



Praxis Paper No. 20

Overview of Civil Society in the Arab World

By Mervat Rishmawi with Tim Morris

Foreword

There is a relative shortage of literature on the state of civil society in the Arab World. As an initial step to address this, and also as to help guide its own work, INTRAC commissioned this overview of civil society in the region. Inevitably given the breadth and variety of civil society experience within the Arab World, this Praxis paper can only touch the surface and raise questions that deserve further investigation. It is hoped that, while providing a useful overview, this paper will also lead to further discussion and more detailed study of specific aspects of this complex subject.

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Executive Summary

Civil society in the Arab World faces daunting challenges. Prior to the Arab Summit held in Rabat in 2006 a Civil Society Forum¹ was attended by 50 civil society organisations, journalists, academics and parliamentarians. Challenging Arab leaders to honour previous commitments to political reform, pluralism and human rights, participants called on governments to eliminate all legislative, administrative and security restrictions precluding political reform and to update legislation regulating civil society to accord with international standards.

What are the chances of this happening? Do people in the Arab World have the time, energy, materials, assets and mobilisation skills required for viable association? What are the major constraints to civil society resources? Can people interact with and learn about others? Are civil society organisations capable of stating their case? What are the major constraints to people expressing themselves? Is access to information, particularly about the public domain and issues, accessible, plentiful and suitable for non-literate as well as literate users? Or is information inaccessible, censored and controlled? How important is education for information access? What are the major constraints to information? Are there well functioning ways, places and capabilities for civic interests to be continuously expressed, claims to be made, rights asserted, collaboration to be agreed and conflicts to be negotiated within civil society as well as with government and business? What are the major constraints to interaction and civic participation?

In addition to surveying the status of the sector in the region, this paper poses and starts to address these vital questions facing civil society in the Arab world.

¹ www.cihrs.org/Act_file/PDF/57_315200663325.pdf

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Introduction

Civil society in the Arab World has been shaped and constrained by a history of foreign intervention and stringent controls imposed by authoritarian and paternalistic regimes. The development of civil society has been uneven, with a much greater concentration of actors in some countries. An increasing number of civil society organisations (CSOs) are providing services across the region. When they attempt to engage in research into the nature of poverty and exclusion, or seek to advocate for labour rights on behalf of vulnerable groups, they fall foul of laws curbing association and expression – many of which remain virtually unchanged from the colonial era. The ‘war on terror’ has further affected the growth of civil society as the USA demands stricter supervision of CSOs’ financial flows.

This paper first sketches the historical background and the economic, social and political context in which civil society operates in the region. It describes the work CSOs do in each country, the challenges they face and their capacity needs. Common issues facing civil society across the region are analysed.

Drawing on information gathered from available secondary sources, from semi-structured interviews with capacity building providers and recipients and analysts of civil society, this paper covers most nations of the Arab World.² There has been no previous region-wide assessment of civil society capacity and there are enormous knowledge gaps.

It is hoped this paper will contribute to debate and information exchange between civil society activists in the region and capacity building providers such as INTRAC.

Background to the Arab World

The region has been subject to a series of dominations by external powers and elites. At the height of its power in the 16th and 17th centuries, the tri-continental Ottoman Empire controlled much of the Middle East and North Africa. With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1922, all parts of the Arab World (apart from Saudi Arabia and northern Yemen) fell under European imperial domination. In the 1950s and 1960s, most states won independence, but soon came under control of military dictatorships.

² These include: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Qatar, Syria, Tunisia, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen

There are many common characteristics shared across this vast region of some 325 million people:

- the primacy of Arabic as the written and official language of the region (though some ethnic minorities use other languages);
- similarities in manners, customs, political and social systems;
- evolution from tribal societies;
- the dominance of Islam: although some countries have significant Christian and small Jewish or other religious minorities, culture is largely rooted in Islam;
- a shared history of external domination – principally by the Ottomans, British and French – and the continued influence of the laws they imposed;
- freedoms of association and expression, vital elements for fostering civil society, remain under strict control;
- in some countries prolonged states of emergency, restrictive legislation or special courts provide regimes with sweeping powers to regulate political parties and civil society organisations;
- rapid population growth in recent decades and young populations;
- high levels of unemployment, especially among young people;
- rapid urbanisation and a significant concentration of population in capital cities;
- continuing high rates of illiteracy, especially among women. Only two-thirds of Arab adults can read and write with understanding, one of the lowest adult literacy rates in the world³;
- high rates of emigration, forced migration and brain drain. Staggering numbers of Syrians, Lebanese, Palestinians and Iraqis – many of whom have professional qualifications – have left: there are almost as many Syrians outside the country as there are residents;
- the prolonged impact of foreign occupations, armed conflicts and military interventions on civil society and human rights, especially in Palestine, Algeria, Lebanon and now Iraq;
- membership of the [League of Arab States](#), an organisation set up in 1945, with the declared aim of protecting the interests of Arab countries.

Key differences are:

- the uneven pace of spread of literacy and modern education. In countries like Egypt, Palestine, Syria and Lebanon, earlier access to education and development of newspapers created an intelligentsia which helped spur development of civil society. By comparison, Gulf states remained closer to tribal values.

³ <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001489/148972E.pdf>

- the uneven distribution of wealth. While oil-rich Gulf states have attracted significant numbers of foreign workers – including from elsewhere in the Arab World – other states are among the world's least developed. For example, Yemen ranks 150th on UNDP's Human Development Index.⁴
- uneven development of civil society. While countries such as Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, Morocco, Tunisia and Yemen have many CSOs, there are few in such states as Saudi Arabia, Syria and Libya.

Northern Africa and the Middle East



Measures of Human Development

Education

The share of national income spent on education is still below four per cent in most countries. The latest UNESCO Education for All report notes that in the majority of Arab States, about 20 per cent or more of children under the age of five suffer from moderate or severe stunting, with negative repercussions on school performance.⁵ Progress towards universal primary education has been slower than elsewhere in the world. More than six million primary school age children were still out of school in the Middle East in 2004, 59 per cent of them girls. While there was a 23 per cent increase in overall secondary enrolment from 1999 to 2004, enrolment in the final years remains markedly

⁴ <http://hdr.undp.org/hdr2006/statistics>

⁵ <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001489/148972E.pdf>

lower with 79 per cent enrolled in lower secondary, but only 52 per cent in higher secondary education.

There are still gender disparities in education. On average, 90 girls were enrolled in primary schools for every 100 boys in 2004, up from 87 in 1999. Only 15 per cent of countries with 2004 data have achieved gender parity in secondary education and none in tertiary education. Girls in rural areas are significantly disadvantaged as household demand for their labour leads to their non-enrolment or premature cessation of education.

Poor children are three times more likely to be out of school than those from the wealthiest category. Expansion of schooling in the region often occurs at the expense of quality, as indicated by the high incidence of grade repetition in some countries. Chronic shortages of teachers and low morale are slowing progress towards Education for All. There is a danger that the education systems in the Arab countries will be split into two unrelated parts: very expensive private education, enjoyed by the better-off minority, and poor quality government education for the majority.

UNESCO reports that only two-thirds of Arab adults can read and write with understanding, one of the lowest adult literacy rates in the world. Unless countries with low adult literacy significantly expand adult literacy programmes, particularly targeting the disproportionate number of illiterate women, the region will find it difficult to meet the UN's 2015 literacy target.

