

Ghana Civil Society Forum

Institutionalisation For Sustainability and Effectiveness

Framework for the Governance of the Forum

1- Introduction

This draft proposes a framework for the governance and programming of the Ghana Civil Society Forum (GCSF) with a view to enhancing its sustainability and effectiveness.

It builds on the discussions and recommendations of the 1st and 2nd convenings of the forum in 2022 and 2024.

2- Background

As Ghana continues to navigate complex challenges and opportunities, the GCSF remains a crucial space for reflection, collaboration and strategic planning. Ghana has a vibrant NGO/CSO ecosystem.

The database of the Ghana Non-profit Organization Secretariat indicates a total of 2,295 registered Nonprofit Organisations (NPOs) in 2019. The contribution of the NGO/CSO sector to Ghana's development in terms of funding inflows, employment generation and more importantly, policy development, capacity development, public education, grassroots infrastructure, among others, is enormous. Just like any sector, the NGO/CSO sector has its peculiar internal and external challenges. Internal challenges include, weak or lack of understanding of regulatory and policy compliance issues, weak synergy and co-ordination amongst CSOs, and absence of self-regulatory mechanisms. For example, of the 2,295 non-profit organisations in the NPO secretariat, more than half of them (1317) are designated as not being in good standing. Many CSOs may not be aware of the existence of the Secretariat and what it takes to be in good standing. External challenges to the sector include growing restrictions through policy and regulatory reforms, increasing antagonism and mistrust for the sector by both state and non-state actors, dwindling funding, and an overall context of shrinking civic space.

Despite these prevailing and growing challenges, the NGO/CSO sector has over the years, lacked a mechanism or platform for periodic sector-wide convening, reflections and planning to improve the sector, and confront existing and emerging challenges that need to be dealt with. What has existed over the years, have been clustered, largely thematic-focused groups such as the Ghana Anti-Corruption Coalition (GACC), NGOs in the extractive industries, Civil Society Organizations platform on Strategic Development Goals (CSOs platform on SDGs), Right to Information Coalition, Coalition of NGOs in Health, among others. Meetings of these groups have, thus, often been around dealing with thematic or sectoral issues. There have also been funder-grantee types of platforms and convenings such as STAR Ghana grantees convening, OXFAM partners meeting, etc, which are often programme/project-based meetings. The thematic, funder-grantee, issue-based groupings and meetings are critical and need to exist to respond to emerging thematic issues.

But what is also critical is a sector-wide platform that occasionally convenes the entire sector to focus, not on thematic issues per se, but on the sector itself and contextual sector-wide challenges. This has necessitated the call for a sector-wide forum on the sustainability of civil society in Ghana.

In furtherance of the above, STAR-Ghana Foundation in collaboration with Oxfam in Ghana, Ghana Anti-Corruption Coalition, Ghana Integrity Initiative, NORSAAC, Ghana Developing Communities Alliance (GDCA), West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) and Ghana Philanthropy Forum have over the period convened two (2) forums that sought to provide a common platform for CSOs in Ghana to deliberate and reflect on their work as facilitators of good governance and inclusive development. The Forum is a space and a mechanism to facilitate collective and inclusive actions towards enhancing the effectiveness, legitimacy and sustainability of the civic sector and its organisations. The maiden edition was hosted in March 2022 under the theme: **"Reflections on the Conceptual and Developmental issues of CSOs in Ghana and the Sustainability Challenge."** The 2nd Forum was hosted from 25th and 26th of June 2024 under the theme **"Civil Society at an Inflection Point: Strategizing for Increased Legitimacy, Effectiveness, and Sustainability."** Participants recommended the institutionalization of the Forum and engagements with the NPO Secretariat on the way forward around CSOs regulatory framework.

Set out below is the proposed framework for institutionalising GSCF and supporting its operationalization.

3- Governance Structure

It is proposed as follows:

3.1 Governance:

- Set up a Coordinating Committee (CC) to:
 - oversee the work of the Forum,
 - provide strategic direction for its development and sustainability,
 - coordinate the Working Groups,
 - plan and implement the annual Convening/Conference of the Forum.
 - responsible for implementation of the resolutions and actions decided at the annual meeting of the Forum
- b- Membership of the CC will comprise as follows:
 - 5 Zonal CSO representatives (Northern, Middle Belt, Coastal, Accra and Eastern)
 - 4 Representatives of thematic/sector CSO networks and coalitions
 - 4 Convenors of the 4 Working Groups.
 - In addition to the above, the CSO funding partners of the Forum (STAR-Ghana, NORSAAC, OXFAM Ghana, WACSI and GACC) will serve on the CC for an initial two (2) years, after which they could be elected to membership of the CC in an ex-officio capacity.

