

CIVICUS Uluslararası Sivil Toplum Endeksi Projesi (STEP) II Türkiye Yan Raporları

Türkiye’de Sivil Toplum Kuruluşları ve Hesapverebilirlik

Zeynep Meydanoğlu, Bilal Zivali
Türkiye Üçüncü Sektör Vakfı (TÜSEV)

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TÜSEV
Bankalar Cad. No. 2
Minerva Han
Karaköy 34420
İstanbul / Türkiye
Tel. +90 212 243 83 07 PBX
Faks. +90 212 243 83 05
info@tusev.org.tr
www.tusev.org.tr

Özet

Çalışmada Türkiye’deki sivil toplum kuruluşlarının hesapverebilirlik anlayış ve uygulamaları incelenmiştir. Ülkenin önde gelen ve çok paydaşlı 6 sivil toplum kuruluşu ile derinlemesine yüz yüze görüşmeler yapılmış ve literatür taraması gerçekleştirilmiştir.

Analiz, hesapverebilirliğin dört temel başlığına odaklanmaktadır. *Şeffaflık* başlığı altında kuruluşların kurumsal süreçlerine dair bilgilerin ne derece erişime açık olduğu; *katılımcılık* başlığı altında paydaşların karar alma süreçlerine katılım dereceleri; *değerlendirme ve şikayet mekanizmalarının* varlığı ve paydaşlar açısından etkinliği sorgulanmaktadır.

Çalışmaya dahil edilen kuruluşların şeffaflık konusunda büyük yol kat etmiş ve paydaşlarını karar alma süreçlerine dahil etme çabaları içinde oldukları görülmüştür. Ancak STK’ların değerlendirme mekanizmaları ve süreçleri henüz oldukça yüzeysel şekilde gerçekleşmektedir. STK’lar çoğunlukla bağışçıların istekleri doğrultusunda proje bazlı etki analizleri ve değerlendirmeler yapmaktadır, ne var ki bu çalışmalar kurumsal performans ve değerler düzeyine nadiren ulaşmaktadır. Paydaşların geri dönüşleri için açık birer kanal işlevi gören şikayet mekanizmaları ise henüz yok denecek kadar azdır. STK’lar şikayetlere karşı açık ve hoşgörülü olduklarını, telefon veya e-posta ile kolaylıkla erişilebileceklerini söyleseler de bu mekanizmaların herhangi bir resmiyeti veya sürekliliği yoktur.

Vaka analizi, Türkiye’de STK’ların hesapverebilirlikleri açısından bir geçiş döneminde olduklarını ortaya koymaktadır. Çoğu STK hesapverebilir olması gereken paydaşlarını tanımlama ve onlarla daha yakından ilişkiler kurma aşamasındadır. Ancak genel olarak şeffaflık, katılımcılık, değerlendirme ve şikayet mekanizmalarının önemine dair yüksek bir farkındalık düzeyi olması sevindiricidir.

Introduction

Case studies are an important part of the research activities that are carried out under CSI implementation. They allow in-depth, systematic and qualitative analysis of issues and aspects that are significant for civil society in the country.

The case study at hand seeks to examine the extent to which civil society organizations in Turkey practice the core value of “accountability” and uses a broad conception of accountability that goes beyond the traditional notions that limit accountability to the analysis of formal representational mechanisms. Specifically, it defines the concept of **stakeholder accountability** as the right to hold an organization accountable by any individual or organization that might affect or be affected by a decision and action taken by an organization.

As a complex concept, there are different related aspects of accountability that one can analyze such as inclusiveness, transparency, evaluation processes and complaint mechanisms. **Inclusiveness** means primarily whether the CSOs’ arrangements de jure envisages an involvement of stakeholders in their decision making process. **Transparency** is often defined in opposition to privacy. A process is transparent when the information of the results is complete and freely accessible. **Evaluation mechanisms** measure the existence of systems through which stakeholders can monitor and evaluate an organization’s performance. **Complaint mechanisms** measure the existence of systems, even sanctioning ones, through which stakeholders’ complaints are registered and applied.

