

CRDA is currently designing its five year /2009-2014/ strategic plan. Based on the consultation of members on the General Assembly, documentary review of the CRDA and civil society major documents and assessment of the operational environment CRDA has come up with the following major issues that need addressed in its strategic Planning. Have a look at them and we would greatly appreciate if you could forward any more, comment on the existing ones or suggest any alternative options.

**Please forward all your comments to [spm@crdaethiopia.org](mailto:spm@crdaethiopia.org).**

**We would like to thank you in advance for your invaluable feedback.**

The critical issues which the association is supposed to take as a building block are:

### **1. CRDA Membership:**

CRDA, as a stakeholders' organization, first and foremost is living as the Association of member organizations for its very survival. In the course of doing this, the implication of the looming legislation also need to be reconsidered right from the very possible identities of the forthcoming constituencies as per the context of the expected legislation. Accordingly, the strategic questions to be answered in this regard include:

- How would the Secretariat re-boost its members' interest towards the CRDA?
- Whom would CRDA accept as members (CSOs, NGOs, CBOs, Faith-based organizations, professional associations, mass-based organizations, private organizations, etc.)?
- Can CRDA accept members as equal as applied? How about de-linking membership acceptance from the inherent and expected institutional capacity building supports? And if to be de-linked, when and how?
- What other strategies can be considered to attract potential members to the CRDA as well as to retain the existing members at the absence of the institutional capacity building supports?
- How can we ensure the structural participation of members in the governance and programmatic issues of the CRDA?

## **2. Representation:**

CRDA at the moment has a feeling that it is representing the CSO/NGO category in this country no matter whether by default or by defacto. But, it is the right time now to examine how effectively it has been representing the CSO/NGOs in an inclusive manner as in the past. It is hoped that the examination will meticulously analyze whether CRDA has been really representing the CSO/NGOs category in an effective manner or whether it is merely bearing the name at the expense of its members' expectation from it in representation. The comment of Intrac's evaluation in this regard is worthwhile and is hoped not to be another missed opportunity in the history of the CRDA. Possible questions here could be:

- Can CRDA continue in its defacto representation of the CSO/NGOs in its entirety and if yes; on what recognized legitimate ground by all stakeholders?
- What major issues can call for CRDA's representation and how can these representations be communicated to and ensure the interest of its constituencies? What possible guiding principles can be developed for CRDA's representation to ensure the shared responsibilities among members, the board, and the Secretariat?
- What kind of relationship is desired with its stakeholders (the government, the private sector, regional, sub-continental, continental, international, bilateral and multilateral organizations, etc.) in the course of playing its representation role?
- How can CRDA engage with other networks in the course of representing the broader CSO/NGOs as a sector? How could it ensure sense of complementarities instead of competitiveness in representing the sector at large?

### **3. Members' Capacity Building:**

The strategic planning exercise should also reconsider whether CRDA can maintain its members' capacity building supports in the form of institutional strengthening. The matter is not only becoming critical in terms of the capacity to afford, but also in terms of looking into it from the perspective of linking or de-linking it from the acceptance of new membership. This in fact has a short and long term implication on the potential size of the CRDA membership that need to be handled in a planned manner. In addition to the strategic questions raised under No, 1 here above, the following can be supplemented here too:

- What other capacity building packages could CRDA have other than the material and financial components for its members?
- What mechanism can CRDA put in place for the capacity need and impact assessment of its members for measuring the input-output relationship of its interventions and contribution for members' capacity building?
- How about the viability of scaling up the CRDA training center to a long term and credentials (certificates, diploma, and/or degree) levels? What opportunities would be there in terms of ensuring the center of excellence and its financial sustainability?

