

Challenges Facing Civil Society Organizations in NES



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ASO Center for Consultancy and Strategic Studies

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Introduction:

The Syrian government had been the most prominent impediment to the presence of local civil society institutions and organizations in NES. The existing government policy before 2011 was operating to prevent any civil or political activity outside the Syrian government or the Ba'ath Party framework.

The Ba'ath Party intended to demonstrate civil organizations, unions, centers, associations, charitable and humanitarian organizations directly affiliated with it, to monopolize civil work, as was the case in the political and media sectors in Syria.

Youth groups in NES, along with the popular protests launch against the Syrian regime; started forming civil blocs, which were then called "Syrian Revolution Coordination." Their work was focused on advocacy, organizing protests and demonstrations, as well as providing assistance to those pursued by the security. Thus, they became the basis for forming civil society organizations in the region.

Later, civil work arena became larger as the work of these youth organizations shifted from organizing protests to civil work and civil organizations began to gradually be established, after popular protests in Syria turned into a war in which local Syrian military groups and regional and international countries participated.

Local civic organizations in NES went through difficult and exceptional circumstances, due to their dependence on local cadres who do not have experience and qualifications in civil work. However, with the beginning of international support for organizations, civil work progressed successively, nevertheless internal impediments and challenges continued within the organization itself and externally in the geographical area controlled by the Democratic Self-Administration of NES.

Civil Society in NES:

Before 2011, CBOs presence in Syria, compared to the situation later, was weak due to the security clout and the prohibition of all independent civil work forms. As those willing to engage in civil activity resorted to secret work with limited impact, in lack of funding and discussion conditions, general societal discussion and the concept of civil work was not originally demonstrated in Syria.¹

¹ Reality of CBOs Work in Qamishli <https://0i.is/QO35>



However, after 2011 the reality changed along the security regime's power declination and losing large areas control. Consequently, this led to enhancing freedom and work space and a great desire has appeared among various segments of civil work. As well as, donor funding flow; as the number of organizations in Al-Qamishli city only has reached around 80 organizations in 2017.²

Since the peaceful movement beginning in 2011, tens of local civic organizations were established and civil work opportunities were more available. They were established with local human resources that do not have sufficient experience and qualifications to manage civil organizations in the region. In addition to, the lack of work sustainability which, has become one of the most fundamental issues facing civil work in NES. This was due to the lack of continuity of funding and lack of its availability for military and security reasons related to the whereabouts of the Syrian intermediary donor organizations.

In the same context, a number of organizations became out of work due to the lack of permanence of funding that affected a number of local civic organizations in NES and the absence of continuous support. This took place after different mechanisms for granting and supporting projects and their geographical areas were adopted and the marginalization of different sectors in civil work. The number of local organizations, once, in Al-Hasaka governorate only, reached more than 250 local organizations in 2018. However, the number decreased gradually, due to the absence of funding and the inability of the organization's employees to pay costs and expenses of offices and work.³

The civil society situation in any country and under the sovereignty of any government, reflects the political and social condition of society in issues related to freedoms, rights and democracy foundations. Therefore, any marginalization of the civil society role implies marginalization of these concepts. In addition to the administration responsibility to establish a cooperative relationship with the civil society in order to improve outcomes of the political process from laws, development and other fields. Activists in civil society may also have to find methods to communicate with the Self-Administration to clarify civil work concepts and frameworks of their activities and what they aim in the long run, whether through media or forming groups to create contact mechanisms with the Self-Administration.⁴

It is natural for every organization, under conditions such as Syria's conditions, to rely on financing and technical support from abroad. This is due to the absence of internal financing and the conflict against it and limitation of its capacities by various parties. We can conclude by observing civil society organizations in Al-Qamishli relations with various political parties,

² Reality of CBOs Work in Qamishli <https://oi.is/BJyE>

³ Outcomes of the Meeting Organized by ASO Center for Consultancy and Strategic Studies in the Democracy Promotion Project in NES.

