



# **Guideline for HROs Engagement on the Ethiopian National Dialogue**

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Developed by  
**Soleyana Shimelis**  
**Kalkidan Esayas, Ph.D.**

# Table of Contents

ACRONYMS .....	2
Executive Summary.....	3
1. Background .....	4
1.1. Definition of National Dialogue .....	4
1.2. Contexts in which national dialogue evolves.....	4
1.3. Framework and phases of national dialogue .....	4
1.3.1. Preparation Phase.....	4
1.3.2. The process Phase.....	5
1.3.3. Implementation Phase.....	5
1.4. Key Components of National Dialogues.....	5
1.5. Ethiopian National Dialogue.....	6
2. Purpose and Scope of the Guideline .....	7
3. The role of CSOs and HROs in the ND Process .....	7
3.1. Awareness Raising .....	7
3.2. Monitoring and Observation .....	7
3.3. Advocacy.....	7
3.4. Participation.....	8
4. Principles of engagement.....	8
4.1. Possible engagement objectives, tasks and strategies of HROs on the ND.....	9
4.2. Stakeholders of HROs on the National Dialogue Process.....	12
4.3. Possible challenges and mitigation actions of HROs .....	13
4.4. The code of conduct.....	14
References.....	15
Annex 1. List of national dialogue commissioners.....	16
Annex 2. List of participant organizations.....	16

## **ACRONYMS**

CARD	Center for Advancement of Rights and Democracy
CRD	Civil Right Defenders
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
EHRDC	Ethiopia Human Rights Defenders Center
ENDC	Ethiopian National Dialogue Commission
EPRDF	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
HoPR	House of Peoples' Representatives
MIND	Multi-stakeholder Initiative for National Dialogue
ND	National Dialogue

## **Executive Summary**

*National Dialogues have been used as a critical tool to settle political crises and lay the foundation for sustainable peace and smooth political transitions. Given Ethiopia's historic and current deep rooted political and cultural tensions, national dialogue is highly believed to offer the potential for meaningful conversation about the underlying drivers of conflicts and ways to holistically address these issues. National Dialogue usually helps to avoid potential political deadlocks, put off distractive conflict scenarios, or disruptive political transitions. There are different stakeholders that need to be involved and contribute their part on the process and outcome of the national dialogue. Of these, CSOs have a lion's share especially the ones which are mainly working on human rights. This guideline aimed to offer & recommend the tools for engagement of Human Rights Organizations (HROs) and human right defenders in the process of national dialogue. i.e. during preparation, process and implementation phases of the national dialogue in Ethiopia. This guideline is designed by collecting inputs from concerned HROs through consultation and validation workshops.*

# 1. Background

## 1.1. Definition of National Dialogue

National dialogue is defined as *"nationally owned political processes aimed at generating consensus among a broad range of national stakeholders in times of deep political crisis, in post-war situations or during far-reaching political transitions"*<sup>1</sup>

A National dialogue is an increasingly popular tool for conflict resolution and managing political transformation. It can broaden debate regarding a country's trajectory beyond the usual elite decision makers and election cycles. It is one of the tools used to build consensus among contending political forces to resolve major political differences and avoid violent conflict. National Dialogues have been used as an instrument to resolve political crises and pave the way for political transitions and sustainable peace.<sup>2</sup>

National dialogues are mainly accompanied by broader societal consultations, involving all sectors of society. Their approach can involve broad-based change processes, like negotiating a new social contract or more narrow objectives.