As such, this case study is structured to analyze how these four key aspects are promoted and practiced on both internal and external levels by civil society organizations in Turkey.

Civil Society in Turkey

The turn of the century has come with some catalyzing events for civil society in Turkey, be it the 1996 Istanbul Habitat meetings that rallied awareness around civil society or the catastrophic 1999 Marmara Earthquakes demonstrating modernization and development completely dependent on state is doomed to fail. Furthermore, the erosion of state’s domination on economical, political and cultural levels, along with the decrease in political party support in society, have created more space for CSOs . With the 1999 Helsinki Summit, Turkey became an EU candidate country, and in 2001, accepted the Copenhagen Criteria. Since then, governments have been eager to conform to EU demands; legislative reform packages involving amendments concerning civil society have passed; new and vast financial resources for civil society emerged; accompanied by new channels to affect policy making at the national and EU levels. In short, the new millennium has come hand in hand with a number of factors that created a more enabling environment for civil society in Turkey.

Consequently, civil society in Turkey has taken on a heightened momentum of growth and expansion and civil society organizations have taken on a new role as a critical element in a democratic society. The number of CSOs being formed continues to grow and they operate at increasing sophistication. With this growth comes a need for professionalization and

accountability. However, as CSI research outcomes suggest, civil society in Turkey remains limited in depth and breadth of participation from the citizens. On the other hand, the study also portrays a vibrant array of CSO initiatives in a rapidly developing, enterprising sector with great potential. CSOs display a great eagerness for more involvement in the policy-making process. They are also self-critical, and aware of the need to promote greater transparency and accountability; and also of the need to promote public awareness and citizen involvement. In such a context, principles of internal and external accountability become vital in citizens participation and maintaining healthy cross-sectoral relations.

Stakeholder Accountability

As previously mentioned, civil society in Turkey has been developing at a rapid pace. Within the last decade, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have grown both in number and size. Their service area has continued to expand as well; reaching greater number of individuals and working with a range of stakeholders. As is the case in other parts of the world, CSOs have a tremendous impact in the lives of individuals as social service delivery agents. They operate in many different areas from health to education and provide assistance to those individuals in need who are unable to receive the same services from private or government entities for whatever reason. In this context CSOs play a role in which they work to fill a service gap.

Another important role they assume and/or assigned to them is the one in which they work to promote or uphold democratic values. To this end they can perform multiple tasks: pressure or lobby government organs, bring to attention ill treatment of minority groups, organize citizens against undesired government actions, etc... In other words, CSOs are instrumental in keeping the government accountable to the people. CSOs are also beginning to take a more active role in public policy negotiations. At times they are approached by lawmakers for their information and expertise regarding a particular area of concern and other times CSOs force themselves into the dialogue while lawmakers are promulgating rules or regulations. CSOs not only can be useful during policymaking but also can be instrumental during the implementation and/or enforcement. It is exactly for these reasons why many start to discuss the topic of CSO accountability in more detail. If the CSOs are to keep the government accountable, they too, must be accountable.

Accountability, to put it simply, is the duty to answer for “performance expectations” to appropriate stakeholders. However, for CSOs, it is often difficult to identify these groups because unlike the private or the government sector CSOs work in environments in which many diverse actors are involved. So, before trying to examine CSO accountability, there must be an understanding of the range of stakeholders they are accountable to. CSOs owe accountability upward to funders/donors who grant resources and to government who acts as a regulator, downward to beneficiaries/service recipients and members who expect lobbying on their behalf, outward to similar organizations or other partners whom they form partnerships with to implement projects, and inward to personnel/volunteers who carry out the organization’s mission. As CSOs achieve the level of accountability desired of them by these groups, their legitimacy in the eyes of their stakeholders and the general public will

increase. Therefore, it becomes a necessity to look at the issue of accountability from a stakeholder perspective; after all it is to them CSOs are accountable to.