#### **4. Funding:**

CRDA is being criticized for becoming a proxy-funder (see Intrac's Evaluation). The process of handling the fund channeling mechanism is also not receiving appreciation among many; even though one hardly avoids such a complaint while facilitating the fund channeling activity. So, as another major component, the forthcoming strategic planning need to pay due attention for the modality of continuing with the CRDA's fund mobilization and channeling role having in mind the following notes:

- What sustainability strategies can be designed to enable CRDA continue with its current poverty alleviation fund-channeling role? What viable methodology can be applied to ensure continuous fund-raising for the purpose?
- Can CRDA continue reaching for non-CRDA members as well in terms of channeling funds? How far can this satisfy or dissatisfy members on the other hand?
- What utmost transparent mechanism can be put in place to reduce dissatisfactions with respect to the procedure on the fund channeling?
- What were the extents of benefits and impacts registered from hitherto's intervention in the fund channeling activity? Is there any reliable system of measuring these in a regular manner along each project cycle?
- What would happen, say, if CRDA moves out of the fund-channeling business?
- With structural implication, what possible strategy can be proposed for more integration (or for a gradual autonomy) of the fund-channeling Department to clarify its exact position in the CRDA?

## **5. CSO/NGO Sectoral/Thematic Forums:**

CRDA is hosting about nine CSO/NGO sectoral/thematic platforms at the moment. Over the last three years, these platforms were not much functional due to one or the other reason. But, thanks to the concerted effort of all, these Forums have all been revitalized since the last quarter and started functioning. The strategic planning is also expected to consider as how to maintain this momentum since losing it again would be tantamount to losing them for last. Yet, in light of the looming legislation the following are issues to be considered in the strategic planning exercise:

- How can CRDA redefine the purpose of hosting CSO/NGOs sectoral/thematic platforms (working groups, taskforces, specific interest groups, etc.) in view of the imminent legislation?
- How can CRDA proactively and reactively facilitate the formation and nurturing of CSO/NGO sectoral/thematic platforms?
- What possible advantages does CRDA get from hosting thematic/sectoral forums and also what advantages do the forum members get from joining CRDA sectoral/thematic forums in vice versa?
- What expectations are there from the side of sectoral/thematic Forums from the CRDA right from the stage of formation to the stage of disengagement and what modalities of relationships could be there after disengagements?

## **6. CRDA Regional Platforms:**

This is another building block for ensuring CRDA's organizational representation in a Federally structured national regional states of the country. The Guideline for the CRDA Regional Platforms had recently been formulated and got endorsed by the CRDA Board. As an opportunity, the strategic plan also needs to look into the possibility of strengthening the Regional Platforms along with this Guideline and the modalities of expanding CRDA representation throughout the country. Some of the strategic questions needing a practical attention in the strategic planning exercise will be:

- What best strategy could CRDA design to ensure a complete organizational representation throughout the regions of the country?
- What would be the desired roles and functions of the CRDA Regional Platforms to ensure members' representation rather than the Secretariat's representation?
- How best can CRDA regional liaison officers (RLOs) could serve the interest of regional platforms/regional members? How can they facilitate regional members' participation in the central CRDA's issues (governance and programmatic issues)?
- What ready made opportunities could CRDA Regional Platforms provide for the upgrading intention of the training center, members capacity building, and in the monitoring of projects that are under implementation by the CRDA's fund-channeling?
- What will be the modalities of relationships between CRDA central and regional sectoral/thematic forums? How about the modalities of horizontal relationships (inter-forums) among sectoral/thematic forums both at central and at regional levels?

## **7. Information Service:**

CRDA is doing its level best to keep its members and partners updated on new developments in the development arena in general and on the issues CSO/NGOs in particular. But, its current doing capacity is being criticized not to be at its expectation. The strategic planning is also expected to address the challenge by considering the following issues:

- How to identify various information service of the CRDA by category (website, the resource center, regular magazines, etc) for their better service of the broader civil society sector in general and those of the CRDA member organizations in particular?
- How can CRDA resource center be better reorganized and re-equipped in a manner that serves all levels of interest groups (academicians, practitioners, researchers, short and long term trainees particularly in relation to the envisaged upgrading of the training center, etc.)?
- How should it upgrade and modernize its information service and technology?
- What possible and relevant linkages could the CRDA information center make with other information sources (government organizations, bilateral and multilateral organizations, other CSO/NGOs, private sectors, etc.) for a mutual information exchange on common issues?
- How to ensure a sustainable two-way information exchange between the Secretariat and the members, between and among member organizations, and between CRDA and other stakeholders (government organizations, donor-partners, bilateral and multilateral organizations, etc.)?