⁴ CBOs in Rojava: their Role and Effectiveness Scope <http://www.rok-online.com/?p=5907>



whether the Self-Administration or the opposing Kurdish National Council to the Self-Administration, which is affiliated with the National Coalition for Revolution and Opposition Forces in Syria. That the common denominator between them is the lack of confidence and the fear of losing work or preventing activities and opening offices and headquarters. This explains exactly how it is difficult to turn into a democratic country and have an active citizenship in Syria.⁵

Internal Challenges Facing Civil Organization in NES:

Local civic organizations in NES face, internally, a number of challenges and difficulties. The self-development weakness of many human resources of civil organizations that enhance responsibilities and burdens of the institution in its development. In addition to the absence of credibility and obtaining double standards in some human resources, as their personal opinions do not match the orientations of the organization, which play a role in creating challenges within the organization to reach the desired work.⁶

Moreover, the absence of cooperation and coordination spirit in civil institutions work in NES, in two arenas; firstly, among the staff of organizations and secondly, among civil organizations working in the same geography or field of work. Also, the organizations' commitment to orientations of donors and policies at work. Thus, if these policies do not optimally address the needs of society, they constitute an additional obstacle to civil work in NES. Likewise, the lack of expertise and competencies owned by the organization's management team and its exclusivity in the organization's decision-making process. This obstructs the competencies in lower administrative levels, therefore, creates a disruption in the work development of the organization and its team.⁷

As well as, linking social relations with the polarization and appointment processes, which negatively reflects on managing these organizations in the optimal and most efficient manner. The transfer of qualified and powerful human resources to work in international organizations in the region and the reflection of this issue negatively on local institutions that are unable to preserve these resources due to lack of permanent funding. This always puts institutions in a struggle to build new resources capacity and its ongoing work to make them qualified to be able to follow up and implement projects and continue the organization work. Not to mention, administrative corruption and its negative repercussions on the society cooperation, as well as on the concept of voluntary work and lack of human resources integration in organizations.

⁵ Reality of CBOs Work in Qamishli <https://Oi.is/BJyE>

⁶ Outcomes of the Meeting Organized by ASO Center for Consultancy and Strategic Studies in the Democracy Promotion Project in NES.

⁷ Outcomes of the Meeting Organized by ASO Center for Consultancy and Strategic Studies in the Democracy Promotion Project in NES.



For example, the non-availability of teams for "project development and strategic plan development " as it restricts donor options in selecting partners and this results in capacities and competencies freezing, concerning the second sectors, in the organization.⁸

External Challenges Facing Civil Organization in NES:

Legal Challenges:

Local civic organizations in NES face a number of external challenges regarding the legal framework. According to outputs of a meeting organized by ASO Center for Consultancy and Strategic Studies, legal challenges that hinder civil organizations work, within the project of Democracy in NES, are the distinction between local and international organizations in granting approvals and licenses. Likewise, the difficulty of obtaining new issuances for licenses or their renewal, or opening branch offices for organizations with valid licenses. Red tape and bureaucracy in Self-Administration institutions work, also create an obstacle.⁹

In addition to the restrictions imposed on some activities and events that are included in the projects implemented in the region. For instance, the interference in beneficiaries' selection and their selection criteria. This plays a major role in obstacles of civil society work, whether in terms of participation in activities or in relief and development projects in NES.¹⁰

Security Challenges:¹¹

Local organizations operating in NES face a variety of security challenges, after the Turkish intervention in the governorate of Al-Hasaka and Raqqa in particular. As well as, its occupation of Serekaniye/Ras Al-Ain and Girespi/Tell Abyad cities. These challenges are manifested as follows:

First: Some projects have been suspended due to security conditions by international donors, following local conflicts in these implementing of projects geography.

Second: Risks arising from the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent change in the implemented projects type. In addition to work suspension on a number of projects of which implementation mainly requires field work.

⁸ Outcomes of the Meeting Organized by ASO Center for Consultancy and Strategic Studies in the Democracy Promotion Project in NES.

⁹ Outcomes of the Meeting Organized by ASO Center for Consultancy and Strategic Studies in the Democracy Promotion Project in NES.

¹⁰ Outcomes of the Meeting Organized by ASO Center for Consultancy and Strategic Studies in the Democracy Promotion Project in NES.

¹¹ Outcomes of the Meeting Organized by ASO Center for Consultancy and Strategic Studies in the Democracy Promotion Project in NES.