The political context in which a national dialogue takes place can affect the likelihood of success or failure. Key factors include political will, links to other transitional processes, common ground among parties, public support, learning from past experience, the role of external actors and national ownership.<sup>3</sup>

## 1.2. Contexts in which national dialogue evolves

Many national dialogue initiatives were taken in a political environment characterized by popular uprising, war or armed conflicts, and/or exclusive elite negotiation to end violence. National dialogue can be initiated by different bodies. Opposition parties, government, civic organizations have advocated for the initiation of a national dialogue, and did so for a variety of reasons. Generally national dialogues were a response to mounting domestic pressures and usually erupt in the context of political crisis. This was especially true when issues of fundamental national concern arose or the survival of a ruling government was in question<sup>4</sup>

## 1.3. Framework and phases of national dialogue

### 1.3.1. Preparation Phase

National dialogues pass through three successive phases: preparation, process and implementation. The preparation phase of the national dialogue is very crucial and critically shapes the next phases. Hence sufficient time, sometimes longer than the process, need to be allocated. At least major parameters of the dialogue need to be agreed upon in this phase. The common parameters include mandate of the national dialogue, agenda, participant selection, convener, decision-making procedures, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> Blunck et al., 2017,

<sup>2</sup> Paffenholz et al., 2017,

<sup>3</sup> Haider, 2019

<sup>4</sup> Paffenholz et al., 2017,

The preparation phase should distinctly set out the institutions and mechanisms needed to lay the groundwork for a smooth and successful National Dialogue. This is also the phase where potential pitfalls and challenges are anticipated and system designed to resolve as and when happened.

A consensus on core objectives of the dialogue need to be reached during the preparation phase, which may include, but not limited to, avoiding violent conflicts, rebuilding state-society relationships, reconstructing the political system, etc. Having clear objectives will determine the structure of the dialogue, the process and the outcome. Building confidence and technical capacity are key elements in the preparation phase.

### **1.3.2. The process Phase**

Once the key parameters are established, the process phase of the national dialogue will start. The process phase is the most public phase of the national dialogue. It is the formal national dialogue phase and covers major aspects related to implementing issues like including agenda-setting, determining a convener, establishing principles, producing decision-making modalities, selecting participants, ensuring public consultation and outreach, establishing effective support structures, and thinking about timing and sequencing.<sup>5</sup>

### **1.3.3. Implementation Phase**

The implementation phase is dedicated to executing the decisions taken during the negotiations. The implementation of a national dialogue's recommendations or decisions represents the final challenge for parties and facilitators and should be planned carefully during and after the dialogue. Depending on the objective and mandate of the national dialogue, planning for implementation happens during the process phase or even as early as the preparation phase.<sup>6</sup>

## **1.4. Key Components of National Dialogues**

National dialogues are very complicated, context driven process; however, they have some common key components that are very important while designing.

1. Mandate of National Dialogue facilitating body
2. Agenda Setting
3. Participants selection and Inclusion
4. Transparent decision making process

What makes or breaks national dialogue?

- Political will
- National elites' support or resistance
- Links to other transitional processes
- Common ground among parties
- Public support or resistance

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<sup>5</sup> (Blunck et al, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> (Blunck et al., 2017).

- Learning from past experience
- Existing culture of dialogue
- The role of external actors and national ownership
- Representation, number, and selection of actors
- Confidence-building measures
- Decision-making procedures
- Choice of mediators and facilitators

## **1.5. Ethiopian National Dialogue**

National dialogue has been a topic of Ethiopian political discourse for decades. Political parties have been advocating for national dialogue since the EPRDF led government came to power in 1991. Despite the idea being raised by many political actors, government has been adamant that there was no need for national dialogue in Ethiopia.

After the reforms introduced in 2018, the conversation of a national dialogue was brought back to the political conversation. Different initiatives that resemble with the dialogue has also been conducted. The best example could be a dialogue facilitated by “Destiny Ethiopia” among political and opinion leaders and “political parties inter party dialogue” facilitated by political parties themselves. The earlier has disseminated the findings<sup>7</sup> of the dialogue while the later was discontinued when the national elections became priorities of political parties. Destiny Ethiopia’s initiative was later expanded to become MIND Ethiopia with more actors taking part to facilitate a political dialogue, which is one of the contributors to the establishment of a national dialogue commission.

Amidst the initiatives that were scattered, the Ethiopian government announced that it will have an all inclusive national dialogue as its priority after the 2021 general elections.

