



How to empower civil society

Conference paper by Ouahiba Getouche

Civil society actors play an important role in society as they participate in the national effort to achieve democracy and social justice. The civil society engagement aims at helping others voluntarily in order to bring the various state institutions and members of society closer together. Furthermore, civil society activists are the closest to the reality of their society and are also the closest to the citizens.

Civic actors should take into account and study in depth the social, political and economic realities of their societies. Besides, they have to work to harmonize and unify their efforts, even if they have different views and visions on how to manage a crisis. What is important in all this, is that the analysis of »realities« and the examination of problems should be rational and scientific. Differences on how to approach a problem and how to identify the roots of a crisis will not solve the problems.

International institutions play a major role in helping and supporting the various civic institutions. Moreover, they have a certain international moral authority and have an impact on global public opinion. This in turn could give the civil society organizations a positive pressure to advance their work.

We believe that in order to empower civil society, a platform for collective action needs to be provided, (consultation, cooperation and exchange of experiences). We also believe that there are elements that could contribute to the development of the associative work on a global scale to surpass the narrow local work:

- The establishment of an independent Studies Center that is overseen by specialists and civil society actors. Only this way the research and studies presented could reflect and produce a flawless idea of the reality of every analysed country and at the same time identify the problems and present an approach to solve them.
- The establishment of a database where the information stems from the reality of the society and not from speculation and assumptions written by those who are far from the country and far from the principles, customs and traditions of that society.
- Working on bringing closer together the different components of society (political parties, associations and institutions), in order to achieve democracy and to strengthen the rule of law.
- Civil society institutions should be brought closer together in form of networks to share experiences, coordinate the work and train activists.
- Motivate and push the competitiveness between civic institutions, for more effort and contribution, through financial incentives etc.
- Interest in funding and supporting scientific research and cultural events that are interested in civil society, at the global and regional levels, and the exchange of various activities to open up to the other, under the condition of respecting the specificities of each community.

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- The financial support for civil society institutions should not serve hidden intentions of the donor institutions; goals that may not serve the public interest and contradict the peculiarities/customs of the country. Any financial support should be free of any political goals or monopolism aims, as the civil society work is but to bring closer the society and the political administration, and to lay out the road to reconciliation and prompt cooperation between them, in order to reach out to state authorities. The latter is supposed to move away smoothly from any chasm that separates the state from the citizens, subsequently to avoid civil disobedience, chaos and uprisings. This is something that many Arab countries experienced once they have lost the keys to deal with their people.

- The World Bank has identified two ambitious goals to reduce extreme poverty to no more than 3 per cent by 2030, and promote common prosperity and equality and fairness in third world countries. But it is regrettable to see that the results of these noble goals haven't been achieved. While many countries provide the financial support, others support wars and conflicts and consequently increase the number of the poor and homeless, such is the case of Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. Therefore, it is necessary to empower and involve civil society in policy-making. Also, governments and official institutions should listen to the views and suggestions of the civil society and see them as a partners, not a competitor or threat.

- Civil society should set a transparent agenda which includes the financial support received from donor institutions to avoid the misuse of funds.

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