involving in political agitation and encouraging the community to oppose the government's policies. This happened as HUNDEE was discussing with the community about women's rights. They were released on bail after several discussions with government officials.

In September 2001, the Ministry of Justice allegedly accused EWLA for having involved in activities beyond their mandate when they criticised the Ministry in public for not taking measures against persons charged on violation of women's rights. Furthermore, they accused the Ministry for absence of an independent court system.   The Ministry closed EWLA's office and banned its work.

As EHRCO mainly deals with political issues, it is considered by the government as an opposition political party. Thus, its reports are understood as being negatively biased against the ruling party, EPRDF. It has also been accused by those in power as being an ethnic based organisation and that its membership is made up of Workers Party of Ethiopia (WPE) members. WPE was the ruling political party during the Derge regime.

ii.   Bureaucratic registration process and problems of obtaining license

Organisations involved in advocacy and democratisation processes, complained that they had difficulties in getting registered under the Ministry of Justice. Though, government's cumbersome regulations and overzealous administration is an obstacle to the operations of CSOs in general, the regulations and supervisions become more strict when coming to CSOs that are involved in advocacy and democratisation programs.

EHRCO could not get registered for seven years after its establishment in 1991 as a non-governmental civil society legal institution, as it was considered as a political organisation. This created difficulty on its operation since certain government institutions refused to provide required support and services to EHRCO on the ground that it was not registered. Only after it pressed charges against the government, was it able to be registered as a CSO in 1998 by the Ministry of Internal Affairs (which used to be the authorised government body to register CSOs) and then later on the Ministry of Justice in 2000.

SAHER had to go through a similar experience where they faced lengthy bureaucratic processes for about three years (between 1992 – 1994), in order to be registered and obtain a legal certificate. It was difficult for government officials to consider SAHER as a development agency, as they considered it as an opposition political party because it undertook advocacy work. However, after a long bureaucratic process, they were registered but only after including additional development activities in their proposal in order to convince the Ministry of Justice that they were a development agency and not a political party.

Another such experience is that of the Ethiopian Free Press Journalists Association (EFPJA) which managed to get registered after eight years since its establishment in 1993. When most of its counterparts which are international organisations such as International Journalist Federation, International Press Institute, PEN International, etc. recognise EFPJA as a professional association, the Ethiopian government did not give it recognition until 2001 when it finally managed to get registered as a non partisan and non political CSO. It managed to register only after it filed a law suit against the government.

iii.   Rapid turn over of government staff and continuous changes in the civil service structure

The high turn over of government staff and frequent changes in the civil service structure, disrupts communication and continuation of pre-planed activities of CSOs.

Currently the Ethiopian government has introduced a new civil service structure with the aim of promoting downward accountability and transparency among government organisation; to provide best services to the poor people and to empower community based institutions; etc. Though this has been appreciated by most NGOs who are involved in micro development activities, it still affects different development initiatives that were jointly run by CSOs and different government institutions under the previous structure.

For instance, FSCE has been providing training to police officers, commanders and investigators on protection of child rights and handling child offenders. However, this initiative has been affected when the trainees had to transfer to other areas of the country or had to leave the police force. In addition, joint committee programs initiated to protect child rights in different parts of the country (comprising of representatives from concerned governmental and non governmental organisations at the zonal level) was similarly affected due to the civil service reform and the decentralisation of government structure.

iv.   Government's interference in CSOs work

Government sometimes directly or indirectly interferes in activities of some CSOs or it influences their democratisation programs. This affects CSOs in such a way that they find it difficult to make decisions on critical issues.

When CETU expressed its concern regarding the dangers posed to the job security of its members as a result of the government's economic reform program, it did not receive a positive response. The General Congress of CETU protested against the violation of workers rights and the response they received from the government (which was an act of violation of the Constitution itself) was the confederation was prevented to organise any kind of meeting.   In November 1995, the various offices of the confederation were sealed and its legal registration cancelled. CETU challenged the government's act by appealing to court, and won with the ruling of the court being in their favour. Nonetheless, this did not stop government members from intimidating, harassing and even laying off employees on the pretext of redundancy.   Trade Union leaders and other workers who actively participated in unions' affairs were forced to give up their union posts, were suspended from their jobs, forced to retire contrary to the law, or laid off, etc. Finally, in October 1996, the government systematically disregard the previous union leaders who were

democratically elected and formed a new form of CETU with new leaders who were chosen by the government.

Since the majority of elected CETU management members and hired staff are members of the ruling party, Ethiopian People Revolutionary Democracy Front (EPRDF), CETU has been used to promote the government's political interest. The EPRDF also influences them to design their internal policies and procedures in line with the party's program. One of the reasons why staff of private companies' (such as Sheraton Addis, private banks and insurance) did not establish labour unions in their respected companies and joined CETU, is because of fear of government's involvement in their work.

v. Lack of awareness of the issue of human rights and the constitution

Since, the great majority of Ethiopian people do not clearly know what their rights and responsibilities are, they do not know whether their rights are violated/deprived or not. Hence, they do not claim for the realisation of their rights. Because of their ignorance people fear the state and this has negative impacts on the democratisation program of CSOs as communities tend not to involved in the process. This in turn results in little or no support from communities in undertaking democratisation. Therefore, these organisations mainly focus on public awareness raising programs in promoting and securing rights, and do not work beyond that.

vi. Absence of independent and efficient judiciary system

The judiciary system of the country is very weak and is characterised by lengthy bureaucratic procedure. It takes the courts several months and even years to pass a verdict. This discourages individuals and civil society organisations to take their cases to court and protect their legal rights.