On the 29th of December 2021, the House of Peoples’ Representatives (HoPR) of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) has approved the establishment of the **Ethiopian National Dialogue Commission (ENDC)**. The bill setting up the commission states that the commission is meant to “pave the way for national consensus and keep the integrity of the country.”

From the six hundred thirty two (632) nominees to the commission whose identities have not been made public, the HoPR shortlisted forty two (42) candidates for further consideration, and finally confirmed the nine (9) commissioners from the list of forty two (42) and additional two (2) from the bigger pool of six hundred thirty two (632) nominees. Currently, ENDC constitutes eleven (11) commissioners; of these, two (2) are females (Annex 1).

Some concerns were mentioned on the transparency of the process of selection of commissioners while some political parties announced that they decided not to take part on the process claiming that it lacked transparency and that the process is heavily influenced by the government.<sup>8</sup> In some cases, though not identical, there are also initiatives that are led by regional states and run separately at regional level. Examples can be the

<sup>7</sup> <https://forumfed.org/document/destiny-ethiopia-four-scenarios-of-possible-futures/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://addisstandard.com/news-newly-formed-caucus-sets-conditions-for-restructuring-reforming-planned-national-dialogue/>

Somali Region's Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Tigray Region's Genocide Documentation initiatives.

## **2. Purpose and Scope of the Guideline**

This "Guideline for HROs Engagement on the Ethiopian National Dialogue" document is prepared by the Center for the Advancement of Rights and Democracy (CARD) and the Ethiopia Human Rights Defenders Center (EHRDC), and financially supported by Civil Rights Defenders (CRD) in consultation with other concerned HROs (Annex 2). The inputs for the guideline have been collected from HROs through participatory workshops.

The purpose of this guideline is to define and direct the engagement of HROs in the coming processes of the Ethiopian national dialogue. HROs, given their different thematic focus, are expected to engage in the process in a way that brings the human rights issues, voices and agendas to the table; hence, this guideline, even though could also be used for other CSOs, is prepared primarily targeting and participating HROs to be used as a quick reference on their role in each step of the national dialogue process and possibly post national dialogue processes and activities.

The guideline covers a practical and theoretical topics related with Ethiopian national dialogue, suggests possible ways of engagement, objectives of such engagements and tools that would possibly be used while taking part on each phase. Organizations can expand on, design projects and define their role and objectives based on this guideline document.

The guideline can also be used as a base document for HROs when they design projects, activities, campaigns and other initiatives related with the ND.

## **3. The role of CSOs and HROs in the ND Process**

Civil society organizations are important actors of big national processes like national dialogue. In some cases like Tunisia where the "National Dialogue Quartet" initiated and facilitated the national dialogue which led to democratization, the CSOs themselves can even facilitate the dialogue. In other cases they influence the process by taking part on each step in different forms. Some of the specific roles they might have are:

### **3.1. Awareness Raising**

CSOs as a grassroots and nonpartisan organizations that can take the role of raising awareness on the meaning and each step of the process. With this role, they will have a significant influence to enhance active and meaningful participation on the process from the larger public.

### **3.2. Monitoring and Observation**

CSOs can also do wholistic monitoring, documentation, and reporting of the process to the general public and specific stakeholders. Their monitoring and documentation work will also help for groups and organizations that might want to engage on specific advocacy work regarding the ND.

### **3.3. Advocacy**

CSOs can also take part on different advocacy issues related with the ND. It could be advocating for inclusion of specific group and/or agenda as well as checking different steps of



the process and putting pressures over facilitators and participants for best outcome according to their mandated objectives.

### **3.4. Participation**

CSOs as representatives of different community groups; thus, they can take part on the actual dialogue or take part in different ways like participants selection, agenda setting, etc. and take part in defining the process.

HROs, like all other CSOs, can have similar role but as they are specifically mandated on human rights, they will have a specific set of principles, objectives, and expected outcome out of of the processes which is related with the current Ethiopian context.

