

# كسر القوالب Breaking the mold

#Breaking\_The\_Mold

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

Country: Yemen

### The Reality of Civil Society Organizations in Yemen

| Studies & Economic Media Center |

#### INTRODUCTION

The early 1990s witnessed the first emergence of Yemeni civil society organizations with their contemporary model. These organizations benefited from previous experience of some unions and syndicates inherited from the socialist state in the south of the country, and from the strong existence of charitable foundations funded by religious donations in the north and some eastern regions.

In 1990, Yemen witnessed a fundamental transition after the two totalitarian regimes in the north and south of the country agreed to achieve Yemeni unity and the transition towards a democratic regime, during which some organizations faded away, and others gained more power after they developed their experience from being just unions and charitable institutions seeking donations and providing aid to civil organizations that implement development projects, especially after the state allowed multipartism and gave authorization to numerous civil society organizations that were more than 7,000 organizations registered at the Ministry of Social Affairs in the late nineties. Each organization received a yearly-modest aid from the government, in addition to grants for implementing service projects funded by international organizations that opened offices in Yemen at the end of the 1990s.

In the early third millennium, these civil organizations expanded and diversified. They have now included research centers and organizations specialized in women's issues, focusing on minorities, specialized in rural development, youth initiatives, child rights organizations, media outlets, and even organizations focusing on water and environmental issues. Some human rights organizations also emerged and gradually initiated advocating for human rights

and demanding appropriate governance. Hence, Yemen had a Children's Parliament, regular shadow reports issued by civil society in parallel with government reports, delegates from this civil society to the United Nations and other international meetings, and other efforts to develop Yemeni society.

With the beginning of the transitional period in Yemen in 2011, civil society organizations grew quickly, and their number reached 8,300, in addition to the emergence of numerous informal organizations and networks that played an outstanding human right and development role and achieved many advantages during the transitional period according to the findings of this study.



The war that broke out in Yemen in 2015 destroyed the Yemeni dreams of a decent life in a federal state that guarantees equal citizenship, as stipulated in the National Dialogue Conference outcomes document. According to UN reports, this war also caused unlimited pain among civilians and a humanitarian catastrophe that the world has never witnessed. It provoked a bitter division in civil society organizations' positions towards the devastating war according to the various conflict parties' positions, which made things incomprehensible for some concerning the general situation in the country.

On the other hand, human rights organizations in Yemen continued to work in an insecure environment, as an expression of the Yemeni nation's collective conscience and in defense of the civilian victims. They also launched many appeals to alert international organizations interested in human rights violations, and their human rights activities targeted some of them by the conflicting parties.

Development organizations played a vital role in saving society from collapse and chaos due to the absence of official legislative, judicial and executive state institutions, the destruction of service infrastructure, the multiplicity of parties in the war, the dominance of armed groups and militias and the proliferation of weapons among the population in an unprecedented way in the history of Yemen.

Amid this environment enclosed with all the causes of conflicts and their violent tools, and with the support of international organizations interested in relief and development, Yemeni civil society organizations were the only ones to save the last livelihood of the shared social life in cities and rural areas. Some of these organizations played a vital role in saving society from the threat of famine after its activities had transformed into relief, launching humanitarian appeals and various initiatives to provide the minimum service requirements and meet people's most basic vital needs after the destruction of the services infrastructure. They also raised awareness about the importance of peaceful coexistence, which indicates civil society's vital role in limiting war's devastating effects in several fields and maintaining society's cohesion and preventing it from falling into chaos and complete collapse.



## 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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