

Code of Conduct for NGOs in Ethiopia

March 1999

Addis Ababa
Ethiopia

Introduction

It is almost 30 years since many of our present Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) first began working in Ethiopia. The leading ones (both national and international) originally became involved in order to mitigate the effects of the droughts of 1973-74 and 1984-85. Since then, however, their emergency response and relief activity roles have gradually declined and today the important challenges are in the fields of rehabilitation and development.

This change from emergency relief to sustainable development is of far-reaching significance to Ethiopia and needs to be handled with care, transparency and accountability. There is also an increasing involvement of NGOs in advocacy, in human rights and civic education. As NGOs have emerged as important development partners, they need to inform what they stand for, their policies, achievements and what they plan to do in the future.

NGO networking, co-ordination and understanding have, in the past, been less than ideal and several independent initiatives were taken in order to examine the role and relationships of NGOs in Ethiopia. These initiatives included:

- the work of the Consortium of Ethiopian Voluntary Organisations (CEVO);
- a series of workshops by the Inter-African Group (IAG) on the roles of NGOs in the emerging Ethiopian Civil Society;
- workshops on the principles and laws regulating NGOs by the Christian Relief and Development Association (CRDA).

These fora discussed the basic principles of the law governing NGOs, issues of volunteerism, and the need for a code of conduct for NGOs. On March 14, 1997, members of the various umbrella organisations (CRDA, CEVO, Society for Participatory Development in Ethiopia, (SPADE) and Consortium of Family Planning NGOs in Ethiopia, (COFAP) appointed a body called an 'Ad Hoc NGO Consultation Working Group' constituting of representative from each umbrella organisation and two resource NGOs, IAG and PACT, to come up with a draft code of conduct for NGOs in Ethiopia using the previous initiatives and opinions gathered through a series of consultations of the NGO community. CRDA was chosen to serve as the secretariat of the Group.

The Group examined a number of works in the field and adaptations of other NGO communities in other countries during its regular meetings. It then framed the first draft of Code of Conduct for NGOs in Ethiopia, which was scrutinised and further developed at two national consultative meetings at Africa Hall in February and September 1998. The September meeting, attended by well over 200 NGO representatives, endorsed the final draft as an instrument of self-regulation.

The Code of Conduct has introduced for the first time standards for previously unregulated activities. It will encourage more effective and efficient ways of working and will improve the partnership between the NGO sector, the government and the private sector. It will ultimately contribute to an enabling environment for all sectors and to the sustainable development of Ethiopia and its people.

Preamble

NGOs operating in Ethiopia are committed to the advancement of the people, including improvements in their quality of life, and the promotion of social justice, particularly for those who are disadvantaged and marginalised. It is, therefore, essential for the NGO sector to devise and implement a Code of Conduct which not only reflects its own core values and ensures the observance of its norms, but also leads to effective and efficient co-ordination and collaboration with the Government, the general public and other partners.

Article 31 of the Federal Constitution of Ethiopia guarantees the right to freedom of associations and has established an enabling environment in which NGOs can co-operate effectively and can formulate and implement a Code of Conduct. We, therefore, the duly accredited representatives of NGOs in Ethiopia hereby voluntarily affix our signatures to this Code of Conduct and commit our organisations to upholding the norms and standards within its framework.

Citation

All references are to 'The Code of Conduct for NGOs in Ethiopia, 1998'.

Definitions

1. *The Code of Conduct* is a set of norms, principles and values to standardise the conduct, action and behaviour of NGOs, and which recognises an NGO as a voluntary, not-for-profit, non-self-serving, non-governmental, non-partisan and independent organisation or association involved in the promotion of social justice and development. NGOs may thus, be national as well as international; secular as well as 'faith-based'; and of membership and non-membership categories.

Voluntary in this definition denotes free will on the part of the NGO as well as community partners. Although *not-for-profit* means not for private gain or profit, there may be paid employees or activities generating revenue which will be used solely for public benefit. *Non-partisan* and *independent* indicates that the NGO is controlled and directed by its founders in keeping with its mandate honouring community values and obligations and its responsibilities.

The Code of Conduct for NGOs in Ethiopia or the Code as referred hereafter includes two parts. These are **Standards of Conduct** and **Code Observance**. The Standards of Conduct are the norms that need to be adhered to while the Code Observance pertains to the mechanism of enforcement of the Code.