## **4. Principles of engagement**

In addition to general principles of human rights organizations, HROs specific principles of engagement while they take part at different levels of the ND process

- **Non-Partisanship** National dialogue is a highly contentious political process; hence, it is very important that HROs display their political and ideological non-partisanship and neutrality to its utmost possibility.
- **Independence** HROs should independently engage on the process despite the influence of their stakeholders, donors and funding partners or others interests.
- **Transparency and Accountability** HROs on their own engagement on the national dialogue must be transparent, clear on their own work and also take responsibilities for their activities, actions and interventions.
- **Human Rights Approach** HROs engagement should solely be based on human rights approach. This could be making human rights a specific topic or a cross cutting topic among other political and social agenda to bring human rights at the centre of the process.
- **Promotion of Inclusion** As inclusion is one of the basic principles of human rights, HROs engaging on the ND process have special responsibility to ensure that marginalized groups are included and their voice is heard. They can also ensure that topics of inclusion are included in different phases of the ND.
- **Focused Engagement** HROs are encouraged to focus on a specific human rights agenda with an exclusive attention and ensure that their issues are part of the process. Broad or fragmented engagement on number of topics will lead to a possible limitation of the impact of their engagement. Many HROs have limited capacity; hence, in order to have a meaningful impact, focusing on singular issues will help save and recognize resources.
- **Cooperation** HROs must avoid duplication of efforts and cooperate among themselves to save resources and also impact the process in a meaningful way.

#### 4.1. Possible engagement objectives, tasks and strategies of HROs on the ND

Phases of ND, objectives at each phase with possible tasks and tools are shown on Table 1. HROs can expand on this basic guideline, develop projects and/or use it as a quick reference to design activities.

Table 1. The engagement of HROS on ND

Phases of the ND Process	Engagement Objectives of HROs	Possible Tasks of engagement by HROs	Tools/Methodology of engagement	Key Outcome
<b>Preparation Phase</b> (Includes the establishment of ND facilitating body, ND process design, awareness raising, engagement of stakeholders)	To contribute for credible and inclusive ND process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Engage with the ENDC</li> <li>▪ Awareness raising about ND (in light of human rights concerns)</li> <li>▪ Take part on methodology design for participant's selection, agenda collection, etc.</li> <li>▪ Advocate for credibility on inclusion and transparency of the process</li> <li>▪ Prioritize and highlight human rights agenda</li> <li>▪ Create platforms to help coordination of similar initiatives (example transitional justice and national dialogue)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Awareness raising campaigns, trainings</li> <li>▪ Partnership</li> <li>▪ Collaboration</li> <li>▪ Advocacy (campaigns, direct advocacy and documentation of the process)</li> <li>▪ Research and publication</li> <li>▪ Establishment of platforms</li> </ul>	The preparation of laws, regulations, and directives as well as methodology development on agenda selection and collection process is inclusive, transparent, and participatory.
<b>Process Phase</b> (Includes participation, monitoring & observation, and	To set selected human rights topics as agenda for the ND	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Participate on agenda selection, agenda setting, and dialogue</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Awareness raising</li> <li>▪ Advocacy</li> <li>▪ Partnership</li> </ul>	Human Rights topics included on the ND agenda and outcome

Phases of the ND Process	Engagement Objectives of HROs	Possible Tasks of engagement by HROs	Tools/Methodology of engagement	Key Outcome
documentation of the process; take part on agenda selection, setting, and the dialogue itself)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Select specific Human Rights issues to be included on the ND discussion table</li> <li>▪ Design specific advocacy task for specific and selected human rights topics to be included on the ND process and outcome</li> <li>▪ Advocate for participation and inclusion of marginalized and vulnerable groups</li> <li>▪ Advocate for transparent process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Collaboration</li> <li>▪ Monitoring and observation</li> </ul>	Marginalized and vulnerable sections of societies are included in the process and had meaningful participation.
<p><b>Implementation Phase</b></p> <p>(Implementation of recommendations provided after the ND to different stakeholders including government, political parties, and other concerned bodies)</p>	Ensure recommended actions related with human rights are being implemented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Engage Institutions that are going to implement specific recommendations related with human rights topics</li> <li>▪ Monitor and document the implementation process</li> <li>▪ Raise awareness among the larger public and concerned institution on specific human rights related recommendations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Awareness raising</li> <li>▪ Advocacy</li> <li>▪ Partnership</li> <li>▪ Observation and monitoring</li> <li>▪ Documentation</li> </ul>	Human Rights related recommendations are fully implemented

