



Enhancing Legitimacy, Transparency and Accountability principles among Civil Society Organizations in Rwanda

Brief Note

1. Introduction

Enhancing the Legitimacy, Transparency and Accountability principles within CSOs in Rwanda is a process that requires a high level of compassion, proactive leadership, efforts and commitments of all actors involved in the sector.

This brief note was developed to present the summary on the current status of LTA principles within CSOs in Rwanda in terms of understanding these concepts, measuring, applying them, weaknesses and challenges related to their implementation among CSOs. From the situation analysis conclusion and recommendations, a civil society capacity strengthening approach, LTA implementation framework and a code of ethics were developed to enhance LTA principles within CSOs and need to be disseminated, known and then used by CSOs and interested partners when strengthening civil society capacity. The situation analysis on LTA principles among CSOs and other previous studies on civil society highlighted capacity gaps within CSOs in Rwanda. Most of them concluded that promoting LTA principles and sustainability of CSOs requires joint efforts, high-level leadership and commitments from various actors. This brief note provides an

overview of the CSOs and current status of LTA principles, highlights progress, gaps and barriers to the sustainability of CSOs. It serves as an informative and advocacy tool as it sets out a series of recommendations to key stakeholders.

2. Background of Civil Society Organizations in Rwanda and principles of LTA

The concept of civil society coincides with the arrival of Christian churches in 1900, especially the Catholic Church with its specialized missions. However, the dense associational movement was witnessed in the early 1980s, with the banner of development, especially in rural areas. They were mainly concerned with agricultural cooperatives and associations for mutual aid. Donors injected large amounts of resources into the country and hailed Rwanda's dense network of vibrant grassroots associations¹. Three important phases mark the historic emergence of Rwandan civil society:

The first civil organizations emerged in the 1980s. During this particular period, most of the CSOs were developmental NGOs and peasants' associations.

¹ Uvin, P. 1998. *Aiding violence: The Development Enterprise in Rwanda*.

After 1994, a good number of civil society organizations were created in response to humanitarian challenges such as supporting genocide survivors, widows, orphans, trauma and counselling, unity and reconciliation, fighting genocide ideology, trust-building and social reconstruction among others.

Between 1998 and 2000, many of the organizations adjusted their initial mandate to include social and economic development as the country was embarking on the new vision with a focus on political stability and strategic programs for poverty reduction. The number of formal CSOs operating in Rwanda increased gradually and their contribution to the national economy was estimated to be around \$196,000,000 in the 2018/2019 financial year².

Nowadays, the Government of Rwanda strongly recognizes that CSOs are an important pillar of Good Governance. The role of CSOs is emphasized in the NST1 under the theme Transformational Governance in many areas including i) *accountability*, ii) *citizen empowerment and participation* iii) *monitoring and ensuring effective service delivery*. The importance of the involvement of CSOs in accountable governance and the development processes is equally put forward in Rwanda's Vision 2050³.

As far as the performance and sustainability of the CSOs in Rwanda are concerned, it has been realized that major progress has been made to meet legal and regulatory requirements, as well as improve programs management, but much more has to be done for more impact. The level of LTA needs to be strengthened for reaching more openness, trust, support, impact and sustainability.

3. Relevance of LTA within CSOs

The application of LTA principles creates public trust while enhancing the good image, credibility and sustainability of the CSOs.

Dealing properly with LTA principles will help every CSO to redefine more clearly its mandate, mission, core values and programs and implement them in a transparent, accountable and sustainable way. The Government, donors and partners will enjoy to work with committed and trusted CSOs that implement responsive and transformative programs, manage funds in transparent and accountable way, with the aim of transforming people's lives. Moreover, members, constituencies, beneficiaries and served communities will be more involved, enjoy high quality services and advocacy interventions that solve major policy issues hampering their social and economic development. More particularly, it has been proved that transparency is an essential pre-condition for CSO accountability,⁴ while LTA principles are essential pre-conditions and enablers of every CSO to achieve high goals, create more impact and then increase its sustainability.

4. Key outcomes from the LTA situation analysis

5.1. On the legitimacy principle

The analysis revealed that within CSOs, legitimacy is understood as compliance to legal requirements but also the way a CSO feels and enjoys its rights to undertake activities that are part of its mandate, missions and core-goals. The legitimacy among the CSOs operating in Rwanda

² NINGO and RCSP, 2020, An overview of recent contribution of CSOs to Rwanda's transformation, p8-9

³ RGB,

⁴ Christina Bermann-Harms and Nora Lester Murad, (2010) Putting the Istanbul Principles into Practice: A Companion Toolkit to the Siem Reap

is observed from appreciation of their interventions by beneficiaries and stakeholders, compliance of CSOs to RGB requirements, the standardized approach of monitoring and evaluation for CSOs activities, CSO efficiency and the value of money during project implementation.

However, the implementation of legitimacy is compromised by 5 major challenges: (1) scarcity of funding, (ii) failure to follow internal laws, rules and regulations (iii) internal conflicts related to interests and the poor organization's governance and financial management (iv) undefined or inactive constituency and (v) limited capacity of lobbying and advocacy on issues affecting constituency and the society. To enhance their legitimacy, CSOs are requested to invest more in their capacity strengthening by focussing on their mandate, complying with internal and external laws and policies, improving on governance, management, coordination and build partnership with other CSOs.

5.2. On transparency

For CSOs, transparency is all about being open and sharing information related to the organization's activities and operations. It includes also involving key people or key stakeholders in CSOs' decision-making process such as project development and implementation, budgeting process, and others.

The major challenges preventing CSOs from achieving adequate level of transparency include (i) ineffective involvement of members and staff in decision making for the organization, (ii) insufficient information sharing mechanism within the organization, (iii) lack, poor or ineffective use of internal administrative and financial procedures, (iv) little involvement of

constituency in decision-making and lack of feedback from them, (v) weak internal leadership and organizational management. To enhance transparency and make it an organisational culture, strong, democratic, competent and committed leadership is needed to set and enforce appropriate internal systems and procedures.

5.3. On accountability

Accountability is understood as being open and transparent in what you do, being answerable and liable to different stakeholders when asked about your actions and responsibilities.

The analysis indicated that even if CSOs adopt policies and are equipped with tools and materials that will enable them to be accountable to their members, board, staff, constituencies, government and donors, there are two major identified gaps among the CSOs when it comes to accountability: (i) Governance and managerial practices in some of the CSOs do not abide by the rules and regulations as they should (ii) CSOs are not properly accountable to the constituency, target groups and local communities. Accountability to government and donors is done to get good relations and keep getting funding.

The analysis concluded that the failure to effectively implement LTA principles for CSOs in Rwanda is mainly linked to (1) weak leadership and poor management that are unable to abide by the rules and regulations of their organizations, (2) the inability to raise funds that allow them to implement programs that are in line with their own mandate, mission and vision and (3) the inability to link and liaise with their constituencies, partners and potential stakeholders.

In order for CSOs to implement LTA properly, it is imperative that RCSP, Umbrellas and CSOs themselves establish and willingly implement mechanisms that will enable them to be empowered based on what LTA principles require.

5. Civil society capacity strengthening approach on LTA adapted to Rwandan context

The proposed approach is structured in 3 levels as key areas of assessing and strengthening CS capacity on LTA.

Levels	Focus and actions
Level 1: CSO internal operational capacity.	Aims at assessing and strengthening the internal and operational capacity of the CSO by addressing issues related to internal weaknesses and filling in the identified gaps.
Level 2: Outreach, community empowerment and transformation	Focusses on responsiveness by assessing how the CSO deals with and reaches out to its constituency, members, beneficiaries and communities and fills the identified capacity gaps.
Level 3: Public policy advocacy	Focusses on assessing and strengthening capacity, influence, commitment, and strategies of CSOs to engage the government in addressing public policy issues affecting the social and economic development.

For an effective and successful implementation of the proposed approach 6 principles shall guide the CSO:

1. *Board of Directors and other Governing bodies of the CSO have to be pro-active, own and support the process, and make it more demand-driven;*
2. *Institutional and organizational strengthening intervention must respond to specific needs and address specific gaps and aim to attain specific results and generate positive change;*
3. *The Work has to be done in partnership with all key stakeholders;*
4. *All interventions have to be customized to CSO needs;*
5. *The systems approach must be providing a holistic solution; and*
6. *Providing high-quality and well-defined support.*

Umbrella organizations or platforms shall use coaching and mentoring and peer learning and exchange techniques to build strong, reliable and trustable CSOs. The RCSP, Umbrella Organizations and their donors are key players in the implementation of the proposed civil society capacity strengthening approach to ensure its applicability and effectiveness.

6. Recommendations

Enhancing and strengthening LTA principles in Rwandan CSOs requires combined efforts and commitments of different actors:

Government of Rwanda:

- RGB should speed up the review and adoption of the NGO law by engaging and considering CSOs inputs;
- Line ministries and government agencies should fully operationalize partnerships with CSOs having specific expertise in designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluation of policies, programs and projects of public interests;
- RGB should enforce and regularly monitor laws and other regulatory mechanisms

aiming at implementing and strengthening LTA principles.

Donors and development partners should:

- Provide technical and financial support guided by a defined partner capacity strengthening framework, fair and equal partnership principles;
- Prioritise the localization agenda⁵ with special considerations to Community Based Organizations (CBOs), young organisations with clear mission and committed governing bodies, women and youth led organizations, social movements and informal networks.

RCSP and Umbrella organizations:

- RCSP and umbrellas should develop, implement, disseminate and monitor the LTA principles implementation framework and the code of conduct and ethics for CSOs in Rwanda;
- Umbrella organizations and network should provide CSO members with progressive support in LTA through mentorship, coaching and peer learning;
- Develop and use feedback mechanism to promote and ensure full compliance with LTA principles;
- RCSP and umbrella should enhance evidence-based advocacy for policy change on issues affecting CSOs and constituency.

CSOs should:

- Uphold LTA principles in compliance with the internal policies and rules;
- Adhere to the LTA principles implementation framework, the code of conduct and ethics;
- Define and build strong relationships with constituency, members and served communities by improving the level of transparency and accountability.

7. Conclusion

CSOs remain key partners in the social and economic development of the country at different levels. They are requested to support and supplement government efforts in the design and implementation of national policies. They have to review their mandate, set and achieve high goals, implement transformative programs through innovative and holistic strategies and approaches that make sustainable impact. Creating strong, trusted and sustainable CSOs that effectively comply with LTA principles should not be the responsibility of CSOs only but the Rwandan government, donors, development partners, should also support all capacity strengthening initiatives.

The Situation Analysis for CSOs on LTA principles, other different studies on the CSOs, the proposed civil society capacity strengthening approach demonstrated that if LTA principles are applied by CSOs, the quality of their work will be flawless or even extraordinary in favour of its constituencies and beneficiaries as well as to the entire country. In the same perspectives, CSOs with an increased level of LTA will be able to influence public policies by setting appropriate strategies and conducting advocacy interventions that tackle major policy issues.

Thus, it is time high that the RCSP, Umbrella Organizations and development actors implemented recommendations and started to invest more in the development of more legitimate, transparent and accountable CSOs to ensure future fruitful results, high impact and sustainability.

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⁵ About INGOs and UN agencies moving away from direct service delivery and strengthening a humanitarian system that can support local authorities and responders