Humanitarian National CSOs Forum (HNCF)
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Email: info@ehnnf.org Tel: 251-915-072-135 Addis Abeba, Ethiopia Website: www.ehnnf.org

Date: 11 March 2026
Reference: EHNCF/PP1/110326

Ethiopian Humanitarian National CSOs Forum (EHNCF)

Position Paper

Equitable Access to the Ethiopia Humanitarian Fund (EHF)

March 2026

Executive Summary

Humanitarian financing in Ethiopia remains disproportionately dominated by international actors, despite the Ethiopia Humanitarian Fund (EHF) a UN Country-Based Pooled Fund (CBPF) being explicitly designed to prioritize local and national leadership. Ethiopian civil society organizations and Global South NGO leaders have repeatedly raised concerns that international NGOs (INGOs) and UN agencies continue to compete directly for EHF resources. This practice restricts meaningful access for local actors and undermines global commitments to localization.

While recent voluntary decisions by some INGOs such as Save the Children International's choice to refrain from applying to the EHF are welcome, these measures underscore the urgent need for systemic, policy-level reform rather than ad hoc adjustments. Ensuring equitable access for Ethiopian NGOs is critical not only for fairness, but also for operational continuity, risk mitigation, and sustained humanitarian presence in hard-to-reach areas—particularly where international actors face constraints related to access, cost, and community acceptance.

Key Challenges

Equitable access for Ethiopian NGOs remains constrained by structural barriers, including:

- Persistent competition from UN agencies and INGOs for EHF funding, despite stated localization commitments and limited meaningful engagement of national actors in decision-making processes.

- Transactional partnerships that reduce Ethiopian NGOs to subcontractors rather than strategic leaders.
- Limited or inconsistent access to adequate overhead and indirect cost coverage, weakening institutional sustainability.
- Weak enforcement of localization principles within allocation, due diligence, and monitoring processes.
- Limited representation of Ethiopian NGOs in strategic decision-making fora influencing EHF priorities, allocation criteria, and risk thresholds.
- The current approach is undemocratic and demonstrates no willingness to engage in genuine discussions on localization.
- During the HC meeting, the HC representative explicitly stated that the process for the US fund would not follow democratic principles.
- When new funders enter the space, the localization policy must remain consistent—it should not be altered or weakened to accommodate external interests.
- The strategy appears to prioritize the survival of UN agencies rather than advancing localization, effectively favoring agencies over communities.
- Our communities must be at the center of the strategy. The focus should be on empowering them, not on sustaining agencies at the expense of local ownership.
- Short allocation timelines and proposal requirements that unintentionally disadvantage national NGOs, despite comparable technical capacity.

These practices contradict the Grand Bargain, the Charter for Change, and OCHA's CBPF Guidelines, while undermining nationally led humanitarian leadership, local accountability, and long-term system strengthening in Ethiopia.

Position

EHNCF asserts the following principled position:

- International humanitarian agencies should progressively reduce direct competition for EHF resources and prioritize catalytic, supportive, and capacity-strengthening roles that enable nationally led response.
- Local and national NGOs must be granted direct, fair, and prioritized access to EHF funding.
- UN agencies and INGOs should serve as complementary enablers focusing on technical support, fiduciary mentorship, and capacity strengthening based on locally defined priorities.

This shift is essential to move from rhetoric to reality on localization.

Rationale

Ethiopian NGOs bring irreplaceable value to humanitarian response. They consistently demonstrate lower operational costs, faster start-up times, and higher levels of community acceptance contributing to improved value for money and accountability outcomes.

Key comparative advantages include:

- Proximity and contextual understanding of affected communities.
- Cost-effectiveness and operational efficiency in resource utilization.
- Stronger accountability to local populations.
- Long-term presence that supports resilience and national system strengthening.

Localization is not merely a matter of equity it is a strategic imperative for effectiveness, sustainability, and risk-informed humanitarian response in Ethiopia.

Key Recommendations

To realign the EHF with its original mandate, EHNCF recommends:

1. Prioritizing EHF access for local and national NGOs, with INGOs eligible only in exceptional, clearly justified circumstances.
2. Guaranteeing adequate and predictable overhead and indirect cost coverage for Ethiopian NGOs to ensure institutional sustainability.
3. Redefining UN agency and INGO roles from competitors to enablers, mentors, and technical partners.
4. Strengthening OCHA's accountability and transparency mechanisms, including clear reporting on localization targets and allocation patterns.
5. Fully aligning Ethiopia's humanitarian financing architecture with global localization commitments and nationally led response principles.
6. Publishing an annual EHF allocation analysis disaggregated by local, national, and international recipients, alongside jointly reviewed localization benchmarks.
7. Ensuring that EHF allocations are determined by collective humanitarian need and demonstrated comparative advantage not by institutional positioning, visibility interests, or organizational survival imperatives.
8. Institutionalizing meaningful participation of Ethiopian NGOs in EHF governance and advisory structures, including allocation advisory boards, strategic consultations, and after-action reviews.

Conclusion

A genuinely localized humanitarian response in Ethiopia requires a deliberate and measurable shift of power, resources, and decision-making authority to local and national actors. The Ethiopia Humanitarian Fund must fulfill its original mandate: to empower Ethiopian NGOs to lead humanitarian action not to compete for it.

Sisay Dejene Gudeta
Humanitarian National CSOs Forum
Executive Director

Registration No 7627 *P.O. Box-190148* *Website: www.ehnnf.org*