

ISSUE BRIEF

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One-Stop Shop for Civil Society Regulations at the Sub-National Level

An issue brief on the most relevant,
urgent, and probable application

BACKGROUND

This issue brief is developed to be at the forefront of thinking and building consensus on what a one-stop shop means to civil society regulatory policies at the sub-national level. Recently civil society organisations have touted one-stop shops as one of the solutions to the myriad of regulatory directives emanating from ministries and agencies of governments across different Nigerian states.

Regulatory delivery for civil society at the sub-national level is usually not known to be hinged on any state legislated law, however, research has shown that both the Child Rights Act and Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act enacted at the state level provide a legal basis for civil society regulations in the areas of children and women issues. One frequent lament by organisations is the difficulty of partnering with the government at the state level without registering with the agency in focus, accessing relevant information on administrative procedures relating to these registrations and their legal basis is often a challenge.

Organisations are also required to provide same information to different government agencies during

registration and reporting on their work which creates an unnecessary burden on human and organisational resources distracting them from engaging in other activities. In some instances, multiple registrations have been reported to result in increased costs to civil society organisations that often operate on thin funds, mobilised largely from founders, friends and family resources, which may then force some organisations to cease operating.

Effective service delivery is an important factor in the regulatory environment. To achieve this, the phrase “one-stop shop” has an immediate attraction among proponents of a strengthened civil society regulatory framework at the sub-national level. There are ongoing conversations around how a one-stop shop model can serve as a ‘win-win” for both the regulator and the regulated with a focus on enabling the operations of civil society organisations. One important conclusion from engagements with civil society networks on

sub-national regulations is the need for an inter-agency collaboration aimed at ensuring that regulatory procedures are established in ways that serve the beneficiaries of civil society organisations with the understanding that citizens are the final recipients of a badly implemented regulatory framework.

For example, a regulatory framework that makes operations hard for organisations offering shelter to abused women or street children would mean that these individuals cannot be served even when government resources are not enough to provide such support to those who need them. Hence it is important that governments invest more in improving the operational environment for civil society organisations.

This brief provides ongoing thinking, insight, and experience into how a one-stop shop on regulatory frameworks can be designed in line with sound public governance processes. They are emerging thoughts from conversations, early extensive background research on the topic and experience drawn from different one-stop shops. It identifies principles, actions, and commitments relevant to be considered in implementing a one-stop shop for civil society regulations at the sub-national level. This information is gathered from the

¹ <https://nnngo.org/civil-society-regulatory-framework-in-nigeria/>

Nigeria Network of NGOs' direct engagement with civil society networks across the country, as well as its 30 years of experience helping nonprofits and government create an enabling environment for organisations doing good across communities.

The issue brief has been enhanced with insights collected from an engagement meeting between ministries, departments, agencies, and civil society organisations organised by the Nigeria Network of NGOs and European Union-Agent for Citizen Transformation (EU-ACT) project.

WHAT DOES ONE-STOP SHOP MEAN FOR CIVIL SOCIETY REGULATIONS?

In their attempt to proffer solutions to issues of multiple registration, unstructured, difficult-to-navigate registration, and reduction of administrative burdens at the sub-national level, civil society organisations have suggested a one-stop shop. For them (distilling from discussions at several fora), this means bringing together a range of information and registration requirements in a legal framework, implemented in both a physical (counter-top) and virtual location (unified information, interactive and transactional websites) along with guidance and advice, managed in a holistic manner (having a single interaction with an entity that resolves all engagements and transactions around different regulatory services across all ministries, departments, and agencies).

The current thinking is that a one-stop shop provides and receives necessary information relating to registrations and compliance through one central portal (virtual) or counter-top (physical) and then redirects the information to all agencies requiring such in a way that common data are submitted once and not in multiples to different organisations through the integration of the systems of different agencies, creating common standards, processes and infrastructure that can aid interoperability.