Phases of the ND Process	Engagement Objectives of HROs	Possible Tasks of engagement by HROs	Tools/Methodology of engagement	Key Outcome
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Advocate for establishment of a body that follows up on the implementation of the ND outcomes (this could be advocating for the extension of the term of the commission to oversee implementation of the process.)</li> </ul>		

## 4.2. Stakeholders of HROs on the National Dialogue Process

CSOs need to work with multiple stakeholders to achieve their objectives. When it comes to the ND process, it is important to identify major stakeholders and mode of engagement with them throughout the process (Table 2).

Table 2. Stakeholders of HROS and its engagement

Phase	Stakeholders	Mode of engagement
<b>Preparation Phase</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ ENDC</li> <li>▪ CSOs networks like CEHRO and Coalitions working on ND</li> <li>▪ Funding partners</li> <li>▪ Associations working on ND</li> <li>▪ Media and Media Associations</li> <li>▪ Individual HRDs</li> <li>▪ The National Human Rights Institution (EHRC)</li> <li>▪ Human rights defenders and human rights community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Networking and cooperation</li> <li>▪ Partnership and collaboration</li> </ul>
<b>Process Phase</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ ENDC</li> <li>▪ ND facilitators</li> <li>▪ ND participant HROs, CSOs</li> <li>▪ ND participant Political Parties</li> <li>▪ Media</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Partnership</li> <li>▪ Advocacy</li> <li>▪ Consultation</li> </ul>
<b>Implementation Phase</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ National Human Rights Institution</li> <li>▪ Legislative bodies</li> <li>▪ Judicial Bodies</li> <li>▪ Concerned Executive bodies</li> </ul>	Collaboration Lobbying

### 4.3. Possible challenges and mitigation actions of HROs

While engaging on the ND process, HROs might face many challenges that will affect the outcome of their engagement. The following are major anticipated challenges and possible mitigation action points (Table 3).

Table 3. Challenges and mitigation action for engagement of HROs

<b>Possible challenges of the engagement</b>	<b>Possible mitigation action</b>
Safety of HROs	Design a collective safety mechanism among HROs while specifically engaging on ND
Lack of clarity on the process	Continuously engage with the ENDC and other stakeholders
Lack of access to take part on major steps of the ND process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Create partnership and consistent information exchange with CSOs that has direct access and contact with the ENDC including the Ethiopian CSOs Council,</li> <li>▪ Make an alliance with other similar organization to bring a better impact &amp; signing MOU with National Dialogue commission</li> </ul>
Lack of special attention to topics that HROs advocate for	Design a well thought advocacy campaign to make human rights an issue of the ND
Lack of resource and adequate human power well versed with ND process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Conduct fundraising</li> <li>▪ Collaborate on resource mobilization avoid duplication of effort</li> </ul>
Time management	Prepare action plan of engagement in line with the ND timeline
Introduction of new national projects related with ND (example transitional justice initiative) that may override the role of ND	Complement the initiatives by designing different initiatives that reconcile and involve initiatives concurrently.

#### 4.4. The code of conduct

The HROs shall act according to the following framework during engaging the ND process (Table 4).

