

# كسر القوالب Breaking the mold

#Breaking\_The\_Mold

## Arab Civil Society Actors and their Quest to Influence Policy-Making

Country: Yemen

### The Civil Campaign for Reconstruction, Development and Recovery in Yemen

| Studies & Economic Media Center |

The 2011 revolution had repercussions on various fields of life. By the end of 2014, the country entered a dark tunnel leading to an armed conflict, which led to stopping development and deteriorating economic and living conditions. With these events, a civil and societal campaign was launched to demand reconstruction, development and economic recovery through many community activities and advocacy campaigns to normalize life, restore stability, and provide relevant and appropriate perceptions<sup>1</sup>.

The armed conflict that began in March 2015 exacerbated the miserable conditions of the country, as infrastructure and public and private properties were destroyed, factories and vital installations were bombed, the economy collapsed, and the economic contraction reached 40%, while inflation rates rose to 40% according to the World Bank, and unemployment reached high levels<sup>2</sup>. Development also stalled, famine affected 11 million people, and poverty spread among 80% of the population until 2018<sup>3</sup>. Nevertheless, community voices continued calling for reconstruction and economic recovery.

Accordingly, this study attempts to highlight civil society's efforts in the reconstruction, development and economic recovery campaign since 2011, identify the path of these efforts and the factors affecting them, and identify the most noticeable results that emerged and the lessons learned.

The case study methodology was adopted in parallel with collecting data from office sources such as international reports and studies. Data from field sources that included 6 civil society organizations that played an effective role in the study's subject were used<sup>4</sup>. Interviews were also conducted to obtain descriptive and accurate data to prepare in-depth analyzes of researchable cases and conclude a preliminary draft of the study to discuss and enrich it by focus groups.

#### THE PROBLEM AND ITS GENERAL BACKGROUND

The current conflict in Yemen dates back to decades of political and economic disorders. With the escalation of the conflict, the humanitarian, economic and social conditions worsened, and Yemen entered a humanitarian catastrophe, which made reconstruction efforts a rough task and an urgent necessity at the same time.

The Yemeni economy suffered from a significant decline and a decrease in its gross domestic product, as the cumulative rate of contraction reached 40% between 2015 and 2018, and the import and local trade of goods became more difficult and expensive due to the restrictions imposed on economic activity. Therefore, companies reduced working hours by 50%, which led to the layoff of almost 55% of the labor force<sup>5</sup>. More than a quarter of the private sector companies operating in industry, trade and services have ceased. The lack of foreign currency and the liquidity crisis created challenges and increased costs for the importers<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, the agriculture and fisheries sectors, which used to employ 54% of the rural population, were affected, and their damages affected the livelihoods of 1.7 million rural families<sup>7</sup>. Meanwhile, 40% of Yemeni families lost their main source of livelihood due to the war, and the poverty rate rose to 80%<sup>8</sup>.

The conflict contributed to the deterioration of the ability of local communities to adapt, the collapse of public institutions, the tightening of restrictions on imports, transportations and financial transactions, which led to the commercial strangulation, the necessary sector for the survival of people, the cessation of providing public services and the payment of government employees' salaries due to the collapse of public funding, and the depletion of foreign exchange reserves, and thus pushing a large proportion of the population towards poverty and dependence on humanitarian aid<sup>9</sup>.

World Bank estimations show that nearly a quarter of the road network was partially or completely destroyed, energy production halved, and almost half of the water and sewage networks were destroyed<sup>10</sup>. With the escalation of the conflict since 2015, Yemen has suffered from a humanitarian crisis, and almost 22.2 million Yemenis are in need of humanitarian aid. Most public services have stopped, resulting in 16 million people losing access to safe drinking water and 16.4 million others losing access to adequate health care<sup>11</sup>.

As a result of the accelerating deterioration in the humanitarian situation, stalled development, and the government's inability to play its role, civil society's efforts had to come together in launching an international campaign for re-development and reconstruction.

