



Inciting Jordan and the MENA region

Conference paper by Manar Filisteen Elabed Essaid

The role and need for civil society has greatly increased in the MENA region. With the influx of mass populations into Jordan, new ideas and initiatives are constantly required in order to create a more stable environment for all those residing within our borders. Several civil society organisations (CSOs) have been established within Jordan in the form of humanitarian NGOs to assist specific population segments and address their needs. And while philanthropy exists as a part of our customs and culture, the need for flexible yet organized institutions to address ongoing needs on a continuous basis still exists.

In my undergrad years, I was privileged to participate in a vast number of projects led by my university, all of which aimed to allocate our youthful energies towards the assistance of others within our society. That said, as fulfilling as all of it was, the bureaucratic complexities of presenting proposals, the lack of flexibility in adapting to the changing needs of our targets and the difficulties of obtaining funds – be them from the university itself or outside sources – truly did take its toll. The time needed to get a project going could sometimes be two or three times as long as the actual duration of the project, and possibly even require more energy than the project itself!

I went back to study and continued with my social work, preferring to focus and use my energy on projects that, while small, were controlled entirely independently by those carrying them out. My peers and I carried out our own target studies, contemplated means of addressing issues we saw as vital and reasonable in terms of our resources, and took to the field, documenting the progress made in carrying out our goals by benchmarks set up around the target communities' satisfaction and benefit. We even collaborated with international NGOs and CSOs, and I co-founded a project called 'Incitement Arabia', branching out into incitement projects in Jordan and Palestine. The goal of Incitement Arabia was to create a platform with which we could bring social actors, local heads of CSOs, and social activists from all fields together with youths and those interested in creating societal change, which we successfully managed for close to a year.

Currently, my peers and I are working on establishing 'The Humanitarian Center', developing projects ranging from education to healthcare to advocacy on controversial issues, creating career opportunities for marginalized minorities in our society. As would be expected, we are keen to present our ideas to the G7 and prospective donor countries, who in turn we expect will not only assist us financially, but also supervise and evaluate our work in accordance with their high standards, which will greatly assist us in developing our endeavours and skills in the service of others.

We believe in the bottom-up approach when dealing with local issues, but we also greatly value any exposure we may have to outside approaches which we may adapt to suit the society we live in. The responsibility is on us, and in this time of turbulence and upheaval in our region, our energies, as manifested through our organized participation in CSOs, can make a very big difference in bringing stability and justice to the lives of those less privileged. I would be greatly honoured if I may be given this opportunity with my peers at the 'Humanitarian Center' to present ourselves and our potential to the G7 conference. maintaining a good social climate within our organizations (which is a key performance factor for our businesses), and stimulating investment and job creation

To conclude, it is important to remember that such involvement of civil society in promoting social justice can only be effective and efficient if the governments of these countries recognize civil society as a full-fledged partner, accept their involvement, and provide favourable conditions for them to operate in.

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