CONFLICT-SENSITIVE CIVIC-ENGAGEMENT OF THE YOUTH IN ETHIOPIA

A Quick Guideline!
This guideline is developed based on deliberations of a workshop that has participated 20 known youth activists from different regions of Ethiopia in November 2020. The youth activists have worked in groups starting to define conflict, conflict-sensitivity, civic-engagement, and continued to discuss opportunities and challenges of Ethiopian youth in civic-engagement, and finally draw a quick guideline to stakeholders on what to do to ensure conflict-sensitive civic-engagement (CSCE) of the youth in the Ethiopian context.

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### WHO IS THE YOUTH?

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Age</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ethiopia (CSA)</td>
<td>15 – 29</td>
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<td>Africa (Youth Charter)</td>
<td>15 – 34</td>
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<td>World (UN)</td>
<td>15 – 24</td>
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- **41%** Of Ethiopians are below 15 years of age (USAID, 2017)
- **28%** Of Ethiopians are between 15 and 29 years of age (USAID, 2017)
- **>70%** Of Ethiopians are below 30 years of age (UNDP, 2017)
WHAT’S CONFLICT?

Definition: “an active disagreement between people with opposing opinions or principles” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020)

Agreed Deliberations:

- The youth has been the major victim of repression and conflicts from the post-1974 revolution to the post-2005 electoral violence and pre-2018 protests and post-2018 conflicts, thus traumatized.
- There are multiple active and latent conflicts in Ethiopia and the youth are major actors in violent conflicts.
WHAT’S CIVIC-ENGAGEMENT?

**Definition:** “Civic-engagement refers to the ways in which citizens participate in the life of a community in order to improve conditions for others or to help shape the community’s future” (Richard P. Adler & Judy Goggin, 2005)

**Agreed Deliberations:**
- Civic-engagement is non-violent
- Civic-engagement should not be narrowed down to political participation and should be extended to social, economic, environmental, and other issues that concern the society
- Civic-engagement activities need to establish solidarity with others and share their visions between the leaders and their respective constituencies
WHAT’S CONFLICT-SENSITIVITY?

**Definition:** Conflict sensitivity is “a deliberately systematic practice that ensures that our processes and actions minimize negative and maximize positive effects within a given context, based on the awareness about the interaction between the said processes and actions and the particular context.” (Lucia Montanaro, 2019)

**Agreed Deliberations:**

- Conflict-sensitivity is the ability to consciously understand the contexts to mitigate the risks of unintentionally triggering latent or active conflicts.
- There are needs for more civic-engagement of the youth in Ethiopia and conflict-sensitivity is equally important.
- Conflict-sensitivity is recognizing the context of inter- or intra-group tensions in civic-engagements.
WHAT’S CONFLICT-SENSITIVITY?

Agreed Deliberations (continued):

- Conflict-sensitivity is a commitment to avoid or minimize harm while working in an already hostile environment.
- Conflict-sensitivity is an integral part of non-violent civic-engagement.
OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH CSCE

Enabling legal environment: Revision of laws including CSO law has partially liberalized the civic space.

Advancement of Technology: availability and advancement of information communication technology for resource and support mobilization; social media made engagement cheap, easy, and fast.

Youth Mobilization: informal youth groups are mobilized for actively engaging in civic and political affairs.

International and regional communities’ emphasis: are giving more emphasis and incentives to engage the youth in their programs.

Decentralization of movements: social movements are often being decentralized from where they have previously concentrated and centralized in Addis Ababa and major cities to small towns organically.
The government imposed challenges:
- Unwillingness to entertain diversity of social and political opinions
- Poorly appropriate youth empowerment policy package
- Lack of commitment to democratization
- Lack initiatives to reorient the role of the youth in civic-engagement

Unreliable information eco-system:
- Uninformed youth: are youth that does not have the proper information at all.
- Misinformed youth: are youth that does not have the right information about a situation and their actions are determined by the misinformation they have.
- Ill-informed youth: are youth that is disinfomed with the intent to cause harm.
CHALLENGES FOR YOUTH CSCE

Lack of clear and shared vision and goal:
Most civic movement leaders and their respective constituencies have gaps between their goals and means to meet their goals.

Lack of non-violence discipline:
Certain participants of movements could be violent and paint the entire movement a bad image.

Lack of code of conduct:
Informal [and sometimes formal] groups lack common basic moral values to behave accordingly.

Lack of engagement platforms:
There are no [enough] intra- and inter-community platforms to engage (train, coach, mentor, consult and communicate their constituency to elevate their competencies) and lead civic engagements in the right direction.
Loose leadership structure and accountability:
Leadership structures are not clear, the leaders of the movements do not communicate their vision, mission, and goals appropriately with their constituencies, and there are little means of holding them accountable.

The instrumentalization of the youth:
Socio-political interest groups use the youth to show force and raise bargaining power rather than giving the youth to directly engage in decision-making processes.

Lack of resources:
The youth do not have means of [local or foreign] resources mobilization to act independently.
GUIDELINE TO THE YOUTH CSCE IN ETHIOPIA

The Ethiopian Government Should:

- Create an enabling civic-engagement environment and draw appropriate policy that empowers the youth
- Revisit the quality of civic education from primary school to tertiary education

The Media

- Follow strict conflict-sensitive editorial policy on reporting civic engagement issues
- Create engagement platforms for the youth to share their issues, activities, and experiences as well as giving them an opportunity for engagement
- Continuously ensure the reliability of contents in reporting

The CSOs

- Focus on youth issues through both researches and actions
- Ensure participation of the youth in all engagement platforms
- Promote youth civic engagement programs down to grassroots movements
- Create a resource pool for youth civic-engagement and support youth initiatives
GUIDELINE TO THE YOUTH CSCE IN ETHIOPIA

The Youth
- Organize!
- Stick to the non-violent discipline of engagement
- Promote and establish solidarity with other parallel movements
- Promote (personal and/or group) capacity development
- Document the civic engagement steps, analyze trends, keep strategies up to date

The International community
- Share the best international experiences
- Create a resource pool for youth civic-engagement and support youth initiatives
- Support the local youth capacity development programs

The Diaspora and Influential Figures:
- Develop conflict-sensitivity and responsibility mechanisms towards youth civic-engagement leadership from afar or through the virtual influence
- Support youth civic-engagement through resource mobilization and enhanced networking
- Be voices to local youth civic movements