

## **A Multi-Stakeholder Approach to Egypt's Development: The Role of Civil Society and the Way Forward**

Thursday, March 24, 2011

### **Roundtable Objectives:**

To provide a clear roadmap to Egyptian civil society, as well as define the key roles of different players in supporting the political and economic changes in the post-Mubarak Egypt. Specifically the roundtable set to:

- Identify the internal and external challenges currently facing Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Egypt
- Share recommendations and solicit feedback between stakeholders
- Review plans of participating organizations
- Reach common ground on key goals and priorities, and identify innovative models and practical strategies for future efforts

### **Introduction:**

In an effort to get a better view of Egyptian civil society, a survey was circulated in early March 2011 and completed by 50 leading Egyptian CSOs.<sup>\*</sup> In addition to the survey, past work by the Middle East Youth Initiative was consulted, namely the surveys cited in the publication "[Social Entrepreneurship in the Middle East](#)" (Brookings, April 2010). Finally, the experience of three of the roundtable's presenters, Amira Maaty, Ehaab Abdou and Noha Hussein, and their work with Egyptian CSOs, helped form the basis of these recommendations.<sup>†</sup>

### **Recommendations:**

Based on the current analysis, three key recommendation areas emerge. Please note that all recommendations are proposed for immediate action, except where otherwise stated:

#### **I. Coordinate: Support coordination efforts among Egyptian CSOs**

An overwhelming majority of respondents cited the need for better networking and coalition building among CSOs. More specifically, there is a strong need to:

##### *Provide technical support on networking and coalition building:*

Currently, several networks and federations exist, but are in need of increased technical support and funding. Egyptian CSOs need technical training on strategic topics such as networking, consensus-building, and coalition building to be able to better coordinate efforts, share resources, lobby and define a vision for their sub-sectors. Along with training, well-funded, well-staffed and technologically equipped secretariats are needed to be able to efficiently build and maintain

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<sup>\*</sup> The 50 CSOs were mainly nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) covering sectors including women, youth, human rights, among others. They included leading organizations such as the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services (CEOSS) (which is an umbrella for more than 200 NGOs), Nahdet El Mahrousa, etc. In addition, International NGOs operating in Egypt have also completed the survey including: Ashoka, International Youth Foundation, Education for Employment Foundation and Save the Children. Umbrella organizations, such as Sanabel, Egypt's and the region's largest network for micro-finance institutions, were also surveyed. Other documents reviewed include, "Roadmap for a nation of rights and the rule of law," a statement by the Forum of Independent Human Rights Organizations in Egypt, and CIVICUS Civil Society Index (CSI) for Egypt, Sept 2006, which covered more than 200 Egyptian CSOs.

<sup>†</sup> Additional insights and information shared by roundtable participants will be used to create a revised version of this document, which will be widely disseminated.

networks that have a stronger voice and convening power. Finally, because of the current situation, CSOs need capacity building in unfamiliar areas. For instance, state media will undergo substantial reforms. CSOs must be prepared to engage in the process, especially with regards to public broadcasting.

*Strengthen linkages between different civil society actors:*

Related to the above, there is a need to support efforts to strengthen linkages between different civil society actors that have not traditionally worked together, such as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), syndicates, labor unions and business associations. For instance, there are currently no networks or coalitions between human rights groups, syndicates and development NGOs. It is understandable why development NGOs have traditionally distanced themselves from human rights groups, but now these actors have the opportunity to create linkages and achieve greater synergies and impact.

*Coordinate efforts in the US:*

There is a strong need for better coordination among International NGOs (INGOs) and donors working on Egypt. Regular meetings focusing on general themes and coordination need to be organized. Stronger coordination could evolve into more specialized thematic networks or working groups.

**II. Scale-up: Support the scaling-up of successful existing models:**

In nearly all areas of interest, whether it is education, job creation, human rights and civic engagement, numerous successful models exist in Egypt. However, they are in dire need of support to help replicate their success or affect policy and be adopted on a national level.