Table 4. Dos and Don'ts while engaging on ND process

<b>DO</b>	<b>DO NOT</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Understand that ND is highly political process, approach it with most caution</li><li>▪ Become a voice of moderation</li><li>▪ Engage as many actors as possible</li><li>▪ Care about the image of your work and your partners on the process</li><li>▪ Consciously show independence from any interest group influence</li><li>▪ Keep your focus on human rights</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Engage in divisive and polarizing activities</li><li>▪ Directly or indirectly encourage violent rhetoric and action</li><li>▪ Partner with partisan entities</li><li>▪ Engage without well designed strategy and communication plan</li><li>▪ Ignore the voice of marginalized and vulnerable groups</li></ul>

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## **Annex 1. List of national dialogue commissioners**

- 1) Professor Mesfin Araya – Chairperson
- 2) W/O Hirut Gebreselassie – Deputy Chair
- 3) Dr. Tegegnetwork Getu-Member
- 4) Ambassador Ayerorit Mohammed-Member
- 5) W/O Blen Gebremedhin-Member
- 6) Dr. Yonas Adaye
- 7) Zegeye Asfaw
- 8) Melaku Woldemariam
- 9) Ambassador Mohammed Derir
- 10) Mulugeta Ago
- 11) Dr. Ambaye Ogato

## **Annex 2. List of participant organizations**

### **A. Participant organizations during consultation workshop**

<b>No</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Region</b>
1	Ethiopian gender professional association	Bahir Dar
2	Ethiopian Human Rights Council	Gambella
3	Ethiopian Human Rights Council	Dire Dawa
4	Ethiopian Human Rights Council	Jijiga
5	Benishangul Gumuz Development Association Network (BGDNA)	Benishangul gumuz
6	Addis Rehabilitation and Reintegration Association, (AHRRA)	Bahir dar
7	Ethiopian Human Rights Council( EHRCO)	Addis Ababa
8	Consortium of Ethiopian Human Rights Organizations (CEHRO)	Addis Ababa

<b>No</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Region</b>
9	Ethiopian Human Rights Defenders Center (EHRDC)	Addis Ababa
10	Association for Human Rights in Ethiopia(AHRE)	Addis Ababa
11	Initiative for Change(I4C)	Addis Ababa
12	Civil Right Defenders (CRD)	Addis Ababa
13	Good Governance Africa – Eastern Africa	Addis Ababa
14	Health and Wholeness Ethiopia	Addis Ababa
15	Ethiopian Women with Disability National Association (EWDNA)	Addis Ababa
16	Ethiopian Initiative for Human Rights (EIHR)	Addis Ababa
17	Civil Society Resource Center	Addis Ababa
18	Institute for Sustainable Development	Addis Ababa
19	Empowering Next Generation (ENG)	Addis Ababa

**B. Participant organizations during validation workshop**

<b>NO</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Region</b>
1	Ethiopian gender professional association	Bahir dar
2	Benishangul Gumuz Development Association Network (BGDNA)	Benishangul Gumuz
3	Addis Rehabilitation and Reintegration Association, (AHRRA)	Bahir dar

<b>NO</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Region</b>
4	Her Ethiopia	Jijiga
5	Center for Promoting Human Rights and Sustainable peace building	Gambella
6	Center for promoting democratic culture	Shashemene
7	Cheshire Eth Hawassa	Hawassa
8	Benishangul Gumuz Women Association	Benishangul Gumuz
9	Wakilisa Development Association	Afar
10	Green Love Appreciative Development (GLAD)	Gambella
11	Empowering Next Generation (ENG)	Addis Ababa
12	Health and wholeness Ethiopia	Addis Ababa
13	Organization for Rehabilitation and Development in Amhara (ORDA)	Addis Ababa
14	Ethiopian Initiative for Human Rights(EIHR)	Addis Ababa
15	Ethiopian Human Rights Defenders Center (EHRDC)	Addis Ababa
16	Transparency Ethiopia	Addis Ababa
17	Empowering Next Generation (ENG)	Addis Ababa
18	Institute for Sustainable Development	Addis Ababa
19	Civil Right Defenders (CRD)	Addis Ababa
20	Ethiopian Human Rights Council	Addis Ababa
21	Ethiopian Women with Disability National Association (EWDNA)	Addis Ababa