EARLY CONSIDERATIONS FOR A ONE-STOP SHOP



Political will or commitment

Considerations for a one-stop shop will need long-term support from both political leaders and public servants (bureaucracy) to succeed. All public policies rely on political will and it is one of the main ingredients for a regulatory quality, critical to the design, take-off, implementation and retooling of a one-stop shop. Though civil society regulation is not always attractive as they often come with some pushback and can be difficult to engage actors since government intentions are also not always clear, sustaining communication and showing genuine commitment amidst clearly articulated intentions are needed for moving the needle on one-stop shops.



Policy framework

To sustain the political will, a policy framework that facilitates the establishment of a one-stop shop for regulations is needed. Attention will have to be paid to legal frameworks that can enable or prevent their establishment including administrative bottlenecks that may be removed to policy and law reforms. Policies and attitudinal change campaigns that help to shift the minds of public servants from doing things the old way and encourage interest in doing things differently will need to be adopted. Navigating across agency boundaries through the creation of a policy framework that supports inter-agency collaboration rather than rivalry is an important imperative.



Develop clear objectives

Before the establishment of a one-stop shop the objectives must be clear to build trust among regulatory stakeholders and to clear any suspicion including establishing the government's intention. This way expectations are set appropriately. A well-articulated objective helps to improve accountability and measure progress.



Coordination mechanism

Central to the realisation of a one-stop shop is coordination. Managing responsibilities and mandates across different portfolios and levels of government in ways that guarantee ease of registration and compliance is a must. A coordinating agency must be designated to lead a joint process that brings together all regulatory services via a single entry point. This could be a joint-management and joint decision-making model at the highest administrative and political level that supports actions, integration, commitment, real-time decision making and cooperation with other agencies within and outside the focal agencies in charge of civil society regulations. Within the coordination framework, roles such as governance, oversight and management will have to be clearly defined along with conflict resolution mechanisms that are defined in an administrative manual.



Sector-wide consultation

To ascertain whether one-stop shops are desirable and popular among those that will be regulated is an important consideration. A whole-of-sector engagement during the conceptualisation phase helps to improve the quality of thinking, insight and information received on the suitability or otherwise of the solution to the regulatory challenges identified by civil society. The focus of this consultation should be on how to gain a deeper understanding of enabling the operational environment for organisations, what solutions are out there and how one-stop shops can facilitate "ease of doing good".



Engagement through strategic communications

Strategic regulatory communications need to be developed and implemented considering the diversity and communication needs of the sector along with technological infrastructure of states. Issues of internet affordability, accessibility, and meaningful connectivity are worth paying attention to. Those implementing the one-stop shop design must approach it with the understanding that it is a platform for broader government efforts to enable civil society operations hence consideration must be given to communication methods and tools that can help facilitate this.



Regulatory performance monitoring and learning

Regulatory indicators and data sharing jointly developed by stakeholders and regulators for purposes of tracking performance and instituting learning should be considered at the inception of designing a one-stop shop. This provides an opportunity for learning about what has worked and what needs improvement, assessing if the objectives are being met and appropriate, adopting, or retooling the policy and identifying prospects. This process should be made a statutory reporting function to all critical stakeholders.

CONCLUSION

Although there has been an increased call for civil society regulations, work on the best form of regulation for the sector is still in its infancy. Thinking and insights on one-stop shop approach to civil society regulation is relatively limited. Work on these issues needs to be more ambitious and go beyond merely touting it as a solution, to advancing the conversations within larger efforts to create an enabling operational environment for civil society organisations to continue to “do good” and “do good right” across communities. One-stop shop models should not only be addressed in isolated civil society regulatory frameworks but they should also be integrated into state efforts of ease of doing business and incorporated as an integral part of citizens’ participation in a democracy and respect for fundamental freedoms associated with assembly and association. This will require a fundamental commitment shift by both government and civil society akin to the shift over recent decades away from portraying the civil society sector as not regulated.

² <https://a4ai.org/meaningful-connectivity/>

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