Employment

The region is characterised by high levels of un- and under-employment. The International Labour Organization (ILO) reports that at 13.2 per cent, unemployment in the region is the highest in the world.⁶ Women's participation in the labour force has gradually increased across the region but remains very low.⁷ Youth unemployment is a chronic problem which is set to worsen. The ILO calculates that the region will need to create 100 million jobs by 2020 in order to guarantee full employment.

Migrant workers, who make up a large proportion of the workforce in Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, are the largest single group of workers to be deprived of all trade union rights.

⁶ ILO: "Global Employment Trends", Brief , January 2006.

[/www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/strat/download/getb06en.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/strat/download/getb06en.pdf)

⁷ Ibid.

Unemployment, conflict and political repression have brought about a major brain drain. The migration of large numbers of qualified Arab professionals to the West greatly undermines economic development in the region. For example, between 1998 and 2000 over 15,000 Arab medical practitioners migrated abroad.⁸ Deliberate targetting of Iraqi's professional classes by insurgents has caused a chronic shortage of health personnel, teachers and qualified tertiary educators.

Gender

Many countries in the region have very active women's organisations and charities run by, and addressing the needs of, women. Women's groups have largely focused on improving women's social welfare and legal reform. They seek full participation of women in the workforce and to enable women to occupy leadership and decision-making positions in both the public and private sectors. They are also working to challenge gender stereotypes and discrimination. Very active women's' groups exist in Palestine, Lebanon, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco and Yemen, but in other countries the numbers are far fewer. In Saudi Arabia and some other Gulf states, female reformers are targeted and harassed both by state authorities and traditionalists.

Many gender-focused CSOs prioritise work on amending family laws and penal codes relating to marriage, divorce, nationality, inheritance, violence against women and punishment for so-called 'honour' crimes. They demand universal suffrage, greater representation of women in parliament and government, equality in the workplace, ratification of international human rights treaties and lifting of the many reservations to human rights conventions made by Arab states. Many CSOs provide legal services and counselling and support income-generation activities. Some also run shelters for women who are subjected to violence.

Family status laws are generally defined by Islamic Shari'a and are largely distinct from the legal structures which continue to draw heavily on French or British civil law. Advocacy of legal reform is complicated by the number of different sets of laws. Nowhere is the challenge greater for women's organisations than in the Lebanon where a woman's personal status is defined by her affiliation to one of the 19 officially recognised 'confessions' – ethnic-religious communities.

There are examples of positive legal changes with the potential to benefit women. In 2000, the Egyptian parliament passed legislation allowing women to file for divorce without having to prove mistreatment from their husbands. Egyptian courts in 2002

⁸ See 'Arab Human Development Report 2003: The Best Investments: Education, Research and Development'. www.rbas.undp.org/ahdr/press_kits2003/3_AHDR03E3_FINAL.pdf

recognised women's rights to obtain passports and travel abroad without the consent of male relatives. Jordan has given women the right to file for divorce, raised the minimum marriage age and allowed Jordanian women not married to Jordanians to have the right to pass on Jordanian citizenship to their children. In 2005, after a prolonged struggle by both male and female activists, Kuwaiti parliamentarians voted to give women full political rights, including electoral rights. In Morocco, a new family law came into force in 2003 (see box below). Omani and Qatari women are now allowed to vote and run for office. A series of amendments of Tunisian laws have resulted in great progress in terms of gender equality. In Palestine, Lebanon and Egypt, non-governmental organisations are engaged in efforts to re-draft family status and other laws.

Conflict has both shaped and constrained the lives of women. The Palestinian struggle for freedom has fostered an active and strong women's movement that has been an integral part of the national movement. In many countries gender-based violence remains a stark reality. Conflict in Algeria between Islamists and the state has resulted in substantial numbers of female casualties. The continued Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza has spawned an increase in domestic violence and created a political climate that is less conducive to advancement of women's rights. The lives of Iraqi women have been framed by state oppression, economic sanctions and three wars. US-led calls for 'liberation' may in the long term serve to further oppress women in a country which once led the region in terms of gender equality and female education. The collapse of security has forced Iraqi women to remain at home, abandon their jobs and conform to Islamic dress codes. Women with a public profile (doctors, academics, lawyers, NGO activists, and politicians) have been targeted for assassination and many have been forced into exile.⁹

There are substantial variations in women's access to work. In Egypt, women own 17 per cent of private businesses but most are employed in the service or agricultural sectors. Many women predominantly work in the informal sector. By contrast, in Lebanon, almost a quarter of women are employed in the professions, but few achieve senior positions. Women make up almost a third of Kuwait's workforce, the highest proportion in the Gulf. One-third of doctors and one-quarter of university professors in Morocco are women. Qatari women have been able to achieve success in education, medicine and the media. In Saudi Arabia, however, women are required to remain segregated from non-related males, banned from driving motor vehicles and can only be employed in workplaces segregated by gender.

⁹ 'Iraq's women under pressure', Nadje al Ali, Forced Migration Review, June 2007
www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/Iraq/18.pdf

Religion, politics and gender attitudes remain intertwined. A number of Arab countries – Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates – have, like the United States, not signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). As a report by Amnesty International shows, many of those that have signed have identified contradictions between CEDAW and Shari'a and have formally entered significant reservations to key CEDAW clauses.¹⁰

Typology of Civil Society Organisations

The most widely used term for civil society in Arabic literally refers to 'society of the city', indicating that it is the movement from rural and tribal society to urbanised society, which gave impetus to organised civil society.

Many argue that the roots of civil society in the region can be found in Islamic values, injunctions to promote philanthropy and tribal precepts of collective responsibility and mutual aid. For example, Islamic principles of *zakat* and *sadaqa* encourage the better-off to donate a percentage of their wealth to the poor.

In the early twentieth century, new organisations emerged, spearheaded by educated visionaries. Professional groups were formed to promote their members' interests and advance social reform.

Charitable Organisations (jam'iyat khayreyya)

Confession-based organisations, associated with mosques or Islamic religious movements, have functioned for centuries. Many derive their income from properties held as *waqf*, Islamic charitable endowments. Charitable organisations in all Arab countries have worked to identify the poor and to receive and distribute funds. Many continue to function, but their exact number is hard to determine. Many were controlled or dismantled by authoritarian regimes in the early decades of independence. Today, many of the Islamic political parties in the region, like Hamas in Palestine, Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Muslim Brothers in Egypt have very strong networks of organisations providing education, health and other forms of welfare. Similar confession-based organisations linked to Christian churches exist in Lebanon, Egypt, Iraq, Syria and Palestine. Other types of charitable organisations address such community concerns as care of the elderly, widows, orphans and the poor. In rural areas, a large number of charitable organisations serve to regulate irrigation and other aspects of agriculture.

¹⁰ Amnesty International: "Reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women -Weakening the protection of women from violence in the Middle East and North Africa region", AI Index IOR 51/009/2004, 3 November 2004

Mutual-Benefit Organisations

Individuals join together to form an organisation in which they are members and have a governance function to elect-office bearers and from which, as members, they derive benefits. Such organisations may be very small – community organisations based in a particular geographical area – or larger and even national in scope. Typical examples include cooperatives, trade unions, professional associations and village self-help groups.