As mentioned above, the issues of accountability, legitimacy and transparency of CSOs are increasing areas of interest. Many different groups from academics to journalists have been dedicating their time to the issue and starting to ask questions. CSOs are being questioned about their financial accounts and organizational makeup; quantity, quality and effectiveness of their services; their relationship with their beneficiaries and/or groups they represent; their practice of democratic values. All of these questions attempt to shed light to whether or not CSOs actually do what they intend to do. Undoubtedly, CSOs will come out stronger from these inquiries. As more studies are conducted and further information is generated regarding CSO accountability, the sector as a whole will benefit.

Practice of Accountability among CSOs in Turkey

Inclusiveness

Overall CSOs have been lacking on the issue of inclusiveness. Aside from couple of the organizations interviewed, most do not make a special effort to include key stakeholders in the decision making process. First and foremost majority of the CSOs fail to accurately identify all of their stakeholders. Secondly, many of them tend to take decisions at the top level of management and do not include the rest of the organizational members such as lower-level staff, volunteers, and/or formal members. For example, at one of the CSOs, board takes all of the decisions without staff input or involvement, then the staff and later the volunteers are made aware of these projects for implementation.

Literature on CSOs suggests that volunteers, who are a vital part of any nonprofit, often get involved with expectations of being involved in the decision-making process. However, most of the CSOs tend to take decisions in a top-down manner in which volunteers play little to no role. Two of the CSOs emphasized the importance of volunteers in the design of projects; these organizations have a mechanism in place in which volunteer input is collected, analyzed and used when taking decisions.

Having said that, there are some positive developments in terms of level of internal stakeholder involvement in the decision-making process; senior staff, especially department heads can be influential when drafting a budget. Most of the CSOs rely on the expertise of the staff and department heads when formulating the budget for the coming year. Also, many of the CSOs hold staff meetings on regular basis; however it is hard to determine how much of the input is utilized when the final decisions are made at the top levels of the organization. Another observation worth mentioning is that there is an understanding by the individuals interviewed about the importance of this issue. They all agree that their organizations either do or try to involve internal stakeholders in the decision-making process.

Generally speaking CSOs perform a poor task of involving external stakeholders in the decision-making process. As mentioned above when discussing internal stakeholder

involvement, CSOs tend to fail to accurately identify their stakeholders. One of the most striking observations was that partnerships or cooperation on projects among CSOs are a rare phenomenon; only two of the CSOs seemed to have had joint projects with other CSOs on more than one occasion. CSOs are reluctant to build coalitions with other organizations with similar missions mainly due to the fact that they see each other as competitors rather than possible partners. Limited resources intensify the level of competition.

However CSO-private sector partnership is more visible and often how most of the projects are financed. Among all of the external stakeholders (similar organizations, private sector, government, beneficiaries, etc...), resource providers from the private sector seem to have the most influence on the decision-making process. At times, organizations tend to design their projects so it is in line with the expectations of the grant rather than solely aligning them to fit the need of their beneficiaries.

One of the reasons for this is that almost all of the organizations, except one, have never performed a needs assessment on their target population. This is one of the main areas where CSOs lack accountability as there seems to be a great disconnect between organizations and their beneficiaries.

For example, an organization that works with children has never performed a needs assessment and/or an evaluation of the effects of their services on children. Consequently, the target population, in this case children, does not have much influence on the design of projects.

CSOs have a unique relationship with the government, while some form very fruitful partnerships; others view them as impediment to their organization's mission. For example, one of the CSOs, design and implement their projects with tremendous support from the local governmental bodies.

One CSO representative mentioned that the local officials help ease some of the bureaucratic restrictions and also guide the CSO staff through their interaction with the local populace. On the contrary, one of the organizations told the authors that the government deliberately sends auditors to carry out an indebt inspection to catch any wrongdoings.