## **COMMUNITY CAMPAIGN FOR RECONSTRUCTION, DEVELOPMENT AND RECOVERY**

### **CAMPAIGN'S DESCRIPTION AND ACTIVITIES:**

The development, reconstruction and recovery campaign was launched as a result of the collapse of the country and aimed to shift international support from relief to development, address threats to livelihoods and generate income for individuals, invite donor countries to build and support economic projects contributing to economic recovery and reconstruction of destroyed infrastructure, and provide basic services to citizens, such as food, health, shelter, security and stability. Campaign activities included:

1. Visions and policies: This activity was the biggest in the campaign's efforts, as many economic visions were presented for recovery, re-development and reconstruction, most notably the Yemen Economic Vision project in 2013<sup>12</sup> and the vision of continuing economic activity and reconstruction in Yemen in 2017<sup>13</sup>, and many others followed the proposals on reconstruction, most notably a set of policy papers for the requirements of the reconstruction phase in Yemen<sup>14</sup>.
2. Neutralizing the economy: The involved parties in the research reported that many civil society organizations carried out awareness-raising activities and advocacy campaigns and drafted papers, policies, and studies to bring attention and pressuring the parties to neutralize the economy from the existing conflict.
3. Institutional framework for reconstruction: According to the testimonies of the organizations interviewed, the proposals of civil society organizations tended to develop their perceptions concerning the institutional frameworks and their working mechanisms, given that the main failure of the state focused on the inefficiency of these frameworks in managing the transition towards redevelopment, reconstruction and achieving recovery. Yemen's Economic Vision project is one of the societal initiatives that focused on the institutional aspect.
4. Supporting the private sector for resilience and recovery and stimulating the economy: The international community's efforts were directed towards activating the private sector's role and supporting economic activities' continuity and strengthening the foundations for resilience and recovery. These efforts focused on awareness activities and advocacy campaigns and offered joint proposals, the most prominent of which are the efforts of the economic forum<sup>15</sup> and the campaign's project "Development for Yemen", which highlighted the support for small projects<sup>16</sup>.
5. Local field efforts for civil society organizations: Efforts were concentrated in development, services restoration, and economic performance improvement; most of them were individual efforts launched by organizations that emerged

from the framework of humanitarian relief to economic empowerment projects and services. Research participants reported that the majority of these efforts were directed towards local communities. Despite the growing need of society for these organizations, their limited funding made their effects limited. Monitoring these efforts and measuring their impact was difficult due to many civil society organizations and the lack of information on these efforts.

6. Supporting the security stability efforts necessary for recovery and restoring the path of development: The organizations tended to implement projects and activities that enhance the chances of security stability and peace-building necessary to restore the path of development, especially with the local authority in many governorates such as Marib, Aden, Hadramout, Taiz and Ibb. According to the opinions of the participants in the research, their organizations worked on some projects and were accepted by the local authority and society, most notably: The Youth and Women's Voices Project (2014-2013), the Jurists for Peace Project 2017, the Civil Society Engagement Project in Peacebuilding and the Strengthening of the Role of Youth to Work on The local level (2018), the Youth Peace Pioneers (2017-2015)<sup>17</sup>.

### **FACTORS AFFECTING THE CAMPAIGN**

The opinions of the participants in the research revolved around numerous factors that they found important to affect the campaign's course, most notably:

1. Availability of qualified cadres who can take risks during fieldwork.
2. Community awareness in terms of the importance of the campaign directions and facilitating the implementation of its activities.
3. Business sector and society's response to the trends and activities of the campaign.
4. Good coordination among civil society organizations.
5. Paying attention to media activities and policy support at the expense of supporting services and economic recovery, and enhancing the path of development, particularly the economic path.
6. Organizations' ability to identify the priorities of community needs according to the current changes.
7. Donors' limited response in directing grants towards re-development and reconstruction projects, and the insistence on directing them to the humanitarian aspects.

### **TRANSFORMATIONS AFFECTING CAMPAIGN'S CONTEXT**

Initial response: The participants in the research unanimously agreed that the media activities of the campaign had a great impact on the involved parties, particularly in the private sector, and it acquired an important part of the campaign's activities, which made a huge, real and remarkable effect in the society. The coordination among the organizations and the target parties also led to positive results.

Transitioning from relief to development and recovery activities: Research participants believe that this transition took place through pressure on donors to divert part of their funds towards re-development, reconstruction, economic recovery and support for development projects. However, the volume of the impact and the transition was limited, as efforts were limited to preparing visions, studies, papers and policies, and response to them was limited due to the donors' convictions of the importance of continuing humanitarian relief work.