Public-Benefit Organisations

These are groups whose aim is to benefit citizens who have been identified as needing help. The people who govern or are members of the organisation are not beneficiaries and mechanisms to organise those governing the organisation are set up at the initiative of committed individuals (often a board). These organisations vary in size. Their mandate comes from the common perceptions and values of self-selected citizens. And while invariably public-spirited in nature, board members are more often than not accountable to their organisation's governance structure and to the law under which they are incorporated, not to those who benefit from their services. Those whose interests are served, therefore, do not, as with mutual-benefit organisations, set the mandate of the organisation. Typical examples of public-benefit organisations are foundations, NGOs and charitable organisations.¹¹

Bogus CSOs

In the Middle East, as elsewhere, there are pretenders – agencies that appear to be representative of citizens, but are actually linked to governments, private businesses, political parties or individuals, especially where Western funding is available. Iraq is the latest example where the emergence of externally-funded non-representative NGOs has added to confusion about the role of civil society.

Civil society organisations in the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf work mainly in the following five categories:¹²

1. Leisure and socialising activities including social, local and youth clubs, recreational and sports associations;
2. Social assistance and social service delivery - mutual aid groups and community development organisations, welfare associations and development NGOs;

¹² Salim Nasr: 'Arab Civil Societies and Public Governance Reform, An Analytical Framework and Overview', January 2005, www.arabgov-initiative.org/publications/civilsociety/arab-civilsociety.pdf

3. Knowledge-oriented activities - cultural associations, research promotion and educational associations;
4. Societal interest representation - membership-based interest groups like business associations, professional associations, trade unions movements, representing women, youth or cultural interests;
5. Public interest CSOs focusing on one or more of: human rights, women's rights, workers' rights, good governance and accountability, democratization, the rule of law, transparency and integrity, electoral monitoring, civic and voter education, environmental protection, heritage protection and consumer protection.

The exact numbers of CSOs cannot be determined since many governments do not disclose data on registered organisations. There is no comprehensive list of charitable organisations in the region. Many, especially those working at community level, do not register with the authorities. Many CSOs are not properly or formally registered and some function even after they have been refused registration. One of the main issues on the civil society agenda is to change laws to provide more freedom of association and the right to organise.

Charitable organisations are largely community-based. They have been able to raise small amounts of funds from the community and also from donations from the private sector as well from various sources abroad. Gulf states have started putting restrictions on the types of funds which CSOs can receive under the pretext of measures to combat terrorism. Generally, local philanthropy is limited to traditional support for social welfare organisations. In most Arab states, there are no laws to regulate private donations or incentives provided for offering them.

A Brief Overview of Civil Society in Selected Countries¹³

Algeria

Winning independence from France in 1962 following a brutal war of liberation, in the 1990s, Algeria was plunged into conflict between the state and Islamic insurgents. Emergency laws and directives limit the constitutional right of association. Although there are a large number of CSOs in Algeria, very few focus on human rights or development. They are forbidden from engagement in political activities unless they are

¹³ Information in this section is largely derived from "Organising Association in Arab Countries", a series of studies coordinated by Adel: The Association for Defence of Human Rights and Freedoms (Lebanon); UNDP's Programme of Governance in the Arab Region ([POGAR](#)) and the [Gulf Research Centre](#).

approved by the ruling party. Despite these constraints, Algeria has a large number of charitable organisations working with farmers, youth, women and trade unionists.

Bahrain

A 1989 law regulates CSOs and imposes a number of restrictions. Political liberalisation since Sheikh Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa assumed power in 1999 has spurred the establishment of new CSOs. In 1999, the government created a Human Rights Committee and subsequently the Union of Bahraini Women and the Bahrain Women's Society were founded. By the end of 2003, over 350 NGOs had been registered. A royal proclamation in 2002 granted workers, including non-citizens, the right to form and join unions. Bahrain now has some 40 trade unions and a larger number of women's organisations. In recent years there has been a reversion to authoritarianism.

Repression of Civil Society Activity in Bahrain

In September 2004, officials of the [Bahrain Centre for Human Rights](#) were detained and the Centre was closed. Amnesty International and ARTICLE 19 wrote to the *Shura* Council in June 2006 expressing concern over a bill threatening rights to freedom of expression, freedom of association and privacy. In 2006, defenders of human rights were subjected to harassment, including prosecution on false criminal charges, threats or assault. BHRO remains concerned about continued harassment of journalists when covering issues considered 'sensitive' by the Bahraini authorities.

Egypt

Egypt has one of the most vibrant research and study centres, as well as human rights and women's rights NGOs and charitable organisations in the region. Yet the permanent state of emergency, continuously enforced and ratified by parliament since it was promulgated by President Hosni Mubarak in 1981, severely limits associational activities. A revised Associations Law, introduced in 2002 to the dismay of NGOs and the Egyptian opposition, increased restrictions on NGO activity and fund-raising and allows the Ministry of Social Affairs, not the courts, to disband any NGO deemed to be performing illegal activities. It also required all of Egypt's 16,000 organisations to register with the Ministry of Social Affairs. Applications by some long-established human rights organisations were rejected. NGOs are not allowed to take part in political or syndicate activities, and must serve the 'public interest', be formally registered and have internal regulations. Associations may not engage in political activities unless they are registered as political parties. In 2003, the Ministry of Social Affairs rejected applications for the registration of two prominent human rights NGOs.

[Ibn Khaldun Centre for Development Studies](#)

In June 2000 the founder of the Centre and 27 of its researchers and associates were arrested, detained for several weeks, interrogated, indicted and tried before the state's security courts. They were sentenced to various prison terms ranging from between one to seven years hard labour. After serving about 15 months, all were released when Egypt's highest court over-ruled the lower courts. Defendants were acquitted of all charges and the Centre's constitutional rights to conduct research, receive grants and publish freely were affirmed.

Iraq

Prior to the invasion of Iraq in March 2003, civil society was tightly constrained. The few international agencies operating in Iraq were labelled as spies by Saddam's regime and those in contact with them were at great risk. The concept of NGOs and the culture of a free civil society were alien. In 2003, the arrival en masse of NGOs reinforced the popular perception that civil society is inextricably linked to the occupying military forces. In the current atmosphere of mistrust this misperception is still widespread. Women's organisations have been split by tensions between women civil society activists returning from the diaspora – especially those with US backing – and those who stayed put under Saddam's rule. There are a wide range of community-based organisations responding to worsening humanitarian needs, but security fears force them to adopt a low profile. As sectarian tensions increase, and more and more Iraqis are internally displaced, welfare organisations attached to political parties and insurgents have risen in prominence. The Iraqi Red Crescent Society is the only civil society actor still able to operate across the country, but at great danger to staff and at constant risk of its work being disrupted, especially by US occupation forces. The NGO Coordination Committee in Iraq ([NCCI](#)), an umbrella group of 80 local and international NGOs, is located in Amman.

Jordan

According to legislation in 1966, the use of associations for any partisan purpose is prohibited. Jordanian CSOs enjoy one of the most favourable political environments in the Arab world for participating in their country's political liberalisation. However, the Jordanian Society for Citizens' Rights (JSCR) was shut down in October 2002. There is a loose [network of development NGOs](#) in Jordan with a database of development organisations. There has been a significant increase in registered NGOs and charities in the last few years following the policy of liberalisation by the government. The huge influx of Iraqi refugees (euphemistically referred to by the Jordanian authorities as 'guests' or 'temporary visitors') has led the Jordanian authorities to be wary of the organisations providing them with assistance.