Among the CSOs interviewed two have been making noteworthy effort to include various stakeholders in their decision-making process. Within these organizations there is a mechanism in which stakeholder input is both collected and utilized. They hold meetings on regular basis with both their internal and external stakeholders; they perform a formal needs assessment and look to form coalitions with similar organizations, public entities and the private sector. On the contrary, two of the organizations analyzed, are quite disconnected from their stakeholders and almost all of the decisions are taken at the top level by the board or most senior staff. There is no mechanism in which input is collected especially from their beneficiaries or target population whom they represent. It is important to note that majority of the CSOs tend to not accurately identify their stakeholders, thus the organization fails to internalize whom they are accountable to.

It is especially worth noting again that most of the representatives interviewed are aware of the importance of stakeholder involvement in decision-making. Even though it is not always seen in practice, the awareness alone is a first and positive step. As previously mentioned, civil society is a newly developing sector in Turkey. Most of the terminologies mentioned in this study are still new ideas and practices for most of the CSOs. However, as more literature is accumulated on the issue of accountability and new models and mechanisms for stakeholder involvement are developed, CSOs will be more inclined to use them.

Transparency

Transparency implies the need to make information readily and freely accessible to all stakeholders. It gives stakeholders access to information, which is the first step in empowering them to participate in their issues of concern. From the CSO perspective, it can be argued that transparency increases the organization's democratic ownership and accountability, as well as providing a useful tool for donors, government and policy makers to take more informed decisions about civil society.

CSOs interviewed for this study all agreed that transparency is a necessary value that needs to be practiced and promoted on both the internal and external levels. Yet, the extent to which they put it into practice differs greatly from one organization to the other, making it hard to come up with any generalizations regarding the state of accountability among Turkish CSOs. On an organizational basis, CSOs show consistency in how they approach transparency: CSOs are either transparent or making a genuine effort to be transparent; or they are completely oblivious to the notion of transparency. Finally, activities and mechanisms to achieve transparency were more common and widely used than efforts towards achieving inclusiveness.

All CSOs contacted had a wide spectrum of stakeholders, including but not limited to their beneficiaries, general public, government, funders and fellow CSOs. Yet, their practice of transparency differed greatly from one another. Among these organizations, one found CSOs that emphasized both internal and external transparency by having solid and effective mechanisms to ensure the flow of information on both levels. These organizations facilitated a bottom-up and top-down flow of information through regular staff and board meetings and made the meeting content accessible to all stakeholders by posting them online. They also made effective use of their communications tools (such as websites and newsletters) to share information on a wide range of issues including their project documents, audited reports, mission, core values and financial information.

On the other hand, there were some organizations where the lack of transparency had become part of the organizational culture. These organizations lacked any mechanism to facilitate the flow of information on internal or external levels. One CSO representative emphasized the "looseness" of their internal information sharing by making a point of how the Board Members' often did not have any information on one-another's actions or views, resulting in contradictory statements and procedures. Websites of these organizations were in line with this culture, where one could find little or no information on the financial situation, management or projects. Finally, CSOs' approaches to disclosing their funding

sources also differed greatly and were symptomatic of their general attitude towards transparency. Some regarded it as a necessary practice for recognizing and motivating their funders while others saw it as a threat to their credibility.

Despite this inconsistency between different organizations, CSOs show great consistency within themselves. External transparency towards stakeholders such as beneficiaries, donors, public, government and media seems to have a direct link with internal transparency. In other words, one can argue that an organization that practices transparency on the internal level is more likely to be transparent on the external level. Of the six CSOs interviewed those that demonstrated higher levels of internal transparency (defined by existence and effectiveness of mechanisms to enable the flow of information between board, staff and volunteers etc.) also demonstrated high levels of external transparency towards their beneficiaries and general public.

In comparison, transparency seemed to be promoted more than inclusiveness by Turkish CSOs on both levels. Stakeholders of the CSO, such as members, board, staff and media are able to reach information that concerns them but often do not play a critical role in the decision-making process. For now, it seems that organizations seem to find it easier to inform their stakeholders than to include them in the decision-making process.