## ROLES OF INVOLVED PARTIES

It is normal to have specific roles for the involved parties in a similar campaign, to achieve the general goals, i.e., shifting from relief to development and reconstruction, especially that this process is complicated and requires concerted efforts from various parties, whose roles and extent of impact can be highlighted according to the views of the participants in the search as follows:

I	Party	Presumptive roles within the campaign	The extent to which those roles were actually implemented according to the opinions of the research participants
1	<b>Government</b>	<p>Improving service delivery.</p> <p>Contributing to community development through poverty alleviation programs and policies supporting civil society efforts in the campaign.</p> <p>Encouraging local initiatives to restore economic activity.</p> <p>Monitoring development projects and reconstructing.</p>	<p>The level of improvement in public services was weak, whether in education, health, electricity or water.</p> <p>An amount of 1.4\$ million was allocated to support the efforts of civil society organizations through the Social Fund and within the framework of the early reconstruction program and a return to the development path with the support of the government, according to an agreement concluded with the United Nations Development Program.</p>
2	<b>Civil society organizations</b>	<p>Determining the needs and damages of society's reality, providing visions and proposals for development and reconstructing</p> <p>Contributing to monitoring the implementation of campaign projects.</p> <p>Contributing to educating and mobilizing the community to interact with the campaign.</p>	<p>A limited number of civil society organizations have tended to pay attention to the return of the path of development and reconstruction, but most of the support directed to them did not target sustainable projects as much as it focused on plans and support for policies and the formation of support networks or frameworks, which made the campaign lose its momentum, in addition to the absence of an organized framework for the campaign limited the ability to monitor the scale of the effects of these efforts.</p>
3	<b>Private sector</b>	<p>Carrying out an economic and developmental role to achieve sustainability.</p> <p>Supporting campaign trends and providing suggestions that reinforce them.</p>	<p>Regarding the efforts of the private sector, the participants in the research believe that the private sector played a limited role in influencing the campaign, and its role was limited to supporting a group of workshops and participation in the efforts of the economic forum and the Economic Vision project, while no material support from the private sector existed for direct projects that support the campaign.</p>
4	<b>International parties</b>	<p>Providing technical and advisory support for the campaign.</p> <p>Contributing to supporting the private sector in order to achieve economic development.</p> <p>Providing grants and funds</p>	<p>Many international parties have been interested in the campaign, foremost of the United Nations Development Program, the World Bank and many other donors who have contributed to financing limited projects to achieve the campaign's goal.</p>





## COMMUNITY EFFORTS WITHIN THE CAMPAIGN'S FRAMEWORK

Civil society organizations were the link with the community due to their capabilities in setting community priorities. Hence, the most important efforts of these organizations can be monitored, as follows:

### Studies and Economic Media Center:

The Center was one of the leading civil society organizations in working with the campaign as it worked on 5 projects related to the campaign, and contributed to presenting an economic vision in 2014 that was adopted by the Economic Reform Team and the Economic Forum. It also presented many studies and reports that gave impetus to the campaign.

**Economic Vision of Yemen - Studies and Economic Media Center:** It aimed to conduct a regional economic assessment and submitted a proposal for an economic vision of Yemen 2030. It also cooperated with the Ministry of Trade and Industry and proposed the vision of dividing Yemen into 5 economic regions. It submitted to the Regional Determination Committee an analysis of weaknesses, strengths, opportunities and challenges in the proposed economic regions. It impacted the decision to approve the regions in Yemen, as 4 regions were chosen from the economic vision proposals and the President's decision to divide the country into 6 regions<sup>19</sup>.

- **Development's campaign for Yemen - Small and Micro Enterprises Development Agency:** The campaign aimed to provide support for projects designated for the unemployed in agriculture, food and clothing industries. The agency worked with its partners to provide various financial and non-financial services to workers in these sectors and provide the appropriate environment for growth, expansion, and poverty alleviation, thus contributing to society's development. The World Bank provided a grant for the project for \$ 3.72 million, targeting training, activation and assessment of 400 small enterprises<sup>20</sup>. Research participants believe that this campaign has not achieved real success, despite the funding that was made available to it. In addition, the lack of data on the results of project activities raises questions about their success.
- **Vision's Project of Economic Activity's Continuity and Reconstruction - The Economic Reforms Team:** It aimed to support economic activity's continuity and reconstruction and included the roles that all parties could play under ongoing conflict years to come or the scenario of ending the war. The vision identified the development partners, their supporting role and the private sector's role, and the possible programs and policies at the current phase or the reconstruction phase<sup>21</sup>. The participants in the research believe that this vision did not find a response from the government, and its impact was limited to the convictions of the private sector, which remained in more than one forum calling for the importance of dealing with it and publishing it on more than one platform affiliated with it. Practically, however, it did not affect reality.
- **Reimagining Yemen's Economy Project - Sanaa Center for Strategic Studies:** The project sought to engage Yemeni voices in defining economic, development, humanitarian and social priorities, taking into consideration the existing conflict, and dealing with the preparation for the post-conflict recovery and reconstruction phase. It also sought consensus on the most important and urgent policies by engaging Yemeni voices



active in this field and positively influencing local, regional and international actors in the development<sup>22</sup>. The participants in the research believe that it has not achieved an impact on the government or the international community due to limited funding as well as other projects targeting policies; its role was limited to preparing research papers and conceptions that did not have sufficient advocacy efforts to communicate them to the involved parties.