Kuwait

Civil society is relatively small and composed of public interest associations, trade unions, and informal groups such as cooperative societies. The law prohibits associations from engaging in political activities. Almost all associations registered as public benefit societies receive government funding. The state also reimburses the costs of attending conferences, seconds civil servants to assist CSOs and provides grants. However, state support does not cover CSOs' costs and many primarily depend on their own fund-raising. There are currently 55 societies with 40,000 members, mostly focused on gender issues, political and economic liberalisation and promotion of Islamic values, as well as hundreds of unlicensed and unofficial NGOs. These do not receive government subsidies and have no legal status. Numerous public meetings take place in private homes. The numbers of these *diwanias* has increased in recent years, and they play an important role in the political process. Kuwaiti women have their own *diwanias* to discuss issues of common interest. Kuwait has a number of trade unions, some of which receive considerable state subsidies, but at a cost to their independence.

Lebanon

Lebanon has one of the oldest laws of association in the region. Regulations promulgated by the Ottoman authorities in 1909 still regulate the formation of associations. CSOs are required to inform the Ministry of the Interior of their existence and internal structure. Some 1,100 new associations were registered in 1999 alone. Lebanon has some 250 professional, employees and business associations. Syndicates of lawyers, engineers, journalists, accountants and teachers are influential, as elsewhere in the Arab World. The General Confederation of Lebanese Workers (CGTL) is the main trade union federation. Some of Lebanon's social welfare associations date back to the nineteenth century, and many of them cross boundaries between Lebanon's many confessions (officially recognised ethnic/religious groups).

Lebanese civil society has grown in a unique environment characterised by constant political instability, a weak, unresponsive and often authoritarian state, inconsistent rule of law, chronic economic problems, a sectarian social structure and external interference in Lebanese affairs. Civil society's impact on politics is relatively limited, but its role in providing services is significant. Many Lebanese CSOs are not noted for transparency, especially those which are family-based or dominated by a powerful individual. There is a rift between the active role civil society plays in promoting democratic values and a poor record of practicing them.

There was a sharp increase in the number of CSOs after the end of the 1975-1990 civil war which paralysed the Lebanese state. The re-emergence/foundation of non-sectarian associations adopting non-confessional and non-political agendas was highly significant in restoring national confidence and promoting active citizenship.

The ongoing consequences of the devastating conflict between Israel and Hezbollah in the summer of 2006 – has not only destroyed hope, but also forced civil society to focus on relief and assistance to victims of the war. Many Lebanese CSOs were affected by the conflict, losing offices, assets and records. The uncoordinated response to the emergency was complicated by the fact that the major Lebanese protagonist – Hezbollah – also prominently provides welfare and relief services. In Lebanon, as in Gaza, the UN and international NGOs have sought to almost completely sideline a dominant civil society actor.

Coordination of CSOs in Lebanon

Lebanon has several fora for the coordination of CSO work.

- The [Lebanese NGO Forum](#) provides humanitarian services, upholds the rights of underprivileged and vulnerable groups, coordinates the efforts of humanitarian NGOs and collaborates with state institutions and foreign and voluntary humanitarian associations.
- The [Collective of Lebanese Voluntary NGOs](#) also works to coordinate social development work. It assists private civil associations, contributes to Lebanese legislation, assists with humanitarian organisations, represents its members before public, national, and international authorities and coordinates a civic forum for development.
- The [Arab NGO Network for Development](#), based in Lebanon, is one of many regional networks or organisations. ANND was established in 1996 with a membership of 45 organisations in 12 Arab countries. It has three main programmes: development, democracy, globalisation and trade. It conducts work through research, networking, campaigning, media and communication, lobbying and capacity building of member organisations and active participation in international and regional meetings and events.

Libya

There are no truly independent organisations in Libya. Workers may join the National Trade Unions' Federation, which was created in 1972 and is administered by the General People's Committees. The government also created the Libyan Arab Human Rights Association in 1998 and the [Gaddafi Development Foundation](#) which has several subsidiary bodies. Arrest of critics and reformists continue, and efforts for association are often suppressed.

Morocco

In Morocco, the first law regulating organisations dates back to 1914. The country has developed a vibrant human rights movement, as well as women's organisations, youth groups and cultural associations, which enjoy a degree of autonomy and operational

freedom. There has been a large increase in the number of organisations and charities since Mohammed VI became King in 1999. The women's rights movement was instrumental in driving campaigning for the newly adopted family status law, which is considered the most advanced in the region. The human rights movement has been instrumental in promoting transitional justice and dealing with past abuses. Half of the members of the country's [Equity and Reconciliation Commission](#), which dealt with past violations of human rights, were representatives from NGOs. The Commission followed a very advanced and sophisticated process, learning from experiences from many parts of the world. The Commission ended its work at the end of 2005 and issued a fairly comprehensive final report.

A New Family Law in Morocco

The adoption of the new family law in Morocco is a good example of successful NGO campaigning, using creativity combined with grass-roots activism. The reforms included in the new law are extensive. Women are now allowed to be considered their own guardians and are no longer legally bound by the decisions of their male relatives with regard to marriage, education and employment – though they may yield this right if they so choose. The legal age for marriage was raised to 18. Polygamy came under new restrictions that are generally prohibitive. The first wife must give her consent and the second wife must be notified of the existence of the first wife. A judge must give consent for all cases of polygamy, basing his consent on proof of equal status being granted by the husband to each wife and their children. The new law also gives women the right to divorce on grounds of polygamy and allows for the creation of a marriage contract excluding the possibility of future polygamous marriages. The new law gives women equal rights to divorce her husband. Verbal repudiation is not considered legally binding. No divorce can be final until the assets of the couple are equitably distributed and any debts owed to the wife and children have been paid. Custody of children following divorce is now balanced in favour of the mother and grandchildren are now included in the inheritance of their maternal grandparents.

Over the last two decades several women's groups emerged in Morocco and began to push for gender equity. These groups have been regarded sympathetically by the monarchy and have been integral to recent reform efforts. In 2001, as part of his effort to project a progressive image, King Mohammad VI established a royal commission of religious authorities and legal experts to propose recommendations for amending family status law (*Mudawwana*). In February 2004, the Presidents of both houses of Parliament presented the unanimously approved new Family Law to King Mohammed VI. The new legislation replaces the family law included in the previous *Mudawwana*.

This was achieved through a coalition of 200 women's associations in an unprecedented campaign that lasted from 1999-2004. The coalition led the demands for the family code reform and argued that the consultative committee should also be made up of women, and not only men and Islamic scholars. They also proposed that the committee should include legal experts, sociologists, economists and psychologists. The process of bringing about change was long and complex and involved a number of partner organisations. Political parties exploited religion for political reasons. Conservative men used the mosque and media to undermine women's work and held demonstrations. A large alliance was created during the campaign, and communicated with community groups to show that the amendments were just and could solve social problems. There were national-level discussions and the women's groups stood their ground, forcefully arguing for law based on gender equality. Mass marches were organised by the women's organisations of about 500,000 men and women in support of the changes.