- c- Members of the CC will serve a two-year tenure that can be renewed for once.
- d- The CC will elect a Chairperson and Vice (one of who must be a woman) who will serve for two-year renewable tenures. The Chairperson, or in their absence, the Vice, will preside over meetings of the CC and represent the Forum in meetings with external stakeholders. S/he will sign off on all official communications from the Forum
- e- STAR-Ghana Foundation will serve as Convenor of the forum and host its secretariat. The Secretariat will:
 - Provide logistical and other secretarial support for the work of the Forum
 - Lead on the fundraising to support the work of the Forum.

3.2 Working Groups

To respond to the vision and imperatives that led to the establishment of the GCSF, and to take forward the recommendations of the 2024 Forum, it is proposed that the work of the Foundation be organised around four (4) pillars. A Working Group of CSOs interested in focusing on that pillar will be formed and will develop and implement a plan of work around that. Each WG will elect/select a Convenor who will facilitate and coordinate the work of the WG. These are described below:

- a- **CSO accountability:** This pillar will focus on the increasing the accountability of CSOs to their constituents and to Ghanaians as part of measures to improve legitimacy, rootedness and sustainability. Issues to focus on under this pillar may include
 - *Peer review mechanism(s).* This will involve setting up processes that enhance the transparency, accountability and responsiveness of members who sign up to it. Members will be peer reviewed against a set of principles and benchmarks. Such peer review mechanisms help in demonstrating to donors, regulators and general public CSOs' accountability to agreed standards and principles. Participation in the peer review will be voluntary
 - *CSOs signing on to the **International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI)**.* Signing on to IATI, which is a global initiative to improve the transparency of development and humanitarian resources to address poverty and inequalities. The GCSF will help members sign on to and implement the IATI processes to enhance their fundraising efforts and their local and international legitimacy.
 - *National CSOs Day.* This will involve the institution of a **National CSOs Week** to highlight the work of CSOs in Ghana's development, dispel or address myths and misperceptions and provide platforms for members to account for their work.
 - *Other related work initiated by the WG*

II. CSO sustainability.

This pillar will focus on work to enhance the sustainability of the civic sector in general and CSOs in particular. It will involve:

- Strengthening members' capacities to diversify their fundraising.

- Promoting Local philanthropy
- Developing and periodically updating a database of funding sources
- Other related work initiated by the WG.

III. Strengthening an Enabling environment for CSOs

This WG will focus on

- Work on the passage of an NPO bill that is responsive to the context and issues of CSOs in Ghana and the implementation of the Act after its passed.
- Engaging with state actors, donors and other relevant stakeholders on an enabling environment for civil society in Ghana.

IV. Strengthening the GCS Forum

This WG will include members of the CC and will focus primarily on work to institutionalise and strengthen the Forum. Areas of focus will include:

- Develop criteria for forum membership
- Facilitate the formation of zonal/regional level branches of the forum to enable greater CSO coordination at all levels.
- Forge linkages with other CS networks and associations such as the GJA, TUC, etc.
- Continuously monitoring the health of the forum and recommending strategies for its strengthening.

4- Strategy and Approach

- The Forum will not be registered as a legal entity and will not set up its own offices. This is to ensure that any resources mobilised are used directly to provide services to members instead of servicing a secretariat and also to keep it as a flexible space for coordinated civil society actions. The Secretariat will enter into agreements and contracts on behalf of the forum.
- Except for any compensation relating to implementation of a funded project, CC and WG members will provide pro bono services to the Forum.
- Focus the work of the Forum on broad issues that affect the civic space and the functioning of CSOs. Avoid activities or work that is already being implemented by a CSO or coalition or CSOs. Where actions in such areas are contemplated, they should be complementary to what is already being done or planned by member CSOs.
- GCSF should not be set up or seen as a supra CSO superintending work of other CSOs, except for the Peer Review mechanism which is voluntary.

5- Financing

- Fundraising for specific activities or projects, from members, donors and private sector organisations.
- Self-financing for participation in annual forum, with general costs covered by institutional partners.

