SNAPSHOT OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN JORDAN

QUESTIONNAIRE TO MEMBERS OF THE AFFINITY GROUP OF NATIONAL ASSOCIATIONS (AGNA)

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AGNA

Who We Are

The Affinity Group of National Associations (AGNA) brings together national associations from around the world. Created in 2004, it aims at strengthening national umbrella organisations, fostering greater co-operation across national and regional boundaries to pursue mutual interests.

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THE CONDITIONS OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN JORDAN

WHAT WAS THE MOST IMPORTANT CHALLENGE FACED BY CIVIL SOCIETY IN YOUR COUNTRY IN 2014/2015?

The most common challenge faced by civil society is the lack of funding, and because the number of civil society organization is increasing the share of funding per organization is becoming less.

Another challenge the civil society is facing recently is the differ in priority of funding, as according to the currently political situation, Jordan has hosted many Syrian refugees and this has driven the priority of donors to a new arena, therefore the funding for development has been affected.

On the same point, the local civil society organizations started to compete with international civil society organizations who started to work in Jordan after the political crises to serve the same issue of serving refugees, and due to the high calibre of these international organizations, their profile was stronger than the local organizations which resulted in high and unfair competition.

We cannot speak about challenges and not mention the legal processes in Jordan, this can be covered from different parts:

1. Registration of civil society organization: the registration procedures and regulations and forms of registration is becoming harder and complicated

2. After registration when applying for funding: the procedures to get approvals for funding has been changed recently, it used to be that the organization would send a request to the Ministry to ask for approval for this fund, then the Ministry would review this funding papers and after reviewing it, the Ministry sends official papers to the Prime Ministry and within 30 days if the organization did not hear from the Prime Ministry or the Ministry then the funding would be considered approved,

3. Recently the procedure has been changed, the organization now send to the Ministry, then the Ministry reviews the papers and send it to the Ministry of Planning, after that the Ministry of Planning sends it to other relevant Ministries, then all Ministries send the papers back to the Ministry (this procedure has no time limit, it might take 3-4 months), after that the Ministry sends the papers to the Prime Ministry and here by law the organization waits 30 days and if the organization did not hear from the Prime Ministry or the Ministry then the funding would be considered approved,
4. The governmental employees responsible for registering, approving the funds or following up on the work of organizations lack the knowledge of the laws, and the experience in working with civil society organizations. Also the laws are broad and vague, so the employees are discretion, meaning they judge according to what they think and feel and not based on clear procedures, which makes the processes not really clear for the organizations. These employees could interfere in the details of the projects such as negotiating about the administrative costs, direct costs and so on, which is not really part of their jobs, their interference comes from their lack of knowledge about the way civil society organizations operates.

Another challenge is that what the Lawyers Union suggested to the Prime Minister to do, which resulted at forcing the civil society organizations to hire lawyers for their organizations, and although this might look a good thing, but obliging such thing has put financial burden on the organizations especially the community based organizations which cannot afford paying for such services.

One more challenge is related to the donors, as follows:

1. The donors priorities changes, and since most civil society organizations are donor driven this makes the civil society work on field and ideas implemented through the projects do not sustain and continue, although these ideas and projects would be really good ones but the donor just change their priorities

2. Donor requirements: unfortunately donors require so many documents and details when writing the proposals and submitting ideas, and the process of applying and getting the approval is really long

3. Another point related to the requirements is that, donors ask for high impact on ground but such high impact does not really match with the small amounts of grants proposed by them, there isn’t a balance between the donor requirements and the amount proposed.

WHAT WAS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ACHIEVED BY CIVIL SOCIETY IN YOUR COUNTRY IN 2014/2015?

We would say one of the significant impacts by civil society was the possibility and the ability of monitoring the role of the parliament by getting the approval to attend the parliament sessions and also to report about these sessions, we have RASED (meaning monitor in English) coalition, run by one of the civil society organization, is issuing reports on the progress of the parliament sessions, their attendance, their attitude during the sessions, the violations happening throughout the sessions, and
they distribute these reports. This resulted that the parliament feel they are really observed and their work is being assessed.

Another component is one of the projects we (Partners-Jordan) work at with other civil society organizations, is increasing the rank of Jordan in the Open Budget Indicator through involving civil society in the process of preparing the national budget. We have created an alliance to work on this matter along with the General Budget Department and a successful relationship has been established and for the first time on this topic between the civil society and the government.

Also, there has been lots of dialogue and discussions on the national level on the decentralization and on anti-corruption, and this has not been like this before.

WHAT IS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT OPPORTUNITY OR CHALLENGE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY IN YOUR COUNTRY THAT YOU FORSEE IN THE NEAR FUTURE?

The most significant challenge that is foreseen now is the amendment on the Association Law. It is expected to have major changes on the law, there is a big chance that the law would not allow civil society organizations to take more than two funds a year, our insights on this amendment does not include any amounts for these two funds. This is the major change that could happen but still we do not know when or what will happen.

THE SITUATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY’S RESOURCING

ARE RESOURCING CONDITIONS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY GETTING BETTER OR WORSE?

It is getting worse as explained above due to the political situation and the refugee’s condition.

IS CIVIL SOCIETY EXPLORING NEW STRATEGIES TO DIVERSIFY RESOURCING AND ARE ANY OF THESE PROVING SUCCESSFUL?

Civil Society is identifying alternative ways in which partnerships with other organisations can open up opportunities for accessing additional funding.

ARE YOU SEEING A MOVE AWAY FROM GRANT FUNDING (AS PROVIDED BY DONORS AND GOVERNMENTS) TO OTHER METHODS OF SUPPORTING CIVIL SOCIETY?

Unfortunately the CSR is still weak in Jordan and the framework does not really encourage any further development. On the other hand, the economy is really bad which does not encourage individuals to
invest or fund any ideas or projects; and even though there are some good initiatives run by individuals they are still quite few.
Snapshot of civil society in Jordan: Questionnaire to AGNA members