Occupied Palestinian Territories

The West Bank and Gaza hosts a richer variety of professional, research, welfare, charitable, women's rights and human rights organisations than most of its neighbours. At least thirty-six NGOs and sixteen research centres have an active presence on the Internet. Civil society has grown against a background of occupation, based on policies of repression of rights and freedoms, economic strangulation and denial of access to health, education and other services. Civil society has collectively filled gaps in provision of services by the occupation authorities in the period between the occupation of the West Bank in 1967 and establishment of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) in 1994. Israeli military orders – including military order No. 686 of 1981 have strictly controlled and limited civil activities and institutions. As a result of the pivotal role played by civil society in the absence of indigenous government, it is estimated that “NGOs currently provide more than 60 per cent of all primary health care services, and manage 42 per cent of hospitals, 90 per cent or rehabilitation centers and 95 per cent or pre-school education. They serve thousands engaged in agricultural activities and other basic services and the broader needs of Palestinian society. Together, the Palestinian NGO sector employs more than 25 thousand people.”¹⁴ Many privately-owned media also survive – although press freedoms in both the West Bank and Gaza have been threatened since the expulsion of Fatah from Gaza by Hamas in June 2007.

¹⁴ See appraisal of the PNGO III Project at www.pngo-project.org/resources/Newsletter/PNGO-III-EIA-R5.pdf

A large number of organisations belong to the Palestinian NGO Network ([PNGO](#)). NGOs and trade unions are very active in voicing concerns as to the proposed charitable organisations and labour laws.¹⁵ A new draft Palestinian NGO law prohibits NGOs and charitable organisations from engaging in political activities. Members of the PNGO, as well as other community based organisations, have been reviewing drafts of the NGO law, providing their perspectives to the Palestinian legislative council. The existing Palestinian Law for Charitable and Non-Governmental Organisations No. 1 of 2000 has given Palestinians the right to practice and form social, professional, charitable and non-governmental organisations. Before 2000, the Ottoman Law of Charitable Organisations of 1907 and the Jordanian Law for Charitable Organisations No. 33 of 1966 were still in force.

There are many international and aid institutions functioning in Palestine. The electoral success of Hamas in national elections in January 2006 led to the withdrawal of almost all external support to the PNA, depriving public sector workers of salaries for many months.

The [Palestinian NGO Project](#), launched in 1997, is funded by the World Bank, the governments of Canada, Italy, Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom, the Islamic Development Bank, and the Welfare Association. It has three key objectives:

- (i) to deliver services to the poor and marginalised in Palestinian society, using NGOs as the delivery mechanism;
- (ii) to improve the institutional capacities of NGOs receiving grants under the project;
- (iii) to support efforts by the Palestinian National Authority and the Palestinian NGO sector to strengthen their working relationship, including support for the development of a positive legal framework.

The third phase of the project seeks to institutionalise mechanisms for supporting the Palestinian NGO sector and improve access for effective social services to poor and marginalised communities, through different types of grant schemes and tailored capacity building activities for social services delivery.

There are several coordinating bodies of civil society organisations in Palestine, including the Palestinian NGO Network, the General Federation of Charitable Organisations and the National Association for Non-Governmental Organisations. They sometimes coordinate together on joint advocacy for revision of legislation on NGOs and charitable organisations.

¹⁵ See, for example, Letter by Palestinian Civil Society Organisations to the Palestinian Legislative Council Member concerning the amendment to the Law of Charitable Associations and Community Organisations on 28 May 2005, available on http://www.pngo.net/NGOlaw_en_Letter_PLC_28_05_05.htm

Palestinian NGO Network

Established in 1993, the PNGO network includes more than 90 organisations listed as members on its website, engaged in a range of sectors such as agriculture, business development, children and youth, community development, consumer protection, culture, democracy, research media and communication, education, elderly people, environment, health, human rights and legal aid, special needs and women. The overall goal of PNGO Network is “to reinforce the role played by NGOs through contributing to the development and empowerment of civil society within an independent Palestinian state based on the principles of democracy, social justice and respect for human rights.” PNGO seeks to:

- contribute to the national resistance to end the occupation;
- advocate for the rights of the Palestinian people locally, regionally and globally;
- advocate for responsible and appropriate legislation and public policies;
- strengthen coordination within the NGO sector;
- strengthen democratic values within Palestinian society;
- strengthen civil society’s organisational capacities.

Oman

It is forbidden to establish associations whose activities are inimical to social order, or are secret, or are of a military nature. There are not many NGOs permitted or active in Oman. Civil society is limited and weak. There are about a dozen registered NGOs and 42 government approved women’s associations (some are partially government funded). The average time required to register an NGO is two years. The government has not permitted the establishment of independent human rights organisations. Industry associations, professional syndicates and trades unions are banned. INTRAC is working with both NGOs and the government on strategies to strengthen civil society.

Qatar

Qatar has undergone substantial liberalisation in recent years, at least in comparison with most other Gulf States. The Emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani announced in 2002 the establishment of a [National Human Rights Committee](#) composed of representatives drawn from government ministries and civil society. The Committee has drawn attention to violations of the rights of foreign workers and has called for a new labour law. Independent human rights and women’s rights organisations have been refused licenses and political parties are banned. The Qatar Authority for Charitable Activities ([QACA](#)) was established in 2004 to oversee the work of the Qatari Red Crescent and a dozen other officially-approved CSOs. QACA’s formation owes much to Qatar’s post 9/11 desire to be seen to be rigorously monitoring financial flows intended for apparent terrorist activities. INTRAC and the Charity Commission for England and Wales have worked to advise the QACA. There are apparent tensions between individual

approved CSOs and the QACA and it is not yet clear whether the latter will develop into a hands-off regulator or controller of CSOs.

Saudi Arabia

The King declared the creation of an independent journalists' organisation in early 2003. The formation of an independent human rights organisation was announced in mid-2003. The National Organization for Human Rights was established in Saudi Arabia in February 2004 and has handled hundreds of cases related to employment, bureaucracy, judiciary, naturalisation, domestic violence and prisons. In 2005 the government announced the establishment of a special administration entrusted with protecting the rights of foreign workers and penalising employers who abuse them. It receives complaints by housemaids concerning sexual harassment, abuse, and unpaid wages. Any employer who fails to pay their maid's salary is barred from employing a foreign maid for a period of five years. Reformists and activists form a loose network and are often targeted and imprisoned. There have been a number of petitions calling for reform and greater popular participation.

Syria

Emergency laws imposed in 1963 permit the government to act in many areas in the name of security. Abolishing martial law is a priority of reformers in Syria. For a brief period after the accession to power of Bashar al-Assad in July 2000, informal groups met in private homes to discuss the economy, human rights, politics and other topics. The president released 600 political prisoners on 16 November 2000 and scores of exiled members of the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood were allowed to return home. However, emergency laws remained in effect. Bashar al-Assad's brief period of tolerance came to an abrupt end in August 2001, when the authorities arrested ten opposition leaders, including two members of parliament. Riad Seif, a parliamentarian who had been granted some freedom to create a nascent opposition party, was indicted for holding a weekly forum in his home. A series of arrests has since taken place. Reformists, writers, lawyers, human rights and other activists continue to be at risk of detention and harassment.¹⁶ There is one federation of trade unions and one federation for women, with branches across the country. No independent trade unions or women's organisations are allowed to be established. Syria has no truly independent CSOs.

Tunisia

In Tunisia, the law regulating organisations dates back to 1888. The number of organisations increased sharply in the eighties. They cover a broad range of activities,

¹⁶ For examples of harassment of activists in Syria, please see documents produced by Amnesty International on Syria: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/eng-syr/index>

from sport and scientific pursuits to welfare, as well as women's activities and – by far the largest category – artistic and cultural activities. NGOs are prohibited by law from engaging in political activity and must be registered with the Ministry of Interior. The founding members of an association are required to submit the organisation's charter and by-laws to the ministry in order to receive a receipt. Public meetings of NGOs require prior approval from the ministry. In recent years, human rights activists and defenders – together with their families – have been subject to repeated harassment, intimidation and detention. They are often restricted from travelling outside the country. Organisations have been closed and their correspondence monitored.