2. *Signatories* are NGOs whose duly accredited representative has signed and accepted this 'Code of Conduct'.
3. '*We*' refers to all the NGOs which are signatories to the Code of Conduct.
4. *Civil Society* includes all other formal and informal groups and associations that are not of the public and business sectors.

Purpose of the Code

The Code of Conduct will:

- ensure transparency and accountability in the operation of NGOs by voluntary self-regulation;
- improve the quality of services provided by NGOs by helping NGOs to adopt high standards of conduct and to devise efficient decision-making processes;
- improve communication between the NGO community and the various stake holders.
- improve the performance of the NGO community by encouraging the exchange of experiences among its members and learning from proven best practices. The Standard of Conduct shall refer to the way in which signatories behave and work.

The Code of Conduct shall be made available to NGOs, Government bodies, donors, target communities and the public at large to use as a reference and a guide.

NGO Mission

Our general mission as NGOs operating in Ethiopia is to improve and advance the public good, the quality of life of those who are disadvantaged and vulnerable and the proper management of the environment for future generations. To realise this mission, NGOs shall seek to empower and build community capacity, and provide services for sustainable development. They shall also work in partnership with each other, the Government, donors, community partners and the public.

I. Standards of Conduct

1. People-Centred

- 1.1. We see our efforts as a means for people and communities to solve their problems by themselves. We encourage and enable the development of self-reliance and advance the right of people to fully participate in decisions that affect their lives.
- 1.2. We shall act in solidarity with the goals of the communities that we work with and the priorities that our community partners identify for themselves.
- 1.3. We shall involve all the men, women, young people and children of our target communities to the greatest possible extent, making them responsible for the conception, implementation and evaluation of projects and programmes.
- 1.4. We shall respect indigenous knowledge, the dignity and identity of individuals and their culture, faith and values. But we will not support traditional practices that may harm an individual or the community.
- 1.5. The design of our programs will take into account the needs of the people and the well being of the environment and the country.
- 1.6. Our programs will be planned, designed, implemented, monitored and evaluated with egalitarian practice and the participation of the people concerned.
- 1.7. We shall abide by the principle to allocate resources efficiently and effectively within our organisation and our target communities.
- 1.8. We shall respect and adhere to internationally recognised human rights.

2. Fairness and Equity

- 2.1. We shall exercise and promote fairness, impartiality and equity in all of our activities and in our dealings with interested parties, community partners and the general public.

2. Fairness and Equity

- 2.1. We shall exercise and promote fairness, impartiality and equity in all of our activities and in our dealings with interested parties, community partners and the general public.

3. Moral and Ethical Integrity

- 3.1. We shall be truthful in all our activities and refrain from practices that undermine the moral and ethical integrity of our organisations.
- 3.2. We shall utilise all the resources and privileges available to our organisations in order to meet our mission and strategic objectives.
- 3.3. We shall accept funds and donations only from sources whose aims are consistent with our mission, objectives and capacity and which do not undermine our independence and identity.

4. Transparency and Accountability

- 4.1. We shall be transparent and accountable in our dealings with the Government and community partners, the public, donors and other interested parties. We shall use all available opportunities to inform the public about our work and about the origin and use of our resources.
- 4.2. We shall maintain and make available to all concerned bodies, periodic audit, financial and activity reports.
- 4.3. We shall conform to the constitution, laws, rules and regulations of the Government of Ethiopia and, where necessary, lobby for change.
- 4.4. We shall devise and develop sound financial policies and systems in order to manage our accounts.
- 4.5. We shall be truthful and honest in all matters related to the raising, using and accounting for funds.
- 4.6. We shall maintain an annual financial audit performed by an independent auditing firm and make the same public.

All financial statements shall be available upon a request by relevant and interested parties.

- 4.7. We shall maintain a sound financial and accounting system that ensures the use of resources in accordance with intended purposes.

5. Good Governance

- 5.1. We shall have a written constitution or a memorandum of association that clearly defines our mission, our objectives and our organisational structure.
- 5.2. We shall develop a written policy that affirms our commitment to equal opportunities in: our employment practices; the promotion of staff; and board composition.
- 5.3. All of our organisational transactions shall be free of conflicts of personal and professional interest.
- 5.4. The services of the governing body shall be given freely and voluntarily other than reimbursements for essential costs incurred during service.

