

"Celebrating the past – preparing the future"
Wrap-up workshop for the EU/ET Civil Society Fund
25 January 2012
Address of EU Ambassador Xavier Marchal

It is a great pleasure for me to be here at this Civil Society Fund closing ceremony. Most importantly, it is also my duty to celebrate with all of you the achievements of this remarkable programme.

The Civil Society Fund deserves the qualification "remarkable", because in many respects it has proven to be unique.

Unique, because of its tripartite governance structure, bringing together the three stakeholders who worked closely together for the last six years to make the programme a success: the Government of Ethiopia, Ethiopian Civil Society Organisations, and the European Union Delegation.

Without constant dialogue and collaboration between these three partners, we would not have been able to build trust and confidence that is uniting us today.

Without this trust, the Civil Society Fund would not have been declared a domestic fund as per the definition of the CSO Proclamation, constituting the framework in which we all have to operate since 2009.

Unique, because of the diversity of Civil Society Organisations which the CSF has brought together. The "CSF family" is spread over the whole of Ethiopia, includes small organisations at the beginning of their professional engagement, and powerful organisations that have contributed to the creation of the civil society sector in this country. All family members work in different intervention areas be it networking and dialoguing, capacity building or service delivery in the governance area. All these interventions have contributed to the success of the overall programme that we want to celebrate today.

I think we can be proud of this diversity and this privileged relationship. It translates into action what the European Union members and our African Partners have agreed to when they signed the Cotonou Agreement back in the year 2000 with all its provisions on inclusion of Non State Actors.

I want to thank all the CSF family members - the Government of Ethiopia and the Civil Society Organisations – for their relentless efforts to keep dialogue and collaboration going, including in exigent times when the introduction of the CSO Proclamation brought about challenges and change.

I wish to thank in particular the Ministry for Finance and Economic Development for the bold decision to consider the CSF as a domestic funding source, thereby allowing preserving diversity and pluralism within the programme.

This decision demonstrates the importance that the Government of Ethiopia attributes to the relationship with the European Union and shows that when committing to Cotonou, it did not commit only to a piece of paper, but also to a process.

An equally big "thank you" goes to all the "CSF grantees" as we use to call them. Their individual efforts, and their commitment and hard work, are at the heart of the achievements and success that we will hear about today.

It is thanks to their engagement that hundreds of girls have been saved from Genital Mutilation and other Harmful Traditional Practices, that victims of sexual and gender violence have received medical and psychological support, and that conflict sources have been mitigated.

I am very impressed to see that the Civil Society Fund has actually been working on some of the core elements of EU external action, which are Democracy, the Rule of Law, the respect for human dignity, fundamental freedoms, equality and solidarity, as enshrined in the Treaty that created the European Union.

For many present here it might not be enough what the CSF has achieved so far. For others it might have gone too far. And a debate on this is certainly healthy.

For me, what is important, to be seen as achievement and success, is that a process of dialogue and cooperation has started in an area where relations are not always easy.

We have successfully laid the path for future tripartite engagement and have to work hard now to build on what we have achieved so far, and to go an extra mile further towards a greater role of Civil Society Organisations in the ongoing process of democracy edification. Our relationship has to be reinforced and made stronger to that respect.

Respecting the sovereignty of the Ethiopian government and the legislative context, we have to concentrate - each of us - on what we are good at. Civil society is good at innovation and creativity and represents the voice of the grassroots. It can reach where government cannot always do so and has to be valued for the contributions it can make to the social, economic and democratic development of each nation.

This particular feature of civil society has to be nurtured and not be suppressed by bureaucracy and red tape which in the end will only be counterproductive to the common goal we are all working for.

With the participation of a vibrant, pro-active and diversified civil society, working transparently and responsibly and guided always by the needs of its constituencies, the Growth and Transformation of Ethiopia will be faster and more successful.

Therefore, let me conclude by inviting all partners in this tripartite endeavour to build on the success that the Civil Society Fund has achieved so far and to push it even further in its second phase, for the benefit of all Ethiopians and of Ethiopia.

Thank you.