



# THINKING BEYOND ESAP3

Concept Note - Exit and Sustainability Strategy for the  
Ethiopian Social Accountability Programme 2019-2024

# ESAP - PROMOTING SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

2006  
2009

## ESAP 1

Citizens' engagement with government to address issues related to service delivery has long been a challenge in Ethiopia. The social accountability concept was successfully introduced in Ethiopia in 2006 through a **pilot program** with World Bank funding.

2011  
2019

## ESAP 2

Building on the lessons learnt from the pilot, a broader program was developed which sought to encourage citizens to hold local service providers more accountable. The **second phase** of the Ethiopia Social Accountability Program (ESAPII) ran from 2011 until 2018.

2019  
2024

## ESAP 3

The current and **third phase** Ethiopia Social Accountability Program (ESAP III) was launched in 2019 and runs until 2024. Confident in its approach from the previous phase, the third phase of the program extended its reach to over 400 Woredas, or half of the total Woredas in the country. It sought to enhance social accountability in the five basic service sectors, namely: Education, Health, Rural Roads, Agriculture and Water and Sanitation (WASH), and other identified sectors that are fundamental for a delivery of these primary sectors (e.g., electricity).



International

This second and third phase of ESAP are implemented by **VNG International**, the international development arm of the Association of Dutch Municipalities (known as VNG, its acronym in Dutch). VNG International works in several developing countries to strengthen democratic governance at a local level.

After more than ten years of ESAP, it is **time to draw conclusions** and discuss the importance and complications of sustainability in good governance programs, following examples from the ESAP program. This paper informs a **Panel Discussion** held on March 24th in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, featuring the World Bank, ESAP Management Agency, and other organizations active in the Development and Governance space, Helvetas and the British Council (CSPS).



## MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS

ESAP has worked toward improving service provision in local governments in Ethiopia through Social Accountability (SA), defined as the process to build trust between civil society, citizen and the government in participative planning and budgeting of local service delivery. ESAP's programmatic features were designed to produce **supply-side and demand-side change**, both independently and interactively: A more engaged citizenry in local governance is therefore both a means to improved service delivery as well as a goal in itself. After all, citizen engagement is enshrined in the laws and policies of the country.

An innovative feature of ESAP is that a **Management Agency (MA) partnered with a wide range of civil society organizations (CSOs)** to work with communities and community-based organizations to expand their knowledge and then to empower them to better engage with public officials. ESAP3 currently contracts 69 implementing partners/CSOs (organized in 24 consortiums) to work on SA in 416 woredas out of the over one thousand woredas in Ethiopia. These CSOs, with the support of the MA, then work with local public officials (e.g., elected officials and service providers) and citizens to form Social Accountability Committees (SACs), which lead general discussions on key policy problems facing their communities. The SACs were then responsible for forming citizens groups, structures and



## MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS OF ESAP 3

individuals and draft and then approve a **Joint Action Plan (JAP)**, which sets priorities in a specific policy area or service reform. These JAPs are informed by service providers, government and citizens based in dialogue and based on the different tools (currently Citizen Report Cards or CRC), a large-scale basic service need collection conducted on household level in the 416 woredas. Finally, these JAPs are to be integrated in woreda planning and budgeting and subsequent monitoring of implementation. The MA, through the IPs, also supports SACs to document improvements in service delivery as the result of the implementation of JAPs.

As much as possible, the **programme builds on existing woreda-level institutions** and citizen representative organizations, such as the woreda council, administration and sector offices, the Financial Transparency and Accountability program (FTA), traditional citizen-representing organizations, representative organizations of minority groups and other Community-Based Organizations (CBOs). **Gender mainstreaming** has been a crucial axis to the programme, with increased and effective participation of women in SA processes being an important achievement – currently 35% of the woreda social accountability committees consist of women.



# A NEW WAY FORWARD: ETHIOPIAN OWNERSHIP



Over the course of 2024, the programme will be **transitioned/handed over to the Government of Ethiopia**. In order to ease handover and ensure sustainability of the programme, ESAP has started applying a number of strategies:

1. On the **demand side** of governance, **ESAP has successfully partnered with civil society organizations** in their mandate of holding local governments and service providers accountable. Under the new Civil Society Act of 2019, the space to engage CSOs became more open. Working with longstanding community-led organizations as well as with a network of 69 Ethiopian Civil Society Organizations, has enabled these organizations to represent citizens, voice their concerns, and enter into constructive dialogue with government service providers. They are made aware of service standards. In active dialogue with these government entities, joint action plans were designed that feed into planning and budgeting cycles – under ESAP2 on the kebele level, and now in ESAP3 on the woreda level. Through institutionalizing these concerns in the administration and its plans, as well as being publicly supported by elected councils at Kebele and Woreda level, service providers and community leaders, this creates a sustainable gateway for locally identified needs to be established in the formal government structures.
2. On the **supply side**, after ten years of ESAP and Citizens Engagement programs, **service providers are now better aware and capable to base their service provision on local priorities and needs**. They know to communicate service standards, conduct validation and interface meetings with citizens and their representative organisations to set action plans for service delivery in five basic service priority sectors. More than before, the attitude of government officials is open to listening to citizens and less top-down. We have provided training to councillors and institutionalized our approach in manuals and guidelines: These materials and trainings are made available on online platforms and online courses (MOOCs) so that knowledge is retained and sustained within organizations. On top of this, in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance, the online ESAP3 basic course and councils' training manual were developed.