## **8. CRDA Training Center:**

CRDA training center has so far contributed a lot in terms of enhancing the technical capacity of member organizations for their operation at the grassroots level. In spite of this, given the well equipped facilities of the Center, some are of a view that more could have been done by the training center even at the scaled up level. The strategic planning is expected to come up with a feasible way of proving these constructive comments for practicality. In this regard, the following points need to be addressed by the strategic planning:

- How practically would it be feasible to upgrade the training center of the CRDA to an institution that can offer a long term certified credentials?
- What opportunities would be there for a transition into and functioning at the institutionally upgraded scale? Preferably with what best starting modalities?
- How about its feasibility in terms of cost and benefit analysis (marketability) and the expected impact, given the magnitude of the current domestic training institutions targeting NGOs' development activities?
- To what extent trained personnel (lecturers) would be available in the market? Are there any alternative ways of getting resource personnel (lecturers) from other sources like from other NGOs and multilateral organizations?
- How about the possibilities of tapping the existing capacities within members for a collective learning?

## 9. CRDA Program Planning:

One of the key challenges persisting in the CRDA has to do with lack of *CRDA-proper* of doing things. Notable among these are lack of CRDA planning modality that in many cases entangled with lack of measurable plans for a measurable accomplishments. CRDA used to depend on external consultants to draft its three-year ranged program plans which usually pose difficulty of ownership among the implementing staff. This would also make another area that is ought to be addressed by the suggested strategic planning taking into account the following issues:

- What lacking planning variables are affecting the quality of CRDA's program planning?
- How can CRDA develop efficient and all stakeholders serving internal planning and reporting systems?
- What best transparent financial planning format could be developed for the consumption of donor partners, non-financial managers, and CRDA's finance service delivery-users?
- What easy and user-friendly mechanism could be developed to integrate the physical and financial planning and reporting systems?
- In line with the current planning, implementation, and reporting problems; how about the viability of putting in place monitoring and evaluation system and what would be its best function and contribution?
- What can be set as a viable CRDA's planning approach; top down or bottom-up or a combination of both?

## **10. Organizational Restructuring:**

The strategic planning is also expected to address the inherent organizational structure of the Secretariat. As mentioned earlier, the Secretariat is suffering from lack of professionally competent staff, while physically having more than sixty staff members at the moment. In this respect too, the strategic planning need to lay a good foundation on the following grounds:

- What best effective and efficient organizational structure could ensure the huge organizational revitalization task awaiting the Secretariat?
- What kind of credentials and qualified staff are desired to technically shoulder such a revitalization task?
- What modest benefit package can CRDA afford for its staff to reduce qualified staff attrition as well as for recruiting professionals in today's highly competitive market?
- How would CRDA address concern of a wider salary-scale disparity even among the existing qualified staff for a mere reason of serving different Departments in the CRDA?
- What possible short and long term training opportunities could CRDA avail for its staff to enhance staff performance and motivation?

## **11. The relationship with other Networks:**

A number of CSO/NGO and Faith-based Networks have increasingly been emerged in the country upholding their own respective objectives. Logically, the emergence and development of these networks can be considered as additional impetus for CRDA representation of the broader civil society sector at large. But, while taking into account the looming CSO/NGOs legislation as well, the expected strategic planning should also consider these opportunity on the following strategic conditions:

- What possible common denominators are there for a continuous collaboration and engagement of the CRDA with other networks?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of collaborating with other networks?
- What could be the best modality of networking with other networks?
- When and how to collaborate?
- What best strategy can be devised to maintain the interest of the CRDA in the course of collaborating with other networks?