In April 2005, Mohammed Abbou, a lawyer and human rights defender, was sentenced to three-and-a-half years in prison for posting internet articles critical of the Tunisian authorities and denouncing torture. His sentence was confirmed on appeal but he remained in detention until he was pardoned in June 2007. In November 2005, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detentions judged the detention of Mohammed Abbou to be in violation of article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In April 2006, human rights defender Lasad Jouhri was harassed and intimidated by the security forces as a result of the establishment of Torture Victims against Impunity, an organisation calling for torturers to be brought to justice.

In the build-up to a UN-sponsored world summit on information in November 2005, there was an increase in state repression directed against leading human rights activists. The repression persisted through the summit itself which, ironically, was aimed to advance international information exchange through the use of new technology.

United Arab Emirates

Public assembly and association are subject to government approval. Local authorities must license all private associations. However, this requirement is enforced only loosely in some emirates. All NGOs must be registered with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs but some unregistered NGOs operate openly without government interference. Approximately 100 domestic NGOs are registered at present. NGOs focus on social and humanitarian activities and not overtly political issues. Registered NGOs receive subsidies or funds from the government depending on the size of their membership. In March 2006, the UAE approved the formation of the Emirates Human Rights Association. Trade unions, strikes and collective bargaining are banned but there have, nevertheless, been a number of strikes by the large number of non-UAE employees.

Yemen

The law specifies that Yemeni non-governmental organisations may not be involved in political activities. Generally organisations, both local and foreign, operate without

serious impediment in Yemen. Attempts to impose restrictions on foreign funding to organisations have been successfully resisted. Yemen today hosts the most active and diverse civil society in the Arabian Peninsula. Some organisations are long-established and highly experienced. The exact number of CSOs is unknown, but Yemen has a wide range of labour unions, self-help projects, development cooperatives, clubs, private schools, welfare associations and discussion groups. Yemen is a poor country and the only Arab state classified among the list of 'Least Developed Countries' by the United Nations. Civil society groups have played a part in combating poverty and implementing development projects. Yemeni civil society, and freedoms of association and expression, are under threat as a result of the government's alliance with the United States and political/sectarian tensions.

Governance crisis

The UN Development Programme, through its series of [Arab Human Development Reports](#), has accurately assessed problems in the region. The 2004 UNDP Arab Development Report aptly describes this governance crisis:¹⁷

“Central to [the problem of freedom and governance] is the fact that at the political level, decision-making has remained in the hands of a minority ... focused on serving its own interests. The vast majority of people are excluded, and thus left to impoverishment and marginalisation. Nor have the Arab regimes been able to protect Arab interests in the international arena. Arab lands remain occupied, with the occupation of Iraq having been added recently to that of Palestine. About 10 per cent of Arabs now live under occupation and, after several decades, foreign military forces have re-appeared in the region. This provokes an extremely high level of discontent in the region.... Finally, present-day regimes have not achieved fundamental reform from within which would correct their course and enhance hopes for a better future.”

Civil society in the Arab World has been vocal on the need for reform. Different fora have been organised prior to summits of the League of Arab States. For example, the Forum for the Future brings together what is known as the Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA) and the G-8. The Final Statement of the Second Civil Forum Parallel to the Arab Summit (Rabat 17-19 February 2006)¹⁸, included a large number of recommendations reflecting civil society demands.

¹⁷ Arab Development Report 2004: Towards Freedom in the Arab World, UNDP, pp. 163-164.

¹⁸ www.cihrs.org/Press_details_en.aspx?per_id=70&pr_year=2006

In particular, they stressed the need for eliminating all legislative, administrative and security restrictions imposed on the establishment and management of NGOs, syndicates and trade unions, political parties and mass communication media. They also called for the free flow of information and freedoms of expression, belief and assembly as well as legislation in accordance with international standards. Prolonged states of emergency in Arab countries (Egypt, Algeria and Syria), as well as exceptional courts were identified as the main challenges to the work of civil society and the rule of law. They demanded the release of reformers, human rights defenders and prisoners of conscience. Arab civil society also stressed the need for ensuring women's rights and ending all forms of injustice and discrimination against women in the Arab countries. They additionally invited the Arab Summit to critically assess the progress of political reform and the promotion of human rights. CSOs urged the Arab League to revise the [Arab Charter for Human Rights](#), and called on the League to open its doors to civil society. The Forum noted in conclusion that "the main obstacle precluding reform in the Arab World is the fact that most of the Arab governments lack the political will necessary to embark on these reforms." The forum added: "Some governments took the initiative to request a number of measures making legislative and constitutional amendments and declaring them to public opinion, proof of the real will to reform. Unfortunately, however, these measures were either too partial or had limited effect, or meant to impress rather than actually change; in many cases, they constituted regress, adding up to the already existing restrictions."

Constraints on Civil Society¹⁹

Freedom of organisation and assembly

CSOs have to apply to states for permission to register and to hold meetings which are often arbitrarily refused. Laws do not set criteria for allowing or denying registration and assemblies. Often there are no clear procedures for appealing executive decisions and seeking judicial review. Provisions in laws regulating CSOs are wide and vague, making them overly subject to interpretation. On many occasions states have interfered with elections of boards of non-governmental organisations, suspended organisations and confiscated assets without any legal avenue of appeal. Laws in the region state that organisations may not be involved in political activities, but fail to stipulate what constitutes a political activity. The activities of all NGOs, especially human rights organisations, can therefore be disrupted at any time by allegations that they are engaged in political activities.

¹⁹ For further details of civil society organisations in the selected Arab countries see Kareem Elbayar, 'NGO Laws in Selected Arab States', *International Journal of Not-for-Profit Law*, Volume 7, Issue 4, September 2005.

Many organisations are not officially registered. This is either due to very stringent laws, organisations refusing to be registered under such laws, denial of registration to many of those who do decide to apply, or simply that some organisations (especially those in rural areas or small organisations), do not attempt to register. This inevitably hinders their ability to carry out many activities.

Funding

Arab CSOs are also doubtful about the aims of interventions of foreign governments in the region. Foreign aid from certain governments (such as the USA) is not welcomed by many organisations. USAID now compels NGOs it supports to sign a [Certification Regarding Terrorist Financing](#), which requires that recipients do not “provide material support or resources to any individual or entity that advocates, plans, sponsors, engages in, or has engaged in terrorist activity”. One of the appendices to the pledge includes the names of a large number of Palestinian bodies and groups the US regards as terrorist entities. Palestinian NGOs have expressed the view that the signing of the pledge would have dangerous implications and would pave the way for mis-labelling a large variety of NGO activities as terrorism. Human rights organisations providing legal assistance to prisoners regardless of their political affiliations would be regarded as operating in contravention of this pledge.

Considering the historical context of the region, fear of foreign interference in ‘sensitive’ issues, hidden agendas and political manipulation have made foreign funding for civil society the object of much controversy. There are currently restrictions on soliciting funding from foreign sources in many countries, although the state in many of these countries itself may be receiving large amounts of foreign funding. There are frequent attempts to restrict CSOs from receiving funding from foreign sources. This has been used on many occasions as a pretext to close some of the most prominent and respected organisations in the region, including the Cairo-based [Ibn Khaldun Centre for Development Studies](#).