3. **Where demand meets supply** - interesting forms of cocreation and co-governance have emerged that form a basis for continuation of the process and support by future GoE programs and DP supported programs. Examples include the building of health facilities closer and more accessible to citizens in specific woredas, after health was prioritized in the JAP (Harar region). Since ESAP3, we have worked more intensively with media and journalists in their role to not only keep citizens informed on service

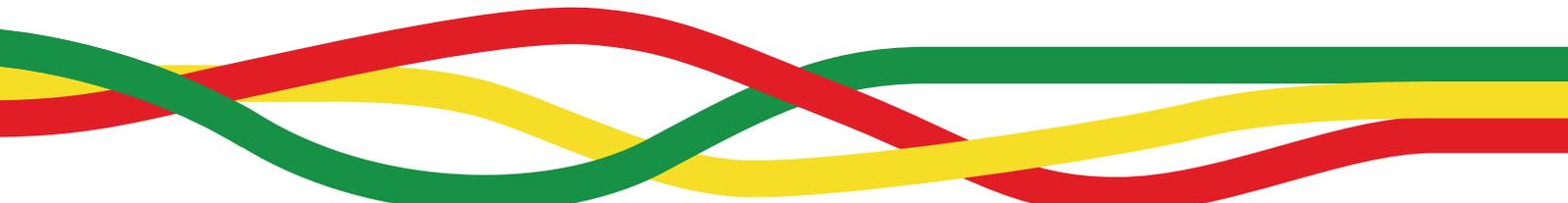


standards, but also to provide a platform for exchange between citizens and (local) governments. See this article by the WB "Innovative Citizen Engagement in Ethiopia During the COVID-19 Pandemic": Radio Shows Promote Accountable Service Delivery, which more than doubled the reach of the program, and gave voice to citizens to talk directly with government officials about services and policies related to COVID-19.

At the end of the programme, ESAP-established structures and programmes are to be taken over by the GoE – this is an essential part of our sustainability strategy as formulated by the WB and GoE: To institutionalize Social Accountability in government and having Social Accountability focal persons in government that need to roll out the cycle. Through the IDA20 programme, the **GoE has committed itself to institutionalize SA** in their way of working.



# ENSURING A SMOOTH TRANSITION



With fourteen months of ESAP remaining, ensuring this smooth transition is a key priority. Yet, complicating factors remain:

1. **Social accountability is a complicated process**, which has taking root for ten years in Ethiopia now. Is the process adequately tested and institutionalized to be handed over? Does the GoE (already) have the right capacity and resources to take over the process? Within ESAP, we deal with high staff turnover in woredas and other levels of (local) government.
2. While it is crucial that GoE owns and enacts Social Accountability in all layers of government, it **requires strong, resilient, and self-sustaining civil society** (demand and supply). While it is recognisable that the current government has made strides in reforming repressive laws that limited civil society and their space to play their role, the conflict in the north and in other parts of the country posed a huge challenge on trust between government, citizens and civil society organizations. This easily led actors to cling onto a closed governance system that prefers to control rather than collaborate, and it will take a long time to **overcome the engrained culture of a centralized, top-down government system**. This culture does not change overnight. How do we ensure that civic space and social accountability continue to be promoted, when it is the government itself that is managing the SA process? Have we learned from SA initiatives managed by sectors such as Ministry of Health?
3. ESAP has established local structures, the WSAC's. Such externally created spaces for accountability serve as "schools for citizenship," as argued by McGee and Kroeschell (2013) These structures have functioned very well during program implementation, but their sustainability is not automatically guaranteed. **Will combined citizen organizations continue to be organized to the current level**, without the support of a facilitating non-governmental organization?

These questions will lead our discussion on March 24th.



International

# VNG INTERNATIONAL

VNG International is the international cooperation agency of the **Association of Netherlands Municipalities** (VNG). It is a medium sized, dynamic company annually managing over 60 projects and programmes in about 40 countries, with a focus on **decentralisation, local governance and capacity-building**. VNG International supports local governments, their associations and training institutions in developing countries and countries in transition.

The organisation was founded in 1993, making use of the practical experience of Dutch local governments and their Association of Dutch Municipalities (VNG). The Dutch shareholder VNG was established in 1912 and is now one of the **world's oldest and strongest local government associations** with 355 members, 200 staff and a vast resource of experience. VNG International is located in VNG headquarters and has direct access to VNG resources.

**VNG International supports local governments**, their associations and training institutions, CSOs as well as national ministries in developing countries and countries in transition. VNG International combines specialised technical know-how with managing, implementing and monitoring large projects of international donors, such as the European Commission, the World Bank, the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, USAID, various United Nations agencies and a series of other multilateral institutions and bilateral donors.

Find us at: [www.vng-international.nl](http://www.vng-international.nl)  
[www.vng-esap.org](http://www.vng-esap.org)

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