*Support replication, technically and financially:*

This entails providing support for proper impact assessment, documentation and funding for expansion on a national level. This would require mapping of current activities, of which several efforts are already underway in Egypt, but there is still much opportunity to identify and scale-up best practices. Finally, in the process of scaling-up existing models, it is important to be cognizant of the capacity of the implementers, to avoid overfunding or diluting activities.

*Support coalitions around relevant policy dialogues and reforms (medium to long-term):*

To support the adoption and institutionalization of successful CSO models through policy reforms, there is a need for multi-stakeholder and cross-sectoral dialogues. CSO coalitions need to be supported by building and strengthening their access to policymakers and administrators, as well as their advocacy and policy-formulation skills to have a direct impact on shaping policy.

**III. Sustain: Support sustainability & accountability of a vibrant Egyptian civil society:**

*Revise relevant donor strategies:*

To contribute to creating a sustainable Egyptian civil society, donors need to revise certain mechanisms and approaches. This includes three main areas: First, donors need to increase funding for CSOs' organizational infrastructure and financial independence, allowing them to deepen their expertise and effectiveness in achieving long-term goals beyond short-term project financing. Second, donors can promote a culture of collaboration by providing technical assistance and training in strategic areas such as partnership-building, coalition-building and consensus-building. Third, it is important to support new organizations and innovations, not just the "international darlings" and traditional partners.

*Support innovative and alternative means of local financing for CSO efforts:*

This could be achieved through several means: First, there is a need to support efforts to advocate for and implement necessary legal reforms to promote social investment and social

entrepreneurship, which would help channel more local funds efficiently and effectively towards successful and impactful social enterprises. Second, as opposed to charity and relief only, there is a need to support the role of local philanthropy in financing more sustainable development efforts as well as nontraditional areas like advocacy, human rights and democratization. Third and most importantly, is the need to support efforts aimed to revive indigenous sources of development financing such as *Waqf*. For each of these areas there are several efforts taking place that could be strengthened.

*Support civil society's role as watchdog:*

To combat abuses and corruption from the government, private sector and media, there needs to be support and technical assistance to CSO coalitions to aid in their efforts to monitor those sectors. This would entail supporting CSO coalitions in building and strengthening their access to those sectors as well as their advocacy skills to have a direct impact. Donors can support capacity building of existing efforts and share best practices from other contexts.

*Organize study tours and exchanges for civil society leaders:*

Whether established or emerging, civil society leaders need to be exposed to countries with similar socio-economic and political situations. These exchanges should focus on transitional periods and especially in areas of mobilization, advocacy and policy-making. Egyptian CSOs would benefit from learning about and exchanging best practices with CSOs from other countries who have gone through democratic transitions.

*Support reform efforts of legal framework and bodies governing civil society:*

These include laws that control and regulate NGOs, unions and syndicates, media, political parties, and other forms of civic and political participation. The efforts being undertaken by several leading law firms and existing coalitions need to be reinforced; this includes the current effort amend the law that governs all NGOs, associations and foundations (Law 84-2002). In addition to those legal reforms allowing for more freedoms, laws should also ensure more accountability of CSOs to their main constituents, not just to donors. Additionally, there is a strong need to reform and restructure current bodies governing civil society such as the General Federation of NGOs, Specialized Federations and others ensuring free and fair elections, etc.

*Improve public awareness in media and support civic engagement in education:*

Education and media are two key sectors that need to be targeted to ensure the sustainability of CSOs' efforts, as well as provide for the needed human capital and public support for a vibrant civil society. In the education sector, support for efforts to reform educational curricula by including material and activities that aim to build the necessary knowledge and skill-set of the envisioned civil society, community leaders and social entrepreneurs are crucial. There are several successful models for civic education and social entrepreneurship programs, but they remain "extracurricular" to the national curriculum being provided on a small scale and unnoticed by education policy-makers and administrators. As for media, after decades of smear campaigns in the state media, especially of human rights groups, there needs to be support to strengthen and improve the civil society public image and credibility. CSOs need to be supported in their efforts to improve their media outreach and to more effectively communicate to the public about their work and its impact.