Third: Dominant forces new distribution on the ground in NES after the Turkish attack and regime forces entry into some areas; like the borderline. This resulted in the stop of many donors from implementing projects, many of which were being prepared and under discussion in the area.

Societal Challenges:¹²

There are a number of societal challenges against active civil organizations work in NES, which can be defined as the following:

First: society does not fully accept women working and it links this with religious doctrines and societal values.

Second: Civil society organizations did not properly clarify their role in society. This, in its turn caused a lack of societal awareness regarding the effective role of civil organizations and reduced it to present purely materialistic values; such as, food baskets and monetary material assistance. However, programs that deal with work to address societal issues and spread awareness concepts such as elections, women issues and transitional justice, do not receive the desired turnout in society. Especially those that handle religious teachings or societal values.

Third: Customs and traditions and the difficulty they entail in implementing projects in areas marked by religious and tribal commitment.

Fourth: Lack of public awareness on organizations' work mechanisms on projects. For example, the concept of " beneficiaries selection criteria" for a program and considering that selection is made according to nepotism, work teams desires or the recommendations presented to them from certain people or entities, which results in obstacles in the implementation of those programs.

Economic Challenges:¹³

They constitute the most significant challenges that affect civil work in NES, which are depicted in the following:

First: The inability to sustain organizations due to the lack of a dedicated budget for the organization that maintains its continuity with its staff during periods of funding unavailability.

Second: losing employees due to differences in salaries between local and international organizations. Likewise, the failure of donors to take this point into consideration when discussing budgets in projects submitted by local organizations to them.

¹² Outcomes of the Meeting Organized by ASO Center for Consultancy and Strategic Studies in the Democracy Promotion Project in NES.

¹³ Outcomes of the Meeting Organized by ASO Center for Consultancy and Strategic Studies in the Democracy Promotion Project in NES.



Third: The absence of an external bank account for most of local organizations while, donors request to have a bank account outside Syria.

Fourth: Lack of compatibility in financial and logistical policies and the procurement policy between donors and local partners. Also, making partners work according to their policies, however, not work to develop existing policies and at least reach a consensus between both policies.

Fifth: Minor economic empowerment of local CBOs and the consequent lack of efficient human resources and their economic support, in order for these organizations to be able to communicate directly with major donors and be under the obligation to rely on partnerships through global organizations working in the region.

Sixth: Political pressures from regional countries and directing donors to specific regions.

Conclusions and Consequences:

Based on the aforementioned and given the fact that there are obstacles affecting the civil work efficiency in NES and the impact of those obstacles on civil organizations involvement in decision-making in the region; the recommendations revolve around the following:

- Developing local civic organizations organizational structures on an ongoing basis and providing periodic consultations among CBOs platform members in NES.
- Developing human resource skills for new organizations.
- Providing consultations and contributions of experienced organizations in preparing and developing projects.
- Providing the opportunity for new organizations to implement projects.
- Cooperate in preparing, presenting, and implementing projects between similar work field organizations.
- Providing facilities between organizations, regarding activities implementation in the same region and in different regions, by allowing organizations to use each other's offices, for example.
- Establishing affairs committees to discuss work of organizations challenges with stakeholders whether represented in Self-Administration bodies or international organizations operating in the region.
- Consideration of religious, societal and tribal aspects in preparing and implementing projects.
- Include bank accounts setting for local organizations along their projects' budgets.
- Impose work expenses independent from project expenditures in order to ensure organizations sustainability.
- Policies periodic development in line with the organization's workload and donor policies.



- Setting priorities related to directing support in proportion to each region needs.
- Activating women role in CBOs.
- Delivering organizations voice working in NES to international forums in a deliberate and proper manner.
- Preparing and presenting integrated and sustainable programs that address sound and complete solutions to issues relevant to the organization, taking into consideration the appropriate time period for these programs.

References:

- 1- Reality of CBOs work in Qamishli <https://Oi.is/NnXS>
- 2- Outcomes of the Meeting Organized by ASO Center for Consultancy and Strategic Studies in the Democracy Promotion Project in NES.
- 3- CBOs in Rojava: their Role and Effectiveness Scope <http://www.rok-online.com/?p=5907>





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