CSOs are not very good at raising their own funds locally through their activities. Some solicit funds from the private sector, or through traditional donations such as through mosques, churches, or as part of *Zakat or Sadaqa*. Membership organisations suffer from lack of funding because members are generally reluctant to pay their dues. Some organisations rely largely on state funding yet this often makes them vulnerable to the risk of arbitrary decisions to withdraw funds.

Many CSOs are not familiar with international funding procedures and how to report to donors and many do not have specialised staff dedicated to fundraising.

Trade Unions

Trade unions are still largely restricted in many parts of the region. For example, in Bahrain, a new law introduced in September 2002 allows for only one trade union to be formed at each establishment. In Kuwait, despite 12 years of discussion, a new labour code has still not come into force. The country still has a single trade union system as well as many restrictions on trade union rights and freedoms. Omani law does not recognise the right to form unions, bargain collectively or to strike. In Syria, all workers' organisations must be affiliated with the country's sole official trade union federation, the General Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU), which is strictly controlled by the ruling Ba'th party. The GFTU controls most aspects of union activity and determines which sectors or areas of activity can have a union. In Saudi Arabia, a new labour law was passed in September 2005. It only allows workers' committees and trade unions and strikes are banned. Yemen also has a single trade union system and restricts some trade union rights.

Other constraints

- Civil society does not reflect the degree of difference among people within the region. In the Arab world there is very little acknowledgement and study of minority rights be these ethnic, religious, linguistic and/or sexual.
- Civil society is struggling to define and open up a space for itself and lacks capacity to explore diversity issues. Arab societies often perceive civil society as elitist and disconnected from people's real concerns. This is compounded by the fact that the vast majority of civil society organisations are not membership organisations.
- There are very few coordinating bodies or networks for different groups working on similar areas across the region or within countries in order to facilitate debates or address common concerns.
- There are also very few linkages and networks between sectors, inside countries or across borders. Competition between organisations working in the same country and the same sector leads to duplication of efforts.
- Many CSOs become politicised, allowing political tendencies excessive influence on their work, thus leading to frequent internal problems and splits.
- CSOs have generally allowed only limited space for participation by women and young people, although this is gradually shifting in some countries.
- The spirit of volunteerism is often either lacking or management of CSOs make little effort to attract volunteers and encourage their participation;

- In the absence of transparent and democratic governance, CSOs often suffer when founders depart.
- The rise of political Islam poses great challenges to CSOs. Many are unsure how to respond to human rights violations perpetrated by members of Islamic movements.
- CSOs generally have very weak relations with governments and do not know how to interact with them. They do not sit on similar platforms to coordinate, share information, or debate issues of common concern.
- CSOs are not generally concerned with how to make themselves accountable to governments, funders, peers and beneficiaries.

Case Study: Arab Human Rights Fund ([AHRF](#))

While human rights activities are growing steadily, funding to support them remains inadequate, especially from domestic sources. Excessive reliance on foreign funding exposes those defending human rights to both criticism and sometimes acts of repression. As a result, human rights NGOs are forced to spend significant efforts and resources on protecting their own institutional survival and legitimacy, instead of directing efforts and resources to the promotion and defence of human rights. AHRF is a newly-created foundation devoted to providing support for human rights activities in the Arab region with the aim of promoting and enhancing the enjoyment of all human rights – civil, political, economic, social and cultural. Through its grant-making, the AHRF supports an indigenous vision of universal human rights in the Arab world. It works directly and consults widely and regularly with human rights defenders throughout the region to identify appropriate and promising strategies for human rights promotion in accordance with the needs of the region. By virtue of its trans-regional orientation, the AHRF is uniquely positioned to link the region's human rights community with global rights and legal networks as well as philanthropic resources. It also works to cultivate domestic funding for human rights, promote the concept of social justice philanthropy and build productive relationships between human rights practitioners and colleagues in the development, media and social service arenas. In these and other ways AHRF hopes to expand and enhance the support available for human rights activities in the Arab region.

Capacity Building

INTRAC favours the 'clover leaf model', seeing the different dimensions of capacity building as an interlocking combination of a CSO's programmes, internal organisation and external linkages. Capacity building in the Arab World has mainly focused on programme performance but has largely ignored the other two areas. There has been little effort to prepare comprehensive coherent organisational plans which could attract external assistance. Such an approach is needed to assist organisations to identify the internal and external factors that hinder their own development as well as programme delivery.

Arab CSOs have frequently failed to define what role they want to play and how they will achieve it. They need to build better capacity to understand the issues upon which they are focusing and define strategies and plans. Today, few organisations have carried out inclusive planning processes, have clear objectives or strategic plans. In the absence of such plans, much of CSOs' work is inevitably reactive to events or opportunities. In many cases, with little internal capacity to plan or write documents, organisations hand over the task of drafting proposals to external consultants, some of whom do not even engage in discussions with relevant staff, volunteers or members of boards of trustees before doing so. Some organisations are also becoming funder-driven, deciding on projects which are most likely to be attractive to donors.

Training Providers and Resources

There is a large amount of human rights training at regional, national and even local levels. Many national organisations train staff from other organisations. There is confusion between specialised human rights training for practitioners and the need to raise general public awareness on human rights issues. The Tunis-based [Arab Institute for Human Rights](#), the main regional organisation providing human rights training, runs several courses each year. The Institute also trains trainers, many of whom are being used by many other organisations on the local and national levels. Through its long experience, it has developed specialised programmes that are generally of high quality. The Amman Centre for Human Rights Studies ([ACHRS](#)) has provided over 230 courses which have benefited over 6,800 individuals, including a large number from Iraq and Syria, where civil society and human rights activism is severely restricted. Amnesty International's regional office in Beirut also offers human rights training and training in strategic planning and campaigning, research methodologies and combatting violence against women (VAW).

Women's rights and anti VAW training is proliferating, but unfortunately there is little coordination or identification of priority training needs. Training in children's rights, early childhood, reproductive health and research methodologies are also increasing. Following the establishment of the [Arab Network for Election Monitoring](#) there is a new emphasis on the teaching of election monitoring techniques.

The Arab NGO Network for Development ([ANND](#)) increases the capacity of its members through providing resources and promoting open discussions and debates. As a membership organisation, the needs of its member organisations are identified during the exchange and meetings of the network. ANND's focus is development; consequently it focuses on social and economic rights. ANND works in three main areas: Millennium Development Goals, trade issues and social and economic reforms. Matters pertaining to

capacity building are decided upon during a strategic planning process that takes place every three years.

Training is often conducted by persons who lack up to date knowledge of the training subject matter. Trainers rarely prepare materials for participants and do not use participatory methods.

Very little capacity building taking place for trade unions and other membership organisations. Training by the International Trade Union Confederation ([ITUC](#)) from its regional office in Amman currently focuses on enabling members of affiliated federations to document violations of workers rights.

A key challenge in capacity building provision in the region is the lack of human and material resources in Arabic and a shortage of trainers and facilitators fluent in Arabic. In a welcome effort to coordinate and exchange experience among trainers in human rights, the Amman Centre for Human Rights has set up a network.²⁰ Unfortunately, there are no similar efforts in trainers in other fields. There are very few resource materials and those that are available are not readily accessible by beneficiaries.