- **The Yemeni Economic Forum:** It is an economic platform that disseminates Yemen's economic and humanitarian situation to enable decision-makers to make decisions according to practical information. The forum aims to support and advocate the economic visions and strategies presented by the reforms team to serve the Yemeni economic situation<sup>23</sup>. The research participants believe that linking the forum with the club of businessmen and the economic elite provided the possibility of supporting the campaign's efforts. In addition, the forum still presents some visions and is trying to influence the direction of reconstruction and a return to the path of development by activating media pressure, publishing reports, and organizing media and intellectual events.

## INTERNATIONAL PARTIES PARTICIPATING IN THE DEVELOPMENT AND RECONSTRUCTION CAMPAIGN<sup>24</sup>

- **The United Nations Development Program (UNDP):** A project to support small projects through the Social Fund for Development.
- **International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD):** Provides loans, guarantees and advisory services.
- **International Development Association (IDA):** Provides interest-free loans to the poorest countries.
- **The International Finance Corporation (IFC):** Encourages economic development by supporting the private sector.
- **Post-Conflict Fund (PCF):** Provides grants for social and financial reconstruction.
- **The European Union, the Kingdom of the Netherlands and other organizations:** provide support for the campaign projects.

## RESULTS

Yemen's conflict led to the worsening of the humanitarian situation, the deterioration of basic services, and the economy's shrinking. Voices called for redevelopment and reconstruction to avoid the worsening of the situation, most notably international organizations led by the World Bank and the United Nations Development Program. Civil society organizations caught it quickly, reaching firm convictions of the importance of the transition to development and reconstruction's support.

The campaign brought attention to the importance of returning to the path of development and reconstruction, and it received local attention that developed in various projects and activities for civil society.

Civil society organizations played a significant role in the campaign, as they have expertise in community priorities and given their presence in the field and the private sector supported them. Nevertheless, their impact was limited by limiting the campaign to the media and activities affecting policies such as visions, research, papers, policies and workshops. In comparison, the sustainability component's weakness affected those roles and their inability to influence the public policies associated with the campaign.

Although the campaign was launched in some international organizations (the World Bank and the United Nations Development Program) before it was later caught by civil society, it did not receive sufficient attention from donors due to their focus on humanitarian relief, which limited the achievement of real results in the transition to support recovery, development and reconstruction.

## CONCLUSIONS

1. The orientation towards development and reconstruction, and the pursuit of economic recovery, has become an urgent necessity to degenerate the conflict, cease the economic decline and achieve recovery, especially as the current situation indicators reflect a catastrophic situation.
2. An effective civil society-private sector partnership plays a central role in the campaign, while its reassessment may have a greater impact on the government and the international community.
3. The role of international actors is an important component of the campaign's continuity and success.



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## BREAKING THE MOLD PROJECT

In mid-2018, the "Civil Society Actors and Policymaking in the Arab World" program at IFI, with the support of Open Society Foundations, launched the second round of its extended research project "Arab Civil Society Actors and their Quest to Influence Policy-Making". This project mapped and analyzed the attempts of Arab civil society, in all its orientations, structures, and differences, to influence public policy across a variety of domains. This research produced 92 case studies outlining the role of civil society in impacting political, social, economic, gender, educational, health-related, and environmental policies in ten Arab countries: Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Yemen, and the Arab Gulf.

Over two dozen researchers and research groups from the above countries participated in this project, which was conducted over a year and a half. The results were reviewed by an advisory committee for methodology to ensure alignment with the project's goals, and were presented by the researchers in various themed sessions over the course of the two days.

## THE CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS AND POLICY-MAKING PROGRAM

at the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at AUB, examines the role that civil society actors play in shaping and making policy. Specifically, the program focuses on the following aspects: how civil society actors organize themselves into advocacy coalitions; how policy networks are formed to influence policy processes and outcomes; and how policy research institutes contribute their research into policy. The program also explores the media's expanding role, which some claim has catalyzed the Uprisings throughout the region.

## THE ISSAM FARES INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS AT THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

The Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut (AUB Policy Institute) is an independent, research-based, policy-oriented institute. Inaugurated in 2006, the Institute aims to harness, develop, and initiate policy relevant research in the Arab region. We are committed to expanding and deepening policy-relevant knowledge production in and about the Arab region; and to creating a space for the interdisciplinary exchange of ideas among researchers, civil society and policy-makers.

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