6- Terms of Reference:

6.1 Coordinating Committee

The CC will provide strategic direction, oversight, and coordination for the work of the GCSF. Its core objective is to ensure that the Forum remains effective, legitimate, and sustainable in fostering civil society actions in Ghana.

Role

- Oversee the operations of the Forum, ensuring alignment with the objectives of enhancing civil society sustainability and effectiveness.
- Provide strategic direction for the development of the GCSF, including decision-making around issues.
- Coordinate the activities of the Working Groups (WGs) and facilitate collaboration across the civil society sector.
- Plan and implement the Annual Forum, which includes setting the agenda, organizing logistics, and monitoring progress.
- Implement resolutions from the Forum's annual meetings and monitor follow-up actions.
- Facilitate partnerships and collaboration with national, regional, and international stakeholders.
- Ensure financial accountability and transparency in the administration of Forum resources.

Membership Composition

- Zonal CSO representatives (Northern, Middle Belt, Coastal, Southern, and Eastern).
- representatives of thematic/sector CSO networks and coalitions.
- 4 conveners from each of the Working Groups.
- Initial participation of Forum funding partners (STAR-Ghana, NORSAAC, Oxfam Ghana, WACSI and GACC) for two years, after which they may be elected in an ex-officio capacity.

Tenure

Members will serve a two-year term, renewable once.

Leadership Structure

Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson: One of whom must be a woman, serving for two-year renewable terms.

The Chairperson will preside over CC meetings, represent the Forum externally, and sign official communications.

Vice-Chairperson will act in the Chairperson's absence and provides complementary leadership.

Accountability

The CC will provide regular updates to the Forum's membership, ensuring transparency and responsiveness to emerging challenges and sector-wide priorities.

6.2 Convenor

The Convenor is responsible for facilitating the daily operations and logistics of the GCSF and serves as the Secretariat, ensuring the effective coordination of activities and long-term sustainability of the Forum.

Role

- Serve as the administrative hub for the Forum, coordinating communication, logistics, and general operations.
- Support the CC by facilitating meetings, preparing reports, and following up on decisions and resolutions.
- Lead fundraising efforts to support the work of the Forum and ensure sustainability.
- Enter into agreements and manage contracts on behalf of the Forum, while ensuring legal and financial compliance.
- Maintain relationships with donors, CSOs, government, and other relevant stakeholders.
- Coordinate the annual Forum, ensuring logistical success and participation.

Accountability

Reports to the CC and ensures full accountability in fundraising, financial management, and the execution of the Forum's strategic priorities.

6.3 Working Groups

The Working Groups will operate around specific pillars, driving focused efforts in critical areas identified by the Forum. They will execute plans, conduct research, and coordinate actions relevant to their thematic areas, contributing to the overall impact of the GCSF.

General Responsibilities

Develop and implement work plans based on the pillars assigned to the group.

Facilitate the sharing of knowledge and best practices among members on their pillar of focus.

Coordinate with other WGs to avoid duplication of efforts and ensure alignment with the overall goals of the Forum.

Advise the CC on emerging trends and challenges within their focus areas, contributing to the development of Forum-wide strategies.

Pillars and Responsibilities:

I. CSO Accountability WG:

- Develop a voluntary Peer Review Mechanism to enhance transparency and accountability.
- Support CSOs in signing on to the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) and improve local and international legitimacy.
- Coordinate the establishment of a National CSO Day to showcase the impact of CSOs on national development.

II. CSO Sustainability WG:

- Strengthen CSO fundraising capacities and promote local philanthropy.
- Develop and maintain a database of funding sources for member CSOs.
- Explore innovative approaches to sustainability in the civic sector.

III. Enabling Environment WG:

- Advocate for the passage of a responsive NPO bill and engage stakeholders in its implementation.
- Lead dialogues with state actors, donors, and relevant stakeholders to foster a more enabling environment for CSOs in Ghana.

IV. Strengthening the GCS Forum WG:

- Develop membership criteria for the GCSF, ensuring inclusivity and representativeness.
- Support the formation of zonal and regional branches of the Forum.
- Forge linkages with other civil society networks such as the GJA, TUC, and others.
- Monitor the overall health of the Forum and recommend strategies for strengthening its institutional structure.

WG Leadership:

- Each WG will elect/select a Convenor who will:
- Facilitate the WG's meetings and coordinate its activities.
- Represent the WG in the CC and provide regular updates on the group's progress.

Tenure

WGs will operate on a two-year cycle, in line with the tenure of the CC.