6. Independence

- 6.1. Our activities and practices shall promote the interests of our target populations and the sector at large.
- 6.2. Although we shall always respect community values and traditions, we shall strive to maintain our autonomy and to resist conditionalities that may compromise our missions and principles.

7. Communication and Collaboration

- 7.1. We shall foster an atmosphere of collaboration and co-operation in our partnerships and supportive relationships to the best advantage of our organisations and target populations.
- 7.2. We shall promote harmony, collaboration, and team spirit within and outside the sector.
- 7.3. We shall share and exchange information, experiences and resources pertinent to our mission with the view to promoting, learning and, common understanding within and outside the sector.

8. Gender Equity

- 8.1. We shall seek to advance gender balance and equity and endeavour to ensure the equal participation of women in all our development initiatives.
- 8.2. We shall fully integrate gender sensitisation into our human resource development and promote non-discriminatory working practices and relationships.
- 8.3. We will strive to increase (where they are currently under-represented) the number of women in senior decision-making positions at headquarters and in the fields, in boards, and in advisory groups.
- 8.4. Our policies and procedures will be designed to promote gender equity in recruitment, hiring, training, professional development and advancement.

9. Environmental Consciousness

- 9.1. We shall exercise a responsible and responsive approach to the care of the environment and to the proper management of the eco-system in all our activities.

10. Sustainability

- 10.1. All our programs will be designed in full consultation with community and other interested parties. Projects that will be taken over by target communities or by government bodies shall be designed and facilitated to enhance sustainability.
- 10.2. We shall work towards the self-reliance of our communities and/or our community partners.

11. Impact

- 11.1. We shall develop and promote clear and measurable impact indicators for our programmes/projects in order to gauge their relevance and effectiveness.
- 11.2. We shall formalise various monitoring and evaluation tools to gauge our performance in relation to our objectives and the short and long term goals of our activities.
- 11.3. We shall make accessible to the public the findings of any assessments or evaluations of our activities.
- 11.4. We shall institute proper mechanisms for the internal and external evaluations of our programmes.

II . Code Observance

1. Establishment

The following organs are established for ensuring observance of this Code:

- 1.1. The General Assembly
- 1.2. The Code Observance Committee

2. The General Assembly

- 2.1. All signatories of good standing shall constitute the General Assembly, which shall be the supreme body of the Code Observance.
- 2.2. One half of the members of the General Assembly shall constitute a quorum with each member having one vote.
- 2.3. The General Assembly shall designate their representatives and their elected representatives from civil society to institute the Code Observance Committee- a mechanism to ensure the observance of the Standards of Conduct.
- 2.4. The General Assembly shall review and decide on all appeals.
- 2.5. The General Assembly shall evaluate the status of adherence to the Standards of Conduct by signatories.
- 2.6. The General Assembly shall define and institute the detailed criteria for civil society representatives to the Code Observance Committee. It shall also provide for the mandate, duties and responsibilities of civil society representatives.
- 2.7. When deemed necessary and after the approval of the General Assembly, the Committee may set up a Secretariat.
- 2.8. The General Assembly shall have one ordinary meeting per year and as many extraordinary meetings as called by a third of the signatories, the Code Observance Committee and/or the Secretary.

3. The Code Observance Committee

3.1. Procedure

3.1.1. The Code Observance Committee hereafter called the Committee shall be composed of five elected members from the General Assembly and two representative members of Civil Society.

3.1.2 The Committee shall appoint and/or dismiss a secretary.

3.1.3 The Committee shall meet quarterly and consider petitions by prospective persons or groups of persons who lodge complaints presented to the Secretary of the Committee.

3.2. The Committee's Secretary shall:

3.2.1. Request a signatory to provide a detailed written report when implicated in alleged breach of Standards of Conduct.

3.2.2 Ensure that a signatory receives a copy of the complaint registered against it by the person or group of persons who lodged the complaint.

3.2.3. Serve as a registrar of the Committee.

3.2.4. Demonstrate a willingness to participate in, and contribute towards, the high ethical standards of conduct within the sector.

3.3. The Committee shall be accountable to the General Assembly and shall oversee, promote and maintain the observance of the Code and shall offer guidance to signatories in the observance.

