



The role of donors in supporting the aspirations of the Egyptian revolution

Conference paper by Dr. Walaa Gad Elkareem

According to official statistics in Egypt, the state is the main recipient of grants and assistance through the Ministry of International Cooperation, which is responsible for coordinating the development cooperation between the Egyptian state and international development partners. The funding provided to civil society organisations (CSOs) is small in relation to the funding provided directly to the government. In spite of the severe lack of information regarding the proportion of where grants and aid is directed, there are indications that more than 95% of the funding goes to the government, while CSOs only benefit from the meagre percentage that is left.

The Egyptian state needs the support of donors and development partners in order to guarantee the economic and social rights and political development for its citizens, especially in light of the accumulated deficit in the state budget. But the problems related to the inadequacy of public policies, the spread of corruption, lack of transparency, and poor record of people's participation in decision-making processes lead to a reduction in the positive effects of support from donors and international development partners, as well as on public services and the economic and social situation.

Therefore, Egyptian civil society needs to play a key role in terms of improving public policies, the development of legislation and procedural systems, combating corruption, and increasing the participation of citizens in public affairs. But financing and institutional obstacles on the one hand and legal and political obstacles on the other hand prevent CSOs from playing this important and vital role.

Challenges facing civil society increased remarkably after the revolution of January 2011, particularly with the outbreak of the so-called foreign funding issues. If we also take into account the negative effects of terrorism, there are multiple constraints faced by civil society organizations that need to be addressed.

Nevertheless, good opportunities can be built upon to enhance the role of CSOs in the framework of the Deauville Partnership: for example, Egypt's new constitution is expected to amend a civil organizations law to comply with the constitution. And Egyptian CSOs are witnessing a significant increase in their numbers (regardless of the extent of their effectiveness): according to statistics, there are more than 47 thousand non-governmental organizations in Egypt.

Therefore, the appropriate approach that must be strengthened within the framework of the Deauville Partnership is to provide financial assistance to active civil society organizations, as well as providing institutional support and training. In addition to that, there is a need for continuous communication with the Egyptian authorities to ensure the amendment of legislation and public policies to allow CSOs to practice a more significant and wider role in a democratic and free atmosphere.

Egyptian CSOs can play an important role not only in influencing policies, public awareness, overseeing the performance of the authorities, and the fight against corruption, but also in helping the government to directly implement economic and social development programs, particularly as the geographical and sectoral diversity of CSOs helps them to function in this role.

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