In conclusion, it can be argued that CSOs in Turkey are currently going through a transition. While some organizations have achieved transparency in its highest standards and are working on moving towards the next stage of inclusiveness, others are slowly moving towards achieving a simple level of transparency. Though their effectiveness is arguable, the existence of mechanisms such as websites, e-forums, mail groups, staff meetings and report circulation in all CSOs; along with the general consensus that transparency is a positive value to be promoted and practiced in the civil society arena are opportunities for taking current practices to the next level. Yet, CSOs need to pay extra attention to identifying their stakeholders correctly, keeping the established mechanisms alive and relevant; and avoiding adopting a purely pragmatic approach towards transparency (i.e. being transparent only for media coverage or donor requirements).

Evaluation Mechanisms

As mentioned above, evaluation mechanisms measure the existence of systems through which stakeholders can monitor and evaluate an organization's performance. Inclusiveness and transparency are prerequisites of having effective evaluation mechanisms as stakeholders need to be both effectively informed and included in the process. The term evaluation has entered Turkish CSOs vocabulary through its being a condition of implementing foreign or corporate funded projects. This has had several consequences on its application in the sector.

Firstly, evaluation has come to be primarily understood as something that is attached to specific projects and not necessarily related the CSO as a whole. This is evident in the fact that all CSOs interviewed acknowledge having carried out some sort of evaluation for a project in the past, while many have not felt the need for an organizational or personnel

evaluation. Secondly, in majority of the organizations, evaluation is not a long-term process but rather a one-time only activity. Among the few that have had an organizational evaluation in the past, most completed it several years ago and show no intention of carrying out a similar study in the near future. Thirdly, there is a general understanding that evaluation is something the CSOs do on their own rather than involving their beneficiaries or having an independent third party assume the responsibility, therefore compromising the objectivity of the outcomes. In terms of external evaluation, CSOs mention that funders often have their own evaluation processes and that their organizations are subjected to these on a project basis. Many also mention independent auditing as a yearly practice they try to do for their corporate and individual funders.

In conclusion, it can be argued that Turkish civil society organizations are far from having comprehensive and inclusive evaluation procedures. CSOs need to change the perception that evaluation is a project component to be reported to the funders and start seeing it as an essential part of keeping their work relevant, maximizing their impact and avoiding waste of their resources. Two challenges in this process are the lack of resources certain CSOs face and weak strategic planning. The lack of resources prevents CSOs from working with independent experts and conducting large scale evaluations. The fact that many CSOs do not undertake any strategic planning makes it hard to have a basis to measure current activities. Yet, benefits of having evaluation mechanisms are becoming more commonly understood by many organizations. CSO support organizations and major funders are also promoting a more enabling environment for such activities by providing additional funding and training opportunities.

Complaint Mechanisms

Complaint mechanisms are a means to address concerns and grievances raised by various organizational members and other, both internal and external stakeholders. Complaints can be viewed as being part of an enforcement mechanism in which stakeholders attempt to hold CSOs accountable. If organizations deviate from their mission then stakeholders naturally should have a platform in which they can bring their grievances to the attention of appropriate authorities within the organization. What is more important is whether or not these complaints and grievances are actually taken seriously by the organization and addressed in a prompt and efficient manner. To this end many CSOs have a formal complaint mechanism in which appropriate staff and/or department both collect and resolve matters brought before them.

Of the six CSOS interviewed none had a formal complaint mechanism to address stakeholder concerns. Internal stakeholders such as staff and volunteers tend to resort to informal means to raise grievances about the organization or its activities. It could be observed from the interviews, most of the complaints were raised through e-mail. Also, three of the organizations provided a channel of communication through their websites. Beneficiaries and the general public tend to use the two methods mentioned. However, in the six organizations, there were not any staff who were solely assigned to address these incoming complaints. One of the representatives mentioned that they go through complaints when they have the free time and only address those they deem “necessary”. Also, all of the

organizations mentioned that employees are given the opportunity to voice their grievances at staff meetings. It is important to note that when asked to give an example of such incident they could not recollect. Additionally, three of the CSOs held meetings exclusively designed for their volunteers and members and at these annual meetings representatives reported that they encourage both of the groups to voice their concerns about the organization. Again, there isn't a mechanism to capture these concerns and to address them.