The judiciary system has also been criticised for not being an independent body and is strongly influenced by government. As some CSOs argue, government's direct interference with the judicial process is almost becoming a norm. Court orders and rulings are disrespected and decisions ignored.

EWLA has been supporting women whose rights are violated and are unable to take their cases to court, through its legal aid service. However, as there are several cases which remain pending such delays postpone justice for the victims. This also negatively affects EWLA's efforts in supporting victimised women in protecting their legal rights.

Conclusions and observations

It was observed that there are very few CSOs that engaged in democratisation processes in the country. In other words, CSOs whose functions are to preserve basic rights of constituents and society at large, educate citizens and advocate popular claims and promote effective participation in the social, economic and political life of the country are just beginning to emerge.

The writer categorised CSOs that involve in democratisation process into two. The first group includes CSOs that are purely involve in human rights issues and democratisation process and the second group are those that link or integrate development work with democratisation process. Though the writer made efforts in trying to obtain information on the first group of CSOs, it was difficult to get more CSOs than those covered by this study.

Organisations involved in democratisation face several challenges mainly from the government. This is one reason for the existence of limited number of CSOs undertaking the said program and the main deterrent to the evolvement of new CSOs willing to involve in democratisation process.

NGOs as part of CSOs are mainly involved in the provision of basic services for poor and marginalised people, considering poverty as lack of basic needs. Hence, there are only very few NGOs that involve in democratisation process by interlinking/integrating these with their service delivery program. Even though some claim that they promote democratisation process, they do not practically do that and their words remain rhetoric. The main reasons why NGOs do not involve in such activities is because of the fact that their role in policy advocacy and democratic process is interpreted by the government as an act of opposition. This is partly due to the officials' lack of understanding of poverty and its cause; and their limited vision of the role CSOs play in changing the lives of the poor people by involving in democratisation process. Hence, government wishes NGOs to involve only in service provision by serving as gap fillers and NGOs wish a safe heaven to operate peacefully instead of facing challenges and risk of their existence.

However, with changes in the broad understanding of poverty - that includes problems of powerlessness, social injustice, deprivation of human rights, etc. - NGOs nowadays are required by Northern donors to involve in democratisation process and to link more and more micro development activities with policy advocacy and other basic human rights issues. International NGOs such as ActionAid Ethiopia, Oxfam UK, Christian Aid, Panos Ethiopia, etc., have adopted right based approach as a better approach to working along side the poor and marginalised communities to enhance their control over development intervention, by enhancing their ability to

defend their basic rights, such as right to basic education, shelter, food and health. Accordingly, NGOs are now initiating different projects in the area of human rights promotion, good governance, civic education, etc. Some of the local NGOs are forced to change their conventional development approach to right based approach in order to get continues financial support from donors. E.g. ActionAid Ethiopia works in 11 development areas in partnership with nine local NGOs. As it has made a strategic shift in its work, so have its partner NGOs which have changed their strategic direction after a long process of different joint meeting and workshops.

Some local NGOs however are still not comfortable with the new development approach. They complain that there is no reliable enabling environment to involve in the promotion of human rights and democracy and are afraid to face possible challenges, mainly from the government.

However, with some pressure from the World Bank and IMF, the government has started to:
- change its major development policies;
- fight corruption and promote good governance;
- introduce civil service reform;
- decentralise the government structure and encourage devolution of power to the lowest government administration units and community level institutions in order to promote downward accountability;
- show interest in working with CSOs and encourage them to involve in democratisation process;
- plan to involve in democratisation process;
- establish Office of the Ombudsman and the Human Rights Commission (OOHRC) etc.

Many people, especially human rights activists are pessimistic about the future fate of the country under the existing ruling political party, EPRDF. However, some people, mainly representatives of international NGOs hope that this would be a good opportunity for CSOs to involve in democratisation process and encourage communities, interest groups, human right activist groups, etc., to form legally recognised formal CSOs in this area.

Even though CSOs complained about the absence of enabling environment to involve in democratisation process, they themselves could not create strong networking or alliance among themselves. They do not show solidarity and support when their counterpart associations face problems and fall under government pressure. For instance, when EWLA and EHRCO's offices were illegally closed by the government and their members were facing a lot of problems (as discussed in part V above), except very few CSOs and individuals, no other CSOs protested or

showed concern. CRDA, which is the only officially recognised umbrella NGO, does not accept CSOs, that are purely involve in advocacy and human rights, as its member. It only organise and give support to member NGOs with operational agreement with the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission (DPPC). DPPC is governmental organisation that co-ordinates and control NGOs' work.

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