## **12. Ensuring self-regulation and ethical standard:**

It goes without saying that the perception of the general public towards the voluntary sector is not trustworthy per se. In fact, this is believed to have been emanated largely from an inherent hasty conclusion that ‘NGOs do have no one to be accountable for, while being seated on less monitored aid resources’. Undeniably, this has tremendously affected the image of the voluntary sector not to be as desired among all, including among the larger sum of even the NGOs’ project beneficiaries. On the other hand, one hardly denies the persistence of problems on the good governance practice of some elements both in the organizational management and in the service deliveries of CSO/NGOs. This practice, no matter whether more or less, could affect the quality of CRDA membership and the overall organizational image as well. Thus, the strategic plan should also consider how to address this inherent challenges (both at the membership and at the Secretariat level) on the basis of the following critical questions:

### **A) At the membership level:**

- What is the membership quality of the CRDA at the moment? What could be the parameters and indicators for having quality membership? What sustainable mechanism can be put in place to verify membership quality?
- How effective the CRDA supported NGO Code of Conduct and Ethics implementation is? Had it deserved a strong adherence mechanism to it? How about the extent of its enforcement in case of violation at least among those NGOs who have formally accepted adherence to its rules and regulation?
- What best alternative mechanisms can be developed to ensure strong enforcement mechanism of the Code of Conduct’s rules and regulations?

**B) At the Secretariat level:**

- What specific core values (organizational work ethics) are in place for the Secretariat and its staff to guide them as the underlying principles in their day-to-day activities in general and in serving members and partners in particular?
- If in place, is there any sort of monitoring mechanism to check the extent of the staff's adherence to those core values?
- Is there any enforcement mechanism for the adherence of each staff to the Secretariat core values?
- What are the differences and similarities between adherence to the core values and adherence to the staff policy rules and regulations?
- How is the interface between adherence to the core values and adherence to the staff rules and regulation is maintained to explain the general work ethics and standard of the CRDA Secretariat?
- Can the CRDA Secretariat become a model for its members and partners in terms of its good governance practices? If yes, with what benchmarks?

### **13. Resource Mobilization and ensuring organizational sustainability:**

One of the most critical factors making CRDA's situation so precarious today is that of unexpected financial shortage that it came across in the course of its transition from the third to the fourth Program Plan. It is hoped that CRDA has learned much from the incidence and similar crisis will not happen again. But in order to get out the already in-house financial crisis and also in order to protect the CRDA from falling into similar pitfalls, the strategic planning should strongly dwell on the remedy of the present and protection of the future with the following (but not limited to) critical issues:

- What opportunities does CRDA have for a reliable resource mobilization from the internal sources? How can it maximize this in light of the looming legislation that will allow income generating activities for NGOs?
- What viable strategies could CRDA design to enhance the trust of the classical donor partners for ensuring uninterrupted resource inflow?
- How can it expand its donor basis for resource soliciting from new donor partners?
- What financial management system could be developed to ensure transparency and accountability in terms of handling the CRDA funds at large?

#### **14. Learning from other model umbrella organizations:**

In the history of the CSO/NGOs of country, and whether fortunately or unfortunately, CRDA has already become the first umbrella organization for 321 NGOs and Faith-based organizations. But the Association is expected to revitalize and maintain its entity likewise in a manner that serves the interest of all its stakeholders and partners as a CSO/NGO consortium. Indeed, the revitalization task is supposed to be transformational and forward looking as well, in addition to the awaiting organizational system rectifications. To this end, CRDA needs to identify and learn the experience of few but model umbrella organizations (from across the globe) in the course of exercising this strategic planning exercise. The following are issued to be learned in this course:

- What organizational structures do these model consortiums/umbrella organizations have to share with the CRDA that got proved sustainable in maintaining their respective changes in continuity?
- What are the categories of their constituencies and how are they serving the interest of the diversified constituencies?
- What are their engagement domains; generic or specific or both in nature?
- How are they maintaining partnership relationship with the government and what viable strategies are they pursuing in ensuring mutually advantageous partnership?
- How about their relationship with other development actors like the private sector, bilateral and multilateral organizations, donor partners, other CSO/NGO networks and organizations, community based organizations, professional associations, academic institutions, etc.?
- How are they ensuring reliable resource mobilization with the objective of ensuring the organizational sustainability?