Among all of the topics related to accountability CSOs have been lacking the most on the issue of receiving and addressing complaints and/or grievances. As previously mentioned a complaint mechanism can be utilized as an enforcement mechanism to hold organizations loyal to their mission by their stakeholders. Although there are informal ways for internal stakeholders especially staff to voice their complaints, there seems to be little means, other than the website, e-mail, and/or a direct phone call, for the external stakeholders especially the beneficiaries. Also, CSOs do poorly in advertising their limited means of complaint mechanisms. Given the fact that establishing and maintaining complaint mechanisms do not require tremendous amounts of resources CSOs can easily improve in this area if they realize the added-value they provide in bringing them closer to their stakeholders.

Conclusion

In conclusion, most of the CSOs are transparent and have moved onto deal with aspects of inclusiveness. Those that are not, at least, identify transparency as an important organizational issue and want to improve this side of their management. Furthermore, there exists a superficial understanding of evaluation and it is a sector-wide problem: CSOs only evaluate their projects and fail to do an overall evaluation of their organizational values, goals, mission, etc. Complaint mechanism can be linked to the level of an organization's inclusiveness. Only one of the organizations makes noteworthy attempts to include as many stakeholders as they can in their decision-making process. Also this particular organization sees the value added in implementing formal complaint mechanism because it brings them closer to their stakeholders through addressing their concerns and complaints. However, majority of the organizations rely on very informal means such as being accessible by phone, fax, or e-mail. In short, Turkish CSOs are still going through a transition phase in which they are attempting to identify, connect with and establish closer ties to their stakeholders. Although civil society sector in Turkey is still in its infant stages, there are signs of positive developments towards internalizing and practicing the core aspects of accountability.

Moving forward, before attempting to address the issue of accountability, CSOs have to identify their stakeholders to see who they are actually accountable to. After this formal identification process, a needs assessment would be appropriate to measure to what extent their programs or projects address the needs of their target population or in other words their beneficiaries. This will indirectly improve the level of inclusiveness assuming that the information obtained from the needs assessment will be used in project design. Furthermore, a communication strategy better linking the organization to their stakeholders and beneficiaries can be developed. A staff member should be allocated solely for this task. Also a portion of the budget should be designated to this end. This will not only link the

organization to their stakeholders but to the public in general and raise the profile of the CSO. Included in this communication strategy should be a formal mechanism in which complaints are collected and evaluated in a systematic manner. On a different note, CSOs can make additional efforts to share their financial information and other related documents on their website; this will improve their image in the eyes of their external stakeholders thus raising their legitimacy. Moreover, government and donors can encourage greater levels of accountability, especially donors through their grant procedures.

Annex 1. Profiles of CSOs Interviewed

Organization	Year of Establishment	Human Resources	Approx. Number of Beneficiaries	Yearly Budget (2008)	Position of the informant
Youth Organization	2002	Fulltime Staff: +40 Part-time Staff: +5 Volunteers: 21,000	280,000 individuals	7,409,000 TL	Fundraising and Communications Manager
Education Organization working with Youth and Children	1995	Fulltime Staff: 167 Part-time Staff: - Volunteers: 25,000	250,000 individuals	11,875,000 TL	Financial Manager
LGBT Rights Organization	2007	Fulltime Staff: 3 Part-time Staff: - Volunteers: +15	10,000 individuals	250,000 EUR	Board Member
Civil Society Capacity Building Organization	2004	Fulltime Staff: +20 Part-time Staff: +5 Volunteers: -	4000 CSOs	3,000,000 EUR	General Manager
Women's Rights Organization	1997	Fulltime Staff: 3	5000 individuals	250,000 EUR	Board Member

		Part-time Staff: - Volunteers: +5			
Environmental Organization	1992	Fulltime Staff: 79 Part-time Staff: 40 Volunteers: 331,000	350,000 individuals	7,045,000 TL	General Manager Fundraising and Public Relations Director

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