Such resources include:

- The [NGO Capacity Building Handbook](#) by the [Search For Common Ground](#) which was written to help strengthen governance structures and increase the openness and responsiveness of NGOs in the Middle East, particularly in Egypt, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen. It was also intended to help answer developmental and structural questions for the NGO community in the region²¹;
- A series of capacity building manuals have been produced by the Palestinian NGO Network focusing on administration, financing, campaigning, lobbying and networking²²;
- Amnesty International 's Campaigning Manual including sections on strategic campaigning, organising for action, responding to crisis, fundraising and campaigning, campaigning techniques and media and publicity²³;
- IMTI has prepared training packages, including over-heads and other materials on such subjects as accounting and financial management, communication skills, democratic governance within NGOs and effective leadership and fundraising²⁴;

²⁰ See "Establishing Human Rights Trainers Network", Amman Centre for Human Rights Studies, www.achrs.org/english/CenterNewsView.asp?CNID=237

²¹ www.sfcg.org/programmes/middleeast/middleeast_capacity.html

²² www.pngo.net/pngo_ara/arabic.htm

²³ <http://web.amnesty.org/pages/campaigning-manual-eng>. The Arabic version is not available online but hardcopies can be obtained from AI offices.

- [AmanJordan](#) is a website that hosts resources relating to women's rights across the Arab world. This includes a series of training manuals useful to strengthening CSOs and promoting gender mainstreaming

Many courses have recently emerged on such topics as raising the capability of staff in areas like computer proficiency, filing and languages (especially English). However, there is little training that enables the organisation to develop and implement its vision.

The Queen Zein Al Sharaf Institute for Development ([ZENID](#)) is one of the few exceptions. It does not focus on any one sector as it seeks to promote development by providing training and research to improve the skills of practitioners in Jordan and across the region. ZENID works in partnership with organisations, assessing their needs for capacity building and providing tailored training based on practical 'learning through doing'.

The International Management and Training Institute ([IMTI](#)) was established in 1988 as a division of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) of Lebanon to serve the organisational development and management needs of both the public and private sectors in Lebanon and the Middle East. IMTI is a specialised capacity building (consulting and training) firm whose mission is to effectively contribute toward the management development and organisation of both governmental and non-governmental organisations. It carries out training and human resources development, organisational development, in addition to legal, financial, managerial consulting. They decide on the subject matter either through needs assessment process conducted by IMTI, or sometimes as a result of specific demand by the concerned organisation. IMTI provides and publishes capacity building manuals and other materials. They often carry out evaluation of the effectiveness of their projects. IMTI supports CSOs in building their institutional capacity and human resources development and in expanding their financial resource base.

The Palestinian NGO Network has identified enhancing the managerial and institutional capacity of PNGO's members and the network structure as priorities. Trainers are identified after advertising in the local press. Bids for training contracts are reviewed and documented by the administration committee and submitted to the PNGP steering committee. Trainers are responsible for producing training manuals.

The Amman-based National Centre for Human Resources Development ([NCHRD](#)) offers services and consultancies to domestic and foreign clients, specialising in computer skills, evaluation, management information systems, research, and planning.

²⁴ www.imtilb.com/templates/training.htm

External Linkages

It is important for organisations to build linkages with each other and with their constituencies in order to do their work effectively, demonstrate their accountability, exchange experiences and deepen their knowledge. It is also important for organisations to know how to build linkages with funders in order to solicit and demonstrate proper usage of funds.

Networking and linkages are important areas for the development of organisations. Carrying out campaigns and lobbying, for example, requires building networks and linkages, coalitions, associations and common platforms. This is essential for policy-oriented organisations, but remains one of the main weaknesses of Arab civil society.

There are some important exceptions to this general trend. Women's rights organisations tend to be the best equipped to carry out coordinated and grassroots campaigns. There are some important campaigns in the region addressing difficult issues, such as the campaign for the abolition of the death penalty in Lebanon or the ratification of the International Criminal Court Statute.

Some new methods of campaigning using different approaches have started to be used. For example, instead of the usual method of issuing press releases, the campaign to support the independence of judges in Egypt in the last few months included taking to the streets in demonstrations, blogs and other uses of the Internet as well as forging broad coalitions among NGOs, political parties and parliamentarians.

Case study: [Arab Foundation Forum](#)

The [Welfare Association](#), in collaboration with several other philanthropic organisations in the Arab world, is working to create an active learning platform in the field of social justice philanthropy focusing on seeking solutions to regional developmental challenges. The Forum aims to help stakeholders to operate effectively and provides a platform for dialogue within and outside the region. In the longer term, the Forum aims to synergise philanthropic interventions across the region in order to ensure more effective mobilisation of resources strategic use of resources for marginalised groups. The Forum will conduct workshops to raise awareness of the concepts of justice and social responsibility, develop documentation pertaining to this concept, prepare a manual, and formulate principles of code of conduct and ethical practices of relevance to Arab countries.

Capacity Building Priorities

Arab civil society organisations are in great need of capacity building and a large number of training and capacity building programmes have emerged in recent years. However, despite the large amount of funds disbursed and efforts made, many CSOs are still failing to meet the needs of those they purport to serve. Discussions with CSO informants and providers of training or capacity building programmes indicate that:

- Many programmes are donor-driven. Donors often require training to be conducted to ensure that projects that they fund are implemented in ways they see as appropriate. The availability of substantial funding prompts many CSOs to initiate training in order to ingratiate themselves with donors.
- Training is rarely preceded by proper planning, needs assessments and careful selection of trainers with relevant qualifications and experience.
- Capacity building focuses mainly on enabling organisations to carry out their programme, but very little is done in the areas of building the internal organisational capability or improving external linkages.
- A large number of organisations, including those providing training, do not realise that they themselves have a need for capacity building, especially in terms of internal organisation and developing external linkages. Only when this was discussed with them in detail did they start realising this need. Capacity building for providers would enable them not only to deliver their training well but would also help them and recipient organisations to carry out needs-assessment and thorough planning processes to identify areas of training that are required.
- Most training and capacity building programmes target NGOs and pay insufficient attention to community-based and membership based organisations.
- Most programmes target the same restricted range of organisations. Often individuals in such agencies have received training from several providers.
- Experienced gained from training is not spread within and between organisations.
- Trainers often do not leave materials with the participants which they can revisit or share with others.
- Training and capacity building generally is removed from reality. It does not analyse real situations, is dry and formulaic and leaves participants with little information that will make a lasting impression.
- There is regional bias in training provision with the Gulf and the Maghreb nations lagging behind.
- States such as Libya and Syria generally exclude external training providers.

Conclusion

Civil society in the Arab world is expanding. New organisations are starting in many countries and CSOs are engaging in new themes and ways of working. They are addressing many new issues and reaching out to new constituencies.

However, they face major challenges. These include external constraints restricting their ability to organise, solicit and spend funds. They also face internal challenges as they often lack the ability sufficiently and effectively to plan their work, maximise resources, coordinate and link with each other and with their constituencies. Further, many lack funds and do not have capacity to generate income.

Regional capacity building programmes are increasing but are reaching only a small number of organisations and focus only on a few sectors. They concentrate mainly on programme performance and neglect two vital areas – internal organisational development and external linkages. Without attention to these areas, civil society in the region is likely to make limited progress.

Above all else, it is essential that basic freedoms are safeguarded and extended. This will require the revision of laws that regulate the registration and supervision of organisations, less state interference in the work of CSOs and real guarantees of freedom of association and expression.