3.4. The Secretary shall report to the Code Observance Committee.

4. Composition of the Committee

4.1. The Committee shall have seven members. The members shall be five representatives of the signatories and two other representative members from civil society.

4.2. The signatories will nominate and select members of the Code Observance Committee by a simple majority vote and will appoint its Chair.

4.3. The Committee shall have two reserve members from signatories who will replace elected members in case of incapacity, death or resignation.

4.4. The term of office of members of the Committee shall be two years. A member can only serve for three consecutive terms.

5. Functions of the Committee

5.1. The Committee shall act as guardian of the Code of Conduct.

5.2. The Committee shall ensure understanding, trust and co-operation between the Public, the Government, the donors, the NGO sector itself and community partners.

5.3. The Committee shall promote and maintain the observance of the Code.

5.4. The Committee shall consider and determine petitions or complaints related to the non-observance of the Code from the staff of signatories, government, donors, community partners, the public and other NGOs.

5.5. The Committee may from time to time review and recommend changes to the Code to the General Assembly of signatories.

5.6. The Committee shall determine its own working procedures and norms and designate a person to act as Secretary for the Committee.

5.7. The Committee shall review significant breaches of the Code.

5.8. The Committee shall be engaged in awareness raising about the Code of Conduct enshrined herein involving Signatories.

6. Complaints

6.1. Any one person or group of persons may file a complaint or petition (supported by evidence) with the Secretary of the Committee.

6.2. A written complaint shall include the following:

6.2.1. The name and address of the complainant;

- 6.2.2. The name and address of the NGO or official against whom the petition is lodged;
 - 6.2.3. The circumstances in which the breach or violation of the Code is alleged to have been committed; and
 - 6.2.4. Where possible, a reference to the Standard of Conduct that was allegedly breached.
- 6.3. The Secretary shall open a file after ascertaining that the complaint meets the requirements of 6.1 and 6.2 hereof.

7. Jurisdiction of the Committee

- 7.1. The Committee shall hear and decide on all instances involving the violation or breach of the Code of Conduct by any signatory or any other acting for and/or on behalf of a signatory.
- 7.2. When a complaint is made under 6 hereof, the Committee may either dismiss the case where no breach of the Code is established or notify the signatory or official against whom the complaint is made.
- 7.3. In an instance of a significant breach or violation of the Standards of Conduct, the Committee:
- 7.3.1 Shall call a meeting of the accused signatory and/or official of the agency and the person or group of persons who lodged the complaint in order to discuss the case;
 - 7.3.2. Shall request any signatory and/or Official to provide evidence on the case under consideration;
- 7.4. When the Committee finds that the signatory or its employee has violated the Code, it shall take one or more of the following measures:
- provide the necessary education for compliance;
 - call on another signatory to assist in the education process;
 - advise the signatory in violation to take corrective measures against the NGO official or employee who is directly responsible for the breach of the Code;
 - admonish the signatory;
 - recommend to the General Assembly the suspension or cancellation from membership of the signatory that is found in violation of the suspension Code.

8. Appeal

- 8.1. An aggrieved party may appeal against the decision of the Committee for consideration by the General Assembly within two weeks of the receipt of a copy of the decision.
- 8.2. A late appeal may be entertained only where the appellant is able to establish good cause for the delay.
- 8.3. The General Assembly may, after considering the decision of the Committee, the memorandum of appeal and the available evidence:
- 8.3.1. remand the case of the Committee for reconsideration.
 - 8.3.2. confirm, reverse or vary the decision.

9. The Unseating of a Committee Member

- 9.1 A Committee member shall not take part in any deliberation or decision making process where he or she has an interest in the case presented to the Committee.

10. Scope of Application

- 10.1. The Standards of Conduct shall apply to all signatories, which fall under the definition of NGOs in the Code of Conduct and operate in Ethiopia.
- 10.2. The Standards of Conduct shall apply to all officials and employees who act for and/or on behalf of NGOs which have agreed to abide by this Code.

11. Compliance to the Code

- 11.1 All signatories and all individuals or groups who act for and/or on behalf of the signatories shall observe, respect and uphold the standards of this Code.
- 11.2 To that end, every signatory shall ensure that all its officials and employees are adequately acquainted with the standards of the Code and work by them.

12. Revision of Code

Revision of the Code will require the approval of two-thirds of the representatives of the signatories.

Signed on March 1999 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia