

Booklet

Syrian Civil Society

Status and Best Practices

For Civic Engagement, Civic Space,
Advocacy, and Financial Planning



دولة



Dawlaty was founded by Syrian activists as a platform to develop and share content on democratic transition and has collected, archived and shared tactics of the nonviolent movement, as well as testimonies of those affected by the Syrian conflict, with a focus on marginalized groups including young women and men. Dawlaty works through its civic engagement and oral history programs to advocate at the local and international level for an inclusive justice for all Syrians. For more information, visit www.dawlaty.org

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Abstract

The experience of Syrian civil society, of working within different and shifting environments, has left it vulnerable and struggling with gaps in the implementation of its work. This is due to a variety of factors affecting its work including isolation, polarization, and restrictions of various forms imposed by the political situation or the international community. Another factor is that the donor community often provides services and support based on interests. However, despite the challenges mentioned above, the experiences of Syrian civil society organizations (CSOs) are usually characterized by innovation and creativity in generating solutions, in a manner that makes them more suitable to the contexts. Syrian civil society has been unique in its dynamism, which has allowed it to respond to rapid changes, especially halfway into the decade-long Syrian crisis, and after they had accumulated various experiences.

The study utilizes a descriptive approach to look into Syrian civil society and its best practices. It does so through descriptive research to study and analyze across four parts, analyze each of their contexts, identify civic organizations' best practices for responding to societal needs, draw a set of results, and present a separate set of recommendations for each part, as well as findings and the general recommendations of this study.

Introduction

Modern democratic principles include male and female citizens' entitlement to exercise their individual rights and be part of the entity we call the state. Individuals join political entities to exercise their political rights. However, political entities are incapable of fully covering communal and individual needs, and there must also be non-governmental CSOs and institutions that are non-partisan, non-political and not affiliated with the government. They work to achieve a social objective that benefits citizens, and these civic entities form civil society. Nothing prevents individuals from being affiliated with political and civic entities at the same time, as the roles individuals play in each of them differs. Definitions of civil society and its organizations vary, and one could almost go as far as saying no comprehensive definition of the concept of civil society and its organizations have been agreed upon because of the divergent definitions' broad scope. This booklet adopts a conventional definition of Syrian civil society organizations (CSOs): non-governmental and non-partisan entities that members join voluntarily; they do not seek to reach power, and they engage in peaceful, unarmed activity with the aim of furthering the interests of a particular social group or the public to serve the public interest

After decades of CSOs playing no role in Syria and being limited to associations, civil society re-emerged by virtue of the March 2011 movement. More were established between then and 2017 than between 1959 and 2010. There were many reasons for the emergence of these organizations. Some of those reasons were linked to the emerging violence, and their roles included documenting violations and relief efforts in all their forms. Others, especially in neighboring countries, emerged to secure job opportunities for the youths who had been fleeing the country. Another development was that the monopoly of the two major governorates, Damascus and Aleppo, on these organizations was broken. They became spread out across neighboring countries and most Syrian governorates, with Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor, which had been under ISIS control, the exceptions. There had been very few CSOs in these two governorates until 2017 because of ISIS persecution and suppression of civil society and those who work within it. These organizations also began forming networks and alliances to

facilitate advocacy and response coordination. Their coordination has gone further, with an association that encompasses all of these networks having been established.¹

Seeking to meet the humanitarian and development needs on the ground, which have been increasing since the Syrian uprising in 2011 and the war that followed, Syrian civil society emerged in an environment fraught with challenges, risks and changes. Syrian civil CSOs have expanded, developed organizational capacities, and gained the trust of the international community despite the military, political and humanitarian developments and the divergence between local and regional frameworks. These organizations have shed light on the challenges they face, their needs, and their priorities. They worked in an array of fields, including: emergency response and aid services, education, health, youth and women empowerment, human rights and peacebuilding. The organization IMPACT- Civil Society Research has conducted a series of studies to identify the bodies active within Syrian civil society. Over 800 bodies were identified in 2015, while the number of active civil society bodies decreased to just over 500 by 2019. Despite the surge in the number of Syrian civil society bodies since 2011, the scope of civic activity remains constrained by political repression, the protracted violent conflict, political and military developments, and changing local governance structures. Restrictive donor policies and interrupted funding are additional constraints, as are the scarcity of technical and logistical resources and economic sanctions. All of that has restricted civic engagement and led to the absence of active bodies.²

An in-depth survey conducted in 2016, which was followed by research issued by IMPACT, demonstrated that Syrian CSOs can be divided as follows: 395 in the opposition-controlled areas (44%), 206 outside Syria (23%), 170 in areas controlled by the Autonomous Administration (19%), and lastly, 126 in areas under the Syrian government's control (14%); 8 organizations' scope of operations was not determined. It is worth noting that the percentages and numbers are not precise because, on the one hand, it is difficult to reach all organizations and, on the other, some organizations are fragile and often disband and are reestablished. The study also showed that more than 91% of the organizations had been established after 2011, keeping in mind that

¹ Zaidoun Al-Zoubi, "Syrian Civil Society Organizations: Reality and Challenges" (Arabic), Citizens for Syria, 2017, p. 6.

² Khuloud Mansour, "Economic Sanctions and Financial Restriction: Additional Challenges to Limited Civic Space in Syria" (Arabic), Dawlaty and the Cairo Center for Human Rights, July 2020, p. 5.

there had been over 1,074 associations in Syria before 2011 according to the reports of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor. Most of them took the form of charitable associations like orphanages and institutions concerned with helping the poor. However, only 59 of the organizations established before 2011 were included in the survey. This figure indicates that many of those organizations shut down after the Syrian movement started. Moreover, the fact that many organizations are based in areas under Syrian government control makes them difficult to access. The real figure thus seems far higher.³

According to the number working in each sector, we can divide Syrian CSOs into three main categories: ⁽⁴⁾

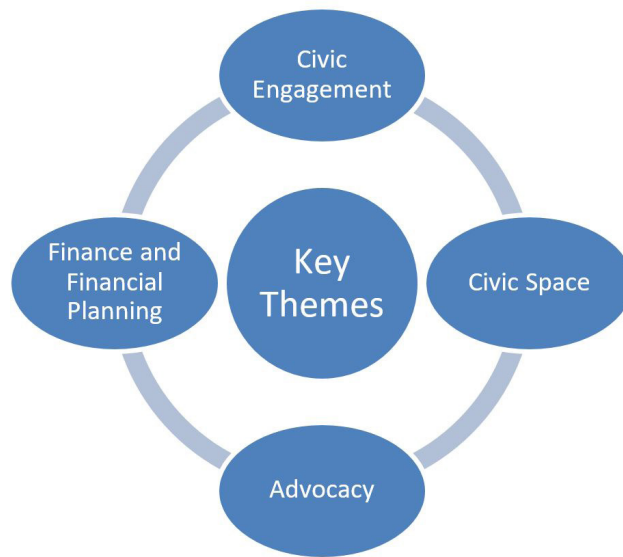
1. The social services sector, which is the most prevalent sector Syrian CSOs work within. There are approximately 349 organizations working in the following fields: child care, women's issues and service provision to women, care for families, provision of personal and social services, care for those with special needs, adolescent issues and service provision, elderly care, and providing refugees with relief, shelter, emergency aid, rapid intervention, disaster control, and protection.
2. Sectors of medium prevalence, including 157 organizations in education and research, 151 organizations in development and housing, 146 organizations promoting culture and creativity, and 125 organizations work on health issues.
3. 175 organizations work on legal matters, advocacy and making policy recommendations, 18 organizations work on environmental issues, 7 organizations work on religious issues, six are labor organizations and unions, one is composed of donors and intermediaries for volunteer support work, and then come the other sectors.

It could be said that the Syrian environment, which is constantly changing on the political, military and economic levels, has highlighted the poor performance and limited the effectiveness of the role played by CSOs throughout Syria. Operationally, these organizations differed from one time period to another, and one region and another. Syrian CSOs had to search for the best practices for responding to communal

³ Zaidoun A-Zoubi, Syrian Civil Society, op. cit., p. 16.

⁴ Ibid., p. 20.

needs and the challenges they faced during their activism work. The state of affairs in Syria also had a hand in shaping these organizations' dynamics and how they did their civil activism. During its research process, Dawlaty noticed this issue and strove to look into it further. Dawlaty organized several focus group discussions with a number of representatives of Syrian CSOs active on the ground in order to study and analyze this issue qualitatively. After holding the focus group discussions, studying the documents, and reflecting on them, it became apparent that there are four main themes playing the principal role in shaping the framework in which Syrian civil society groups operate. They are: civic engagement, mobilization and advocacy, funding and financial planning, and the space for civil society.



On the level of financial planning, Syrian civil society faces many complex and exacerbating obstacles. These hindrances are tied to the reality of funding and its challenges, as it is essential for the sustainability of the organizations' work and their ability to reach target groups and carry out their activities and programs as required. Syrian CSOs find themselves facing a wide array of challenges and options in a variety of contexts. That demands that they look into developing practical and effective solutions that can be adopted in response to current conditions. The importance of research on funding stems from the fact that it is an essential requisite for the sustainability of the organizations' operations, their ability to carry out their activities and programs in the required manner, and their ability to reach target

groups. Funding is also among the many major obstacles facing Syrian civil society that are exacerbating year after year.

Regarding the advocacy part, it could be said that Syrian civic activity did not include advocacy campaigns in the real sense of the word before 2011. Its presence, as a concept and a practice, is weak on the Syrian civic scene to this day, especially at the local and national levels. Additionally, advocacy campaigns are effectively not covered by audio-visual media unless the campaigns support the political positions of dominant forces on the ground. That has left advocacy campaigns deviating from their proper course and going against the spirit of advocacy. Instead of mobilizing and pressuring decision-makers to ensure public policies are altered in line with popular demands, advocacy moves in a different direction, and the matter addressed by the campaign becomes framed to win the favor of authorities and decision-makers so it can be carried out.

Regarding the work environment of Syrian CSOs, the extent of the risk levels within which these organizations operate is evident. We cannot overlook the significance of organizations' capacity for dealing with these risks in the most appropriate manner for overcoming them in their various forms, be they internal or external. That is crucial whether they are security, legal, social, technical, on the field or other kinds of risks. Over the past few years, organizations have developed various mechanisms and strategies for identifying, dealing with, and managing risks in order to mitigate them and ensure as safe and stable a workspace as possible.

Research Question

Instability and rapidly changing environments in Syria bear on the work of CSOs, impacting the extent, form, and safety of civic engagement. It also plays a role in framing these organizations' ability to formulate and sustain their financial policies, as well as restricting their ability to carry out civil society's primary tasks, mobilization and advocacy. That leads us to the research question on the extent to which CSOs have responded to and are affected by the developments in Syria, as well as the degree to which they have adopted the best practices for continuing to carry out their activities effectively and efficiently since the Syrian crisis began in 2011.

The study poses several questions from the main research question:

- 1- How do Syrian CSOs operate?
- 2- What challenges do Syrian CSOs face?
- 3- How are practices and mechanisms for engaging in civic activity chosen?

Significance of the Study

The importance of the study stems from the fact that it is a qualitative research study that seeks to analyze Syrian civil society work throughout Syria. It does so from the perspective of the main themes that frame the work of civic society: civic engagement, mobilization and advocacy, funding and financial planning, and space for work.

The study's analysis of Syrian civil society from the perspective of each of those four themes adds to its significance. The study analyzes the challenges that CSOs have faced, the best practices they have followed in dealing with the conditions they find themselves in and the challenges they have faced and to carry out their civic activities. It also puts forward recommendations made by the CSOs per their sector and stakeholders.

Objectives of the study

The study aims to shed light on Syrian civil society activity and present a descriptive study from the perspective of the four themes that most influence their civic work: civic engagement, mobilization and advocacy, funding and financial planning, and the space for civil society. They shape the contexts in which CSOs throughout Syria operate. We conducted this descriptive study with the aim of analyzing the context in which these organizations work, studying their successful experiences and making an attempt to broaden their application in suitable contexts.

Research Methodology

The study has adopted a descriptive approach for analyzing the state of Syrian civil society and identifying best practices. It does so through research into CSOs' experiences within the four main themes. The study illustrates the framework of Syrian civic activity as it is on the ground without introducing the variables or studying the factors that create change. The booklet studies the essence of the four themes, and it does not do so quantitatively. Rather, it utilizes qualitative research tools such as: focus groups, qualitative interviews, and studying documents and researchers' first-hand observations. The study is divided by theme into four parts, with each part addressing the local context and the obstacles and impediments facing civil society. It also includes research into and analysis of the best practices adopted by CSOs within the framework of each part. It thus helps us understand the context in which civil society organizations operate from the perspective of those four themes, which contribute to creating and designing the framework within which Syrian civil society carries out its activities:

Part One: Civic Engagement.

Part Two: Space for Civic Activity.

Part Three: Mobilization and Advocacy.

Part Four: Financial Planning and Sustainability.

The Syrian context was also studied and analyzed along each of the four themes. The obstacles facing Syrian CSOs were identified, and the best practices for each part were analyzed, a set of conclusions were drawn, and a set of recommendations was made.

Primary sources of data:

1. Focus groups discussions with organization representatives
2. Study of office documents
3. In-depth qualitative semi-closed question interviews with organization representatives

Secondary sources of data:

Studies and Research previous.

Research Sample

The research sample includes CSOs throughout Syria, whether they are organizations, initiatives, or licensed or unlicensed teams (but their names are known and the means of communication identified). The sample does not include:

- International organizations
- Governmental organizations
- Quasi-governmental organizations.
- Local councils
- Unions and popular organizations such as: the Baath Vanguard Organization, Syrian Student Union, or Revolutionary Youth Union.

The following interviews and discussions were also conducted:

- 12 Focus group discussions moderated by the Dawlaty team, with an average of 3 groups for each part of this handbook. Each focus group included representatives of around 10 organizations. Syria was also divided into three regions: Northeast Syria, North and Northwest Syria, and Central and Southern Syria.
- 5 qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives of 5 organizations.
- 10 qualitative questionnaires with semi-open questions were filled out by representatives of 10 organizations.

Findings

The study presents separate outcomes and findings for each of its four parts. These conclusions were drawn over the course of the study and analysis of each part. A set of general findings is listed below:

1- Structural weakness and vulnerability in the civil work institutions are mainly due to the absence of strong ties between the CSOs working on the ground and the local communities of the areas in which they operate.

2- The limited impact of civil activity can be explained through the absence of a real connection between the activities carried out by CSOs and the societies' actual needs. That leaves the choice of organizations' pursuits not reflective of populations' needs.

3- Many CSOs follow a policy of skipping stages, implementing their initiatives using the same mechanisms in areas with different economic, social, religious and cultural contexts. That leaves the concept itself in particular and civil activism in general rejected by the societies in which they operate.

4- Syrian CSOs see the dominant forces in every area as not being fully supportive of the roles they play, though views diverge according to who controls the area. These dominant forces consider CSOs to be rivals, disregarding the fact that their main role is providing the community with services.

5- Syrian civil society is aware of the priorities for donors, and those priorities are often tied to geostrategic interests. These interests are thus the most prominent and influential factor in determining donors' decisions. That is evident from the donors' constantly changing priorities and the changes in the support and grants they provide.

6. Donors often provide capacity-building training to partner organizations. These sessions are framed according to ready-made templates, and the donors present the same training to all partners and associations working on the ground without really looking into their needs, which may differ from one organization to another.

7- CSOs are under pressure because they cover needs that should be addressed by the authorities rather than civil society, and CSOs are under immense pressures tied to funding, a shortage of human resources, and security risks.

8- Experienced staff members are not involved in the design and implementation of Syrian CSO activities. Instead, most organizations carry out their activities according to donors' preferences in their areas of operation.

9- A lack of coordination, cooperation, communication and networking between CSOs is prevalent, whether it is organizations operating within the same geographical space or those operating working in different geographical areas. There are many reasons for this, including competition and a lack of trust between different organizations.

10- Most CSOs need to build the administrative, operational, and financial capacities of their staff. There are no opportunities to do so inside Syria, and it is difficult to access such opportunities outside Syria.

11- It could be said that the Syrian civil society, despite some drawbacks, has been able, due to the Syrian context, to play the roles associated with international organizations. The latter's role has been limited to providing grants and oversight, while the organizations on the ground implemented the projects.

12- The financial planning framework of CSOs throughout Syria is done on a short and medium-term basis. Despite the organizations' awareness of the importance of developing financial strategies and diversifying sources of funding, they develop strategies that are too simple and straightforward for the development of a long-term financial plan.

Recommendations

The study presented a set of recommendations for each part separately, and they are listed in the sections of each. Below is a list of general recommendations:

I. Recommendations Addressed to Official Bodies

1. Ratify a new legal text that governs how Syrian civil society operates. The new legislative environment should be suited to current conditions and needs; it should facilitate overcoming challenges, and the legislation should standardize the mechanisms for registering CSOs' work.

2. Prevent the executive and de-facto authorities from abusing their power against civil society.
3. Form a national body that regulates civil society's work. This body should supervise and oversee civil society's activities and coordinate the efforts of CSOs operating on Syrian soil.
4. Allow CSOs to exercise their real civic roles in awareness-raising, mobilization and advocacy, and popular oversight.
5. Accept CSOs and engage with them as bodies supporting official institutions in their task of meeting citizens' needs.
6. Allow civil society to link the different areas of Syria by taking real civic action at the national level.

II. Recommendations Addressed to International Donors

1. Alleviate or remove the politically motivated restrictions imposed by donors on Syrian civil society. That is, separate its civic role from politics and work. At the international level, work on lifting sanctions on civic activity.
 2. Base strategies on equitable grant distribution, not interest-based agendas.
 3. Donors should support institutional capacity building initiatives, institutional work, and the development of administrative structures for Syrian civil society entities.
 4. Support civic awareness programs and projects and the concept of civic work. Integrate local communities in civic work with the aim of raising the community's awareness about and acceptance of civic activity.
 5. Support intermediary civil bodies and organizations that help develop CSOs and emerging civic groups.
-

III. Recommendations for Syrian Civil Society Organizations

1. Syrian CSOs must open channels of communication with other organizations across Syria and bypass the regionalism imposed by the conditions of armed conflict in Syria.
2. Organizations need to increase their transparency and accountability, adopting a participatory approach with beneficiaries and involving them in the implementation of projects. This process must start at the needs assessment stage, and continue through service provision and project evaluation.
3. CSOs must develop financial sustainability plans by seeking genuinely independent and alternative sources of funding that can be used in the event that the support or funding provided by donors ceases.
4. CSOs must share experiences, knowledge, and lessons learned and build on them, in order to adapt to the local context in which they operate.
5. CSOs must unify their visions and positions across Syria, disregarding political agendas.
6. CSOs must engage genuinely and effectively, thereby dispelling negative stereotypes about civil society.

Part I

Civic Engagement

Civic Engagement

Introduction

The presence of civil society organizations in society is an important step towards involving the community and arriving at social integration, as well as promoting engagement in public affairs. CSOs are not only necessary in developed societies, where rights and freedoms are established and the authorities exercise their role in line within constitutional and legal frameworks and under the umbrella of popular control. Indeed, the establishment of a civil society in unstable environments suffering from state agencies' hegemony and fluctuating respect for rights and freedoms must be among the priorities of CSOs. Their presence in such environments facilitates and stimulates engagement in public affairs in the broad sense, since there are many restrictions on political participation. Civil society plays an important role in steering the relationship between the individual, the family, the state and society in periods of crisis and instability. The concept of civic engagement also encompasses activities linked to public affairs outside the framework of the government or the private sector and the family or clan.

Within this context, it can be said that Syrian civil society, throughout the Syrian crisis, has played many roles, starting with the provision of relief and humanitarian aid, to raising awareness, empowering individuals and communities, enhancing community cohesion, and successes at the level of the political practice.

This part analyzes the state of civic engagement in the Syrian context and the role that civic engagement plays within it. This part is essential for understanding civil society's work, as well as analyzing and studying successful practices throughout Syria with the aim of arriving at a set of conclusions and recommendations according to the following schema:

Section 1.1: Civic Engagement Models, Incentives, and Obstacles

Section 1.2: Best Practices for Civic Activity

Section 1.3: Best Practices for Overcoming Obstacles

Conclusion

Section 1.1

Civic Engagement Models, Incentives, and Obstacles

Syrian civil society has made a set of achievements through its work within the various sectors, especially after the outbreak of the Syrian crisis. A 2018 study conducted by the Center for Civil Society and Democracy shed light on the achievements of Syrian civil society on several levels, including: politics, conflict resolution, community awareness and empowerment, services, in addition to the achievements made on the level of Syrian civil society itself.

This study dealt with Syrian civil society's achievements on the political front and its ability to convey the people's viewpoints in a manner that contributes to the political process in Geneva held under the auspices of the United Nations. These efforts enabled civil society to play an advisory role in the negotiation process. As for its contributions to resolving the Syrian crisis, civil society has played roles in alleviating the humanitarian crisis ensuing from the armed conflict, containing conflicts at the local level, and exerting pressure on the dominant parties to compel them to change their positions on certain issues. It has also mobilized and advocated, documented violations perpetrated against Syrian civilians, raised awareness, created spaces for national dialogue, and raised awareness about transitional justice.

Syrian civil society's successes are not limited to these two levels; rather, they extend to services as well. Civil society worked to bridge the gaps that had emerged due to the absence of state institutions, conduct periodic needs assessments, develop initiatives for community development, and provide psychological support services. It also contributed to developing local government structures and the socio-organizational capacity of non-governmental organizations. Regarding its achievements at the level of civil society itself, it has played a role in organizing institutional work, developing

5 مركز المجتمع المدني والديمقراطية، المجتمع المدني السوري، استطلاع رأي، آب 2018، ص 4-5.

6 زيدون الزعيبي، منظمات المجتمع المدني السورية الواقع والتحديات، مرجع سابق، ص 15.

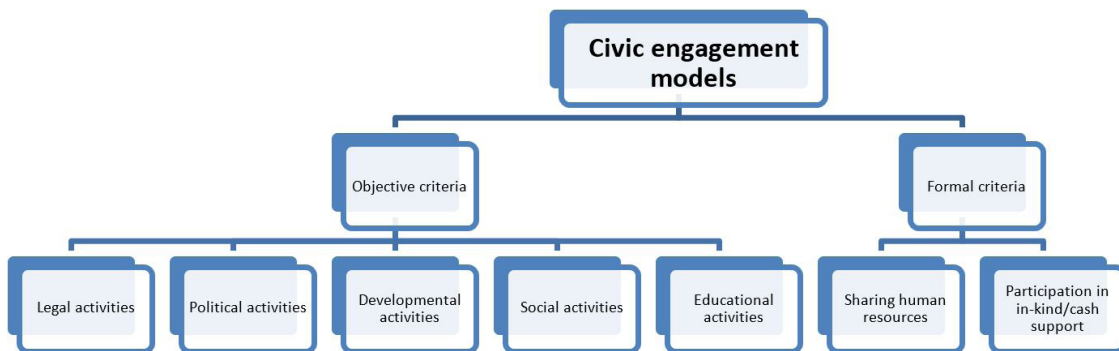
platforms and networks where local communities' views are represented, and supporting many community leaders. It also contributed to creating and shaping a civic environment suitable for communal dialogue, spreading a culture of peaceful coexistence, and paving the way to healing the communal rifts resulting from the conflict.() These achievements, or some of them, would not have been possible had it not been for the diversity of the CSOs throughout Syria operating on different levels and with different models: organizations, initiatives, centers, movements, and unions.

The motivations and incentives of Syrian CSOs vary, and most organizations work to achieve humanitarian, social, and development goals. Nearly 40% of CSOs work in humanitarian sectors, while about 25% work on developmental and social issues. 10% are motivated by patriotism, while religious motives rank the lowest at below 2%.

6

I. Civic Engagement Models in the Syrian Context

Civic engagement in Syria takes different forms, based on formal or objective criteria, according to the following:



1- The Formal Criterion

Classifications are made according to the form or model through which a particular civic activity is conducted, which can take two forms: contribution human resources, and financial or in-kind support.

1. Contributing human resources takes many forms. First, affiliation with associations and organizations, with this often taking the form of volunteer work to help with all the institution's activities. The second model is: Volunteering to take part in the activities of the institution with the aim of performing certain civic tasks and activities, with members and volunteers participating and contributing with their expertise in the field in which the institution works, such as providing legal support services and legal awareness or providing psychosocial support services.

2. The second type, contributing non-human resources, takes many forms. These contributions are made through the provision of either in-kind or financial support, including presenting research and studies that address civic concerns, such as legal, social, political and economic research, and needs assessments. Also within this category is making monetary donations or in-kind contributions, such as spaces or tools. In many cases, CSO workers cover the cost of activities out of pocket.

2- The Objective Criterion

Here, categorizations are made according to the field of the activity being undertaken and service being provided, regardless of the form the service takes; the objective criterion for classifying civic engagement takes several forms:

1. Engaging in civil activities with a legal dimension: includes legal services and activities in the broad sense, in court or in other official departments, giving legal advice, presenting studies and research that address problematic legal phenomena and topics, and providing the necessary suggestions and recommendations. Syrian civil and legal activism does not end here. Rather, it extends to include activities aimed at raising legal awareness and exerting pressure through legal awareness campaigns in their various forms that aim to mobilize positions and opinions. All of these efforts come together to create a force for change within a legal framework.

2. Engaging in civic activities with a political dimension is the second form of civic engagement according to the objective criterion. It addresses civic activities that have a political perspective, like holding political dialogues to approach and analyze political opinions and viewpoints. Another is holding political empowerment initiatives for women and youths, which are the most prevalent within this model and aim to raise the political awareness of women and youths.

3. Engaging in civic activities with a developmental dimension, including development work in the broad sense. This development work ranges from initiatives to integrate women and youths into the labor market or holding vocational training workshops in order to help target groups acquire particular vocational skills to support small projects.

4. Engaging in educational civic activities. These include civic work tied to the education sector, as well as providing educational services to children who have dropped out of school, services supporting children's education alongside formal education, or working to raise parents' awareness.

5. Engaging in civic community activities, including civic work that affects and is affected by society such as: taking part in community discussions, including those aimed at building communal cohesion and mobilizing for advocacy campaigns addressing specific social issues like violence against women or children.

Participants in the research sample unanimously agreed to adopt the use of workshops and discussion groups in carrying out their civic activities. The analysis also showed that most civic activities target primarily two groups, women and youths, which could become problematic in the future, as it could leave one group empowered and granted the appropriate awareness and education, while another had not been of interest to civil activists. Here, problems may arise between the empowered and un-empowered segments.

Despite the diversity of forms of civic engagement, most CSOs agree that civic engagement is not up to par because it has no real impact on public policy and is limited to initiatives, associations, and institutions. That is due to considerations particular to the Syrian context that restrict civic activity, as well as the many different obstacles to civic engagement. Some participants also found that the concept of civic participation is misunderstood, which creates apprehension about engaging with it for fear of the violent repercussions that activists could be exposed to because of the situation in Syria. Another hindrance to improved awareness about civic engagement and its significance is the media's lack of professionalism and independence, with media channels used to further certain agendas.

3- Types of Civic Engagement According to the Study Criteria

The types of civic engagement in Syria can be classified, according to the participants, based on the following criteria: representation, the issues proposed most, geographical scope, the extent of on-the-ground presence as follows:

Type / Area	Under Government Control	Under Autonomous Administration's control	Northeast Aleppo (Local Councils)	Northwest Syria (Salvation Government)
Engagement	In theory, representative engagement is broad and widespread, and there are many representative CSOs. However, in practice, representativeness is not realized because representation is controlled by the government.	Representative engagement is strong, but functional organizations' presence is stronger.	Representative engagement is evident there, as there are many associations, unions, federations. There is a margin of freedom in these areas that allows people to assemble and be represented.	Representative civic engagement is less prevalent when compared to functional civic entities.
Representative Most proposed issues	There is little development work, especially by licensed organizations, as they do not obtain permission to engage in developmental, political, governance, or social activities. They also provide providers such as relief or medical work. The narrowness of the developmental role played by unlicensed organizations, due to restrictions on them, is noticeable. It could be said that the scope for working on the rights of women and children is wide, while political empowerment and work on social issues are not sufficient.	There is a lot of space for working in the area controlled by the Autonomous Administration, though it is governed by an array of procedures and licenses from the Office of Humanitarian Affairs, as there is a degree of freedom for civil engagement. There is a lot of room for working on human rights and women's rights issues but less freedom to engage in political work. So, the organizations provide services and play developmental roles.	There is no framework for civic political activism because of the situation in the region and the absence of clear administration. Nonetheless, governance and human rights issues are raised, and relief efforts are more prevalent than development work.	There is no developmental dimension due to the religious tendencies of parties in control. Political issues, women's rights, and human rights are only put forward within a narrow framework.

Type / Area	Under Government Control	Under Autonomous Administration's control	Northeast Aleppo (Local Councils)	Northwest Syria (Salvation Government)
Geographical scope	There is plenty of space to work in at the local level, as well as strong engagement and intersection with the work of organizations in areas under the government's control and other areas, but within a narrow framework amid strong fears.	Civic engagement with the other regions is healthy, but it is not sufficient for building effective communication and engagement.	There are bridges of communication with other regions.	Civic engagement at the local level is strong, while there are no channels of communication with other regions due to the threats from and fears of the dominant powers.
Level of presence on	International and local organizations both have a strong presence.	International and local organizations both have a strong presence.	International and local organizations both have a strong presence.	International and local organizations both have a strong presence.

It is impossible to conceal the effects of incentives and obstacles of civil activity in Syria, as they differ depending on the different criteria.

II. Incentives for Civic Engagement in the Syrian Context

The opinions of participants differed in regards to engagement in civic activism in Syria within the space available. Some believe there is no interest in civic work because of economic conditions and that CSOs consequently have a limited ability to maintain volunteers. Moreover, volunteers are drawn to sectors in which they can make financial gains, as the priorities of citizens changed due to economic conditions, which rendered maintaining a staff a real challenge amid plummeting living conditions. On the other hand, the majority of participants were confident that there are incentives for engaging in civic activity. These incentives fall into several categories, some of which are objective and others that are personal.

1- Objective Incentives

Objective incentives are factors that encourage civic engagement and the pursuit of positive change in the social or legal spheres. These incentives push activists to take part, achieve their goals, and further the causes they believe in by making use of what little freedom of expression they enjoy, as the freedom to express political opinions is severely restricted throughout Syria. Thus, civic work has become a haven for former activists, as it has created a space for freedom of expression, even if it remains somewhat far from political freedom. In the end, however, these efforts and initiatives all lead to positive change, and those doing the work may target specific social groups and help them overcome marginalization, a major factor encouraging civic activism. This was seen in the campaigns targeting women and people with special needs, which were aimed at helping them overcome stereotypes and socially-imposed obstacles.

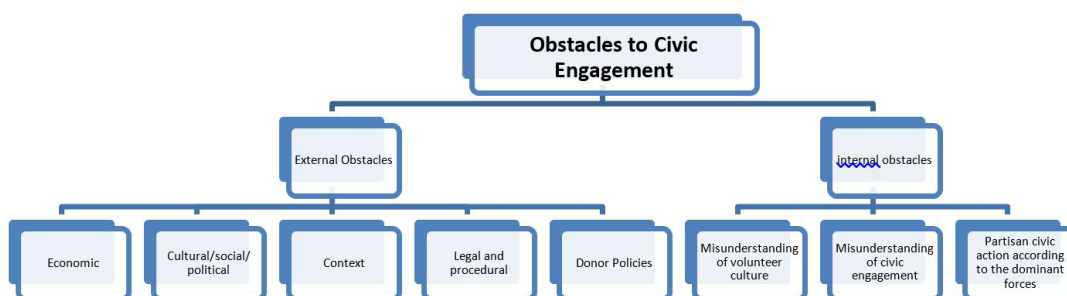
2- Personal Incentives

Personal incentives are factors that encourage civic engagement with the goal of attaining material or moral personal benefits:

1. Material incentives include benefits such as financial allowances and compensation, whether through engaging in volunteer work or by participating in workshops and training.
2. Moral incentives are essentially related to garnering experience and receiving training or certificates provided after the training. Also encompassed is the desire to expand one's perspective and build one's skills, as well as to build one's capacity in the political or social contexts. One participant believed that the desire to be seen and exercise power motivates some of those who engage in civic activity. The majority of participants agreed on the positive role played by advocacy campaigns in encouraging stakeholders to engage in civic activity.

III. Obstacles to Civic Engagement

Civic activism has different and diverse models, and it covers a broad range of relationships between institutions, society, the family, and individuals living in the complexities of Syria today. This leaves Syrian civil society facing many moving obstacles as it tries to undertake its activities, some related to the work environment and others associated with the structure of civil society itself. We can trace external obstacles related to the environment surrounding civic activity, as well as internal obstacles created by the content of civic action.



1- External Obstacles to the Work of Civil Society

These take many forms, including:

1. Economic factors are some of the most prominent challenges facing Syrians, and they have a profound impact on Syrian civic activity. This is especially the case considering the low standards of living brought on by the fragile economic situation, low levels of income, and the consequent abandonment, marginalization, and disregard for civic activities that do not generate income. It is impossible to deny that economic factors and deteriorating living conditions can incentivize activists to engage, as engagement can be a source of income through which to earn financial compensation. However, this is a constraint for civil activities that cannot offer compensation, allowances, or stipends. We must keep in mind that material incentives are not effective when the civil activity is voluntary or payment of allowances ceases – as is the case when funding is suspended or delayed. The best example of this is the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on project funding in Syria, which left many people quitting their jobs with CSOs and seeking other means of generating income.
2. Cultural, social, and political factors invariably play a role in shaping the context of civil society activity, and they are the factors that most influence civic activity. One of the most common forms of these obstacles is a lack of trust between communities and CSOs, often due to a lack of awareness about civic engagement. This has led society to distance itself from civic and political life, leaving poor areas to be only marginally targeted by CSO activities. This marginalization has created a rift in the culture of Syrian society and often prompts local populations to shun civic work. Additionally, there are various forms of discrimination along regional, ethnic, religious and political lines that contribute to this problem.
3. Factors related to the surrounding physical environment: These include obstacles that affect the physical environment in which civic work is being undertaken and have a negative impact on performance. An example would be the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent lockdowns and restrictions on physical gatherings. Another example is weak infrastructure, such as weak communication and public transportation networks. In areas where civic activities take place, poor infrastructure makes moving between regions difficult, which has particularly negatively impacted women's engagement.

4. Legal and procedural obstacles, the clearest and most impactful of them is the stringency of laws with criminal penalties imposed against those engaging in civic activity without a license. In many cases, this act is described as external financing and support for terrorism. Even when they seek approval and licensing, CSOs run up against routine procedures and the need for founders to be approved by security forces. They also have to allow a delegate to attend some of the board meetings. These requisites constitute an obstacle to engaging in civil work, as security approval or approval from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor are needed for CSOs to operate legally. In addition, decisions being taken on a variety of different levels leads to a multiplicity of contradictory decisions being taken because of the plurality of official bodies authorized to issue them, and many contradictory decisions have been issued within this framework. The laws regulating civic activity also differ depending on the region. In government-controlled areas, the 1958 Law on Associations and Private Societies regulates, though it has become outdated, does not meet today's civic needs, and leaves the civic sphere regulated through administrative decisions and restrictions imposed by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor. Meanwhile, in the areas under Autonomous Administration's control, there is a modern civil labor law that covers civic activities, but it is brimming with procedures that take a relatively long time. The rules governing the regions of northern Syria differ depending on the forces in control.

5. Those financing CSOs often impose agendas that are compatible only with their strategy, even if they are not aligned with society's needs, which poses a threat to civic work because it creates social or cultural rifts in some cases.

Security and economic obstacles were also among the most frequently discussed by those who were part of the research sample, and all of them agreed that these obstacles hinder their work. They also agreed that security obstacles and fears are the primary hindrances to civic engagement and the effective use of incentives play to motivate civic work. For instance, security concerns have forced some CSOs to adopt fictitious titles for their organization and its programs and profile, in order to avoid security concerns.

2- Internal Obstacles to the Purpose of Civil Work

1. Misunderstanding the culture of volunteering. This is one of the hurdles that are internal and specific to each organization, primarily affecting the organization itself and its members or volunteers. In these cases, volunteering in civil work is sought for personal gains and ends, or in pursuit of the incentives discussed earlier such as compensation. These volunteers do not join due to a genuine interest in the issues or faith to bring about change –the fundamental purpose of civil participation. In light of this misconception of volunteering, personal gain has become the anchor of civil work, as if the goal of civic engagement is material or moral benefit, and thus engagement ends when personal benefits cease. Benefits take different forms: financial, certificates, work experience, and moral benefits.

2. Misunderstanding the concept of civic engagement, which means interpreting civic action in a manner contrary to reality. This is often clearest and most visible in countries suffering from a weak civil society culture, in which the concept has yet to crystallize:

a. For example, labeling those engaging in civil work with ready-made stereotypes, and those stereotypes becoming associated with civil work. An example here is accusing civil society activists of corruption merely because of their civic activism. Another is security forces, as is common in government-controlled areas, arresting activists because they consider engaging in civic activity to mean the adoption of particular political positions. Another is dominant forces arresting activists and accusing them of blasphemy and secularism, which is particularly common in northern Syria where religious factions view it as a crime that warrants punishment.

b. The absence of agreed-upon principles for civic action which, in fact, creates confusion within the work of civil society and diminishes its effectiveness.

3. Civic action becomes partisan depending on the dominant forces, amid poor networking and coordination between CSOs due to the lack of legal protection – especially across conflict lines. Another issue is the lack of clear mechanisms for regulating partnerships between CSOs. This obstacle can be directly linked to the security authorities, regardless of their titles or areas of control, imposing their authority on CSOs and demanding security permits or licensing to engage in any civic activity, which is a result of the inadequacy and ambiguity of the old legislative environment.

4. For many organizations, limited institutional capacities are an internal obstacle to civic engagement within the framework of their work. That is due to the difficulty of meeting the required standards of effectiveness and efficiency. Institutional weakness could also be linked to the decreased capacities of CSO staff or volunteers. This weakness stems from internal factors including the unwillingness, or inability, to work on institutional development. It could also arise as a result of experienced staff members opting to work for international organizations once the opportunity arises. A structural factor is the inability of CSOs to train their staff due to financial constraints.

The various types of external and internal obstacles are related to the imposition of the types of civil activities that can be undertaken and how they are implemented. At the same time, they have an impact on determining the options of CSOs. The misguided conceptualization of volunteering, which sees it as a means for reaping material or moral benefits, is an obstacle that curtails civic engagement. However, some saw that it simultaneously creates incentives. Legal and procedural obstacles have also contributed to civic action being categorized as falling within certain frameworks for fear of legal or security liability. However, at the same time, they created an opportunity for the creation of a coordination and networking relationship between licensed and unlicensed CSOs. These obstacles also sometimes forced CSOs to reframe their work in order to obtain a license to undertake their activities, with some CSOs obtaining licenses as commercial companies with the aim of engaging in civic work in the name of these companies.

We can notice that the obstacles Syrian CSOs face in Lebanon differ from those faced by CSOs operating inside Syria, wherever they operate in the country and regardless of the dominant powers in that area. Engaging in civic activism outside of Syria removes the burden of security fears and frees CSOs from the legal and legislative restrictions imposed inside Syria. However, entities outside Syria are facing additional problems primarily tied to the lockdowns imposed to contain the spread of the COVID-19 epidemic. Recently, they have been facing problems obtaining funding because of sanctions imposed on Lebanon and the country's politico-economic crisis.

The political and economic context affects civic activity in several ways. The more stable a region is politically and economically, the more civic engagement is facilitated there. In the areas controlled by the Autonomous Administration and in northeastern Aleppo, life appears more stable, and therefore more civic activity is undertaken. Meanwhile, in the areas of northwest Syria controlled by religious authorities, economic and political life is less stable and civic activity is therefore less prevalent and could be classified as weak. In the areas controlled by the Syrian government, despite the political stability, economic conditions contribute to weakening civic engagement.

These conditions often lead to a decline in civic activity, either for political reasons such as fear of security persecution, security pressure exerted by the dominant forces, or a lack of faith and trust in civic work due to its inability to influence the political factions or at least create consensus, or because of economic needs and the need to make a living and acquire daily sustenance.

Section 1.2

Best Practices for the Work of Civic Activism

I. Identifying Best Practices for Implementing Civic Activities

Syrian civil society has so far accumulated substantial experience from field work conducted while implementing its activities and during all phases of civil activity on various issues. Therefore, it must be considered a priority to identify and incorporate best practices for civil work, given that there are techniques and approaches that have, through experimentation and research, proven their effectiveness in achieving desired outcomes. We will address these practices as follows:

For civil work, best practices fall primarily within the framework of implementing community campaigns such as awareness-raising, advocacy, and mobilization. Moreover, dialogue sessions have proven effective as a tool for implementing civic activities. As for best practices related to the implementation of activities, they can be summarized as follows:

1. That campaigns or dialogue sessions reflect social needs and adopt a participatory approach by involving beneficiaries in all stages of project implementation. Compelling beneficiaries to take part in the activities and building their capacities gives beneficiaries a sense of ownership over the project and encourages them to adopt it given its relevance to the matters that concern them.
2. Including physical, reading, and audio activities such as distributing brochures and printed posters, as well as using videos while presenting information to ensure that it reaches the largest possible audience.
3. In implementing cultural activities, it is very useful to use competitions and prizes to integrate beneficiaries into the project and to integrate new activities into the community.

4. Conducting advocacy campaigns and community dialogue sessions brings the perspectives of beneficiaries closer together. This approach also helps them overcome stereotypes that existed before participating in the project. This positively reflects on societal cohesion, helps overcome barriers created by stereotypes, and integrates a culture of mutual tolerance.

5. It is very useful to use the outcomes of the meetings and dialogue sessions in writing papers and conducting research on advocacy. As such, advocacy efforts can be the product of the community itself and receive support from various segments of society prior to its adoption. This also makes the community feel involved in the process of developing civic activities.

6. Facilitating networking between different volunteer teams that share experiences in expanding the geographical scope. Plan-sharing and exercises can also help provide training to each team according to its experience, contributing to greater effectiveness and efficiency in the implementation of civic activities.

7. Networking with other civil society entities working in the same geographical area or on the same theme, which contributes to alleviating burdens, achieving greater access, and securing legal cover for civil work.

It is worth noting that there are two types of networking:

1. Temporary networking around a specific project or activity, or on the basis of region: In this case, networking and coordination take place between organizations working in the same area, or between several CSOs and entities working on the implementation of a specific project. This helps facilitate implementation and improves access to beneficiaries and areas. However, a spirit of competition often emerges, and the same service can be provided several times within the same area.

2. Permanent networking within a coalition: In this case, strategic plans are presented and joint activities are coordinated such that interventions achieve a common goal. Members of a coalition work in tandem and in several directions, leading to concerted efforts that reach objectives with high degrees of efficiency and effectiveness.

II. Studying Unsuccessful Experiences in Civic Activities

It is not necessarily the case that every civil activity will achieve its desired goals or go as planned. Civil work is not without failures or shortcomings, and the least successful civic activities were:

1. Awareness sessions that took a purely theoretical approach, as they were not relevant to providing legal aid, but were rather limited to providing legal information on various issues such as inheritance, marriage, divorce, etc. Despite the importance of these issues, the sessions did not achieve their desired outcomes due to failure to provide auxiliary legal services.
2. Political dialogue sessions were not effective. This is due to fears of security risks, insufficient involvement in civil work by politicians and political activists, or their lack of belief in its role. Moreover, there is a lack of representation across the political strata, which negatively affected the incentives to participate in dialogue sessions.
3. Ineffective community campaigns whose goals were not achieved, as the issues and topics of the campaigns were not adopted by the community or target group.
4. Pre-planned, donor-imposed campaigns and activities, or those implemented completely without consideration for meeting community needs. These had a negative impact on the community's acceptance of such activities and practices and, at the same time, weakened acceptance of the CSO itself.
5. Major disparity between the competencies and experiences of various activists in regards to civil work in joint sessions. This had an adverse impact on civic cooperation due to the predominance of the most experienced and powerful CSOs and activists, leaving the remaining attendees reluctant to participate. This occurred during one of the joint dialogue sessions between Syrian civil society activists working within the same context. We found much variation in the experiences of Syrian civil society activists across geographical regions due to the concentration of donor funding in certain regions and sectors.

Section 1.3

Best Practices for Managing and Overcoming Obstacles

In the Syrian context, it is almost impossible for a civic activity to be free of obstacles and challenges to its implementation. Often, the implementing CSOs spare no effort in overcoming obstacles that hinder them from reaching desired outcomes. These entities adopt methods to confront challenges and obstacles depending on their type and the mechanisms for addressing them. We will discuss the best practices that CSOs have adopted in overcoming obstacles, namely:

1. Overcoming financial difficulties and lack of funding through the use of available human resources such as volunteers. Moreover, knowledge sharing among the participants assisted in effective service provision under conditions of poor financial resources or difficulty in securing funding.
2. Overcoming difficulties caused by the insularity of communities and their non-acceptance of new ideas and concepts contained in advocacy campaigns and dialogue sessions. This can be achieved by forming good relations with local community leaders and notables to build links with the local community. As well as engaging the local community at all stages of the project from planning to monitoring and evaluation, this could make service provision projects and ideas new to the culture of the region more accepted.
3. Using modern technologies like the internet to conduct trainings or discussion sessions online, which helps bypass obstacles related to the difficulty of women's movement in some areas, mitigates security risks, and is an optimal solution for the continuation of projects during the COVID-19 pandemic.
4. Overcoming security difficulties and risks by networking with a licensed partner, or by resorting to licensing training centers, implementing projects under their cover, or framing projects within fictitious descriptions due to security concerns. A network of relations also facilitates access to some areas in order to provide services to women who face difficulty leaving their areas due to security conditions. Also, in many cases, modern technologies have been a useful tool for reaching beneficiaries.

5. Forming an effective referral network between stakeholders and families of persons with disabilities. This contributes to families' acceptance to sending their children or relatives to the association providing services to people with special needs.
6. Civil entities must follow up on exercises and activities only with engaged trainees, excluding non-active participants or those involved for material or moral self-interests.

Conclusion of Part I

I. Results

1. Some organizations adopt research methods using meetings, focus group sessions, in-depth interviews, and questionnaires. However it can be noted that, in reality, organizations seldom rely on research work. Often, that is due to inadequate research capacities, and sometimes it is due to the financial infeasibility of employing researchers from outside the organization.
2. An obstacle common across Syrian geography is the dominance of the forces in control over various aspects of life. They impose conditions such as licensing for civil work, monitor the work of organizations, and their security services harass organizations and activists. They also make accessing funds and transferring them to Syria more difficult.
3. The laws regulating civic work in Syria have become outdated and do not meet modern requirements. This resulted in the structural weakness of Syrian civil society and its inability to meet needs and fulfill its duties placed upon it.
4. There can be no real or effective civic activism without providing space that is broad and open to the work of CSOs, and within clear and transparent legal rules governing its work.
5. Poor coordination and communication between CSOs in Syria is a structural obstacle to the effective implementation of services that meet real needs.

6. The lack of an inclusive platform for Syrian civil society, which leads to arbitrariness and dispersion in the provision of services across Syrian geography.
7. Lack of sustainable sources of funding leads to control by donors over civic activism, often diverting it from its primary purpose and coopting it into the agendas and visions of donors. Moreover, it can often create competition between CSOs working in the same space.
8. Ignoring the real purpose of civil society and its work being framed by the forces dominant on the ground leads to civil activity being limited to restrict care provision within relief work, derailing civil society from exercising its true role in development at all levels.
9. The multiplicity of forces of control across Syrian geography and the disparate legal, political, and economic contexts between them. This, in turn, has created significant disparity between the civic activities carried out in each territory, whether in terms of their type, duration, or the mechanisms by which they are implemented.
10. Syrian civil society has sometimes succeeded in creating spaces of consensus and dialogue between civil activists across Syria. However, these spaces and agreements have not materialized into civic action.

II. Recommendations

1- Recommendations for CSOs and entities regarding their relationship with society

A- The relationship of CSOs with the community in terms of economic and political empowerment:

1. Empowering and building the capacities of Syrian CSO representatives participating in international events, in order to convey the proper image to decision-makers and activists involved in civil work.
2. Economic empowerment, helping to create job opportunities and supporting small projects, given the derailment of civil work due to the current economic situation.

B- The relationship of CSOs with the community in terms of community partnership:

1. Inclusion and involvement of all segments and groups in civil work in all its stages, raising the level of cultural awareness, and involving women, youths, and marginalized groups.
2. Supporting emerging initiatives and organizations, and enabling them to carry out their projects based on community needs.
3. Involving stakeholders from the community in setting up policies for civil work and forming platforms for popular oversight over it.
4. Spreading awareness on the importance of civil work and its necessity for building social cohesion, with the aim of creating a sense of responsibility to participate in civil activities and highlighting the necessity of women's participation.
5. Carrying out activities to rebuild social/cultural identities with the aim of achieving social integration.

2 - Recommendations addressed to CSOs regarding their relations with other CSOs

1. Enhancing networking and coordination between CSOs, whether within the same geographical scope or across different regions of Syria, by building real local and national platforms for sharing data and information.
2. Establishing common databases that civil society can access, where CSOs can share knowledge and experiences, and benefit from experiences. This is necessary due to the monopolization of knowledge by some organizations and bodies. This would also facilitate the organization of workshops to build strategies to enhance civic participation.

3- Recommendations for CSOs at the structural level

1. Developing the tools of CSOs in the political arena.

2. Breaking the traditions of CSO work and improving flexibility and communication with the community.
3. Empowerment of CSOs institutionally, financially, and in terms of networking.
4. CSOs must understand their identity and build alliances on clear foundations, such that the civil sphere mirrors the reality of Syrian society away from political alignments and affiliations.

4- Recommendations addressing the context surrounding CSO work

1. Strengthening the role of independent and professional media to facilitate communities' access to civic initiatives and CSO activities.
2. Amending the laws regulating civil and community work.
3. Working to find a political solution to the Syrian crisis.

5- Recommendations addressed to the donor community

1. Donors and international organizations must facilitate the mechanisms of work of CSOs and their access to funding, especially those that find it difficult to obtain a license in their places of operation.
2. Diverting funding towards support of civic activities that focus on awareness-raising and development rather than humanitarian relief.
3. Donors must be reluctant to provide funding to projects that are preprepared according to a specific framework and model.
4. Donors must support service provision projects that emerge from studies of the needs of the target area.
5. Donors must conduct an assessment of the needs and capabilities of each of their partners, separately, in order to provide training services as needed.

Part II

The Space for Civil Society Activity

The Space for Civil Society Activity

Introduction

Some countries - especially police states - impose many restrictions on civil society, from registration to funding, operations, and extending to evaluation. This is especially the case if CSOs adopt the values of democracy, justice, and freedom of expression. Some of these restrictions are legal and introduced via legislative bodies, which in Syria adopt the positions, attitudes, and interests of the dominant authorities, while other administrative restrictions are put in place by the executive, including security apparatuses. In addition, these laws or administrative rules are ambiguous, and the authorities can interpret them as they please. The authorities have jurisdiction over the registration of civic entities and follow up on their work. These legal and administrative restrictions take the form of threats and fears faced by the activists of both licensed and unlicensed CSOs. And since the frameworks of constitutional and legal texts in Syria were developed in line with the desire of the executive authorities, many gaps in civic work have emerged because its scope constricts or expands depending on the whims of the ruling authorities in all their forms across Syria. This state of affairs, in turn, has led to variances in the space Syrian CSOs have to operate in depending on the risks that they may face, which is determined by their activities, the place where this activity is undertaken, and the entity donating the funds or supporting the activity.

The existence of safe spaces for work is a concern for CSOs that determines whether they can carry out their activities according to plans that had been developed previously and use the means that allow them to achieve their goals. However, the work space of CSOs may be narrowed or expanded depending on the political conditions in each country, especially since civic work constitutes a sphere for collective action aimed at achieving the goals and furthering the interests of a group of people united by common goals. That leaves political regimes fearful of them, as civil work, per international conventions, assumes the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and to form associations, which repressive political regimes feel could constitute a threat because they often entail demands for freedom of expression, political democracy, and popular oversight over the performance of the executive authority. Syrian civil society - in light of the political conditions that have shaped the country for over half

a century - has not been immune to pressures and constrictions on safe work spaces, when they are available at all.

CSOs usually want to deal with and manage risks in order to reduce their negative impact on the results of their work. They also want to avoid missing any potential opportunities to develop or improve their position and work. Thus, the risk management process is considered essential for protecting CSOs and their sustainability, as well as protecting the beneficiaries of their services and their workers and ensuring the effectiveness of its programs and the projects it undertakes. This process entails identifying risks preemptively, analyzing and studying them, and assessing the risk of these threats materializing. It also involves setting a plan to deal with them if they do emerge and minimizing their negative implications on the work of the CSO. In this context, risk management is not considered an end, but rather a means for making the work of the CSO sustainable.

Observing the work environment of Syrian CSOs, it is not difficult to notice the scale of the risks they face. At the same time, the significance of being able to address them appropriately cannot be ignored. These internal and external risks vary between security, legal, field, social, technical risks and others. Over the years, CSOs have developed different mechanisms and strategies for identifying risks, dealing with, and managing them with the aim of mitigating them and ensuring stability and as safe a space as possible.

This part addresses the results of the dialogue sessions, questionnaires and in-depth interviews that were held with a group of Syrian civil society representatives on the risk management mechanisms that have been developed over the past few years, how they work to achieve a safer and more stable work environment despite the obstacles and changes, and what they find to be the best practices that can be broadly applied and shared with those facing circumstances, as follows:

Section 2.1: Safe Spaces for the Work of Syrian Civil Society and the Risks it Faces

Section 2.2: Best Practices for Identifying Risks and Understanding their Contexts.

Section 2.3: Best Practices for Managing and Overcoming Risks

Conclusion

Section 2.1

Safe Spaces for Syrian Civil Society Work and the Risks it Faces

I. Contextual Analysis of the Safety of Syrian Civic Spaces

The field study of a research sample of Syrian CSOs across Syrian geography in areas under the control of various parties showed that the safety of the civil society space varied on several levels. The participants agreed that a safe workspace is one that ensures the personal safety of those engaging in civil activity, as well as positive institutional conditions that have a clear framework, granting CSO workers peace of mind. That is realized when there are facilitating external factors and surrounding circumstances like a suitable legal environment that creates room for engaging in civic activity and ensures the CSOs are legally protected from the executive's infringements on its work space. Another factor is the economic security of CSOs, whether that is achieved through grants, self-financing, or income-generating projects. They also stress that social safety is no less important than the above because it leads to the creation of a work environment suitable for the implementation of CSO activities and achieving their goals. Here, the question of what social safety means in the analysis of civil society workspaces arises. The answer is that social safety in this context is one of the pillars of community work in the comprehensive sense, with its economic, social, political, cultural and environmental dimensions because it aims to support stability and social cohesion and to reach a balance between the various components and communities of society.⁷ One of the participants indicated that threats gradually escalate and spaces are incrementally tightened the more the work approaches human rights, development, or peacebuilding. Thus, humanitarian work is the least dangerous in the Syrian context, and the danger peaks with human rights work related to law, politics and fields linked to them.

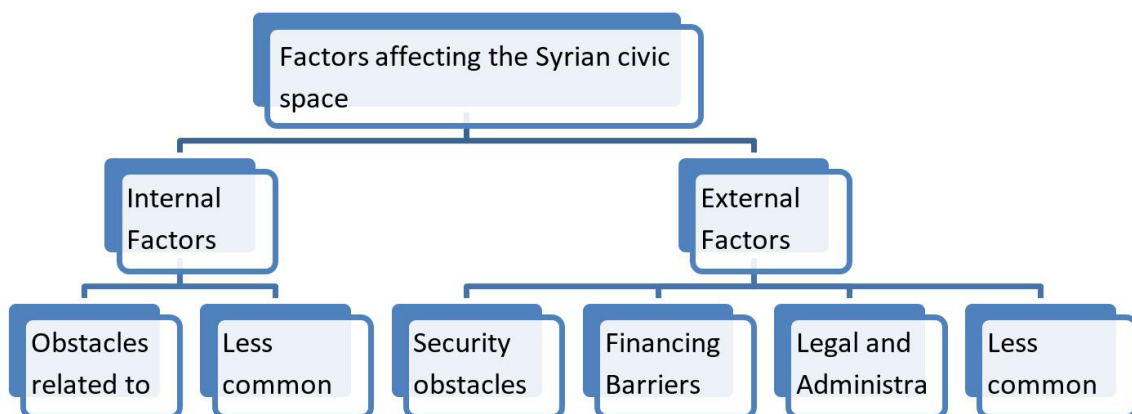
One of the participants said that the issue is arbitrary and falls to personal judgments, as there are institutions that raise women's and human rights issues in the northwestern

⁷ "Correlations of Social Safety Nets to Social Welfare Policies: Case Studies" (Arabic), Arab Planning Institute, Kuwait, no publication year, p. 6.

region of Syria despite the potential dangers. Others in northeastern Aleppo have called for elections and organized elections for one of the local councils despite the risks and challenges. In the areas under the control of the Syrian government and the Autonomous Administration, there are activities centered around political participation despite the sensitivity of the issue. A set of general rules are followed, the most important of which are confidentiality and anonymity, taking precautions in mobility and other general procedures. However, there are no clear and fixed standards for each region, as there is always a margin for civic participation within red lines, and decisions are made according to personal and subjective assessments, which vary from one CSO to another and from one activist to another.

II. Factors Affecting the Space of Syrian CSO Work

Many factors determine the scope within which Syrian civil society can operate. The degree to which these factors have an impact and the extent of the danger they pose vary. Some of them are more widespread and more frequent, such as risks related to legal, security and financial factors. On the other hand, institutional factors or social acceptance have less of an impact on civil work. We will discuss the factors shaping workspaces according to the nature of the factor and its source, whether it is external or internal:



1- External Factors

Syrian CSOs agree that they face a wide array of external obstacles to their civic activism, and they can be categorized as follows:

1. Security Obstacles and Governing Powers of all Ideologies Interfering in Civic Activities , which leaves the activists involved in constant fear of security liability if the organization is not registered. For example, the rate of arrests of civil society activists in areas under the Syrian government's control decreased after 2018, and several activists attributed this to international directives that the government grant a little space for CSOs operating in government-controlled areas to work within. However, this change does not apply to the areas of northern Syria because of the nature of the dominant forces. They are military groups or blocs that have no reference point in most cases, and they tighten or expand the workspaces according to their immediate interests. While CSOs operating in northern Syria can work on documenting violations and war crimes that may have been committed by the government, these organizations are not allowed to document the violations of the armed opposition groups. They are allowed to implement food relief campaigns but not to hold training or workshops on secularism. The same is true for CSOs operating in northeastern Syria. There is more space to work on gender equality, women's rights, citizenship and secularism, but it is tightened or closed off for issues the Autonomous Administration considers sensitive, such as human rights violations or decentralisation. Within this context, there is no specific criterion for security obstacles because the issue is complex and depends on the details of the civic activity, such as: the activist himself, the subject of the activity, the agency implementing the activity, the place, the date, time, the political context, and others. For example, women suffer more in the areas under the control of the so-called Salvation Government, and yet there are many women activists working there. On the other hand, Arab activists suffer more in the areas of the Autonomous Administration, and many continue to be active nonetheless. Nationalist activists are opposed to Turkish administrative and identitarian expansion but many of them continue to be active, and that applies to all regions.
2. Funding obstacles and difficulties have become especially prominent after the siege on Syria and the sanctions imposed on those dealing with Syrians. The fears

organizations and banks have of these sanctions have undermined the economic security of SCOs, which fear funding being suspended or stopped. Another funding obstacle is that it is monopolized by certain organizations with broad relations. Here, it can be noted that funding concerns are tied to organizations being dependent on grants and external support without really investing in income-generating opportunities that could help cover their expenses.

3. Legal and administrative obstacles linked to licensing and registration, and their conditions, especially obtaining security approval for engaging in civic work in light of vague old laws that have not kept pace with changes. The fact that decisions are made on a continuous basis grants the executive authority power that undermines the stability of the work of CSOs. However, unlike areas under the control of the Syrian government or the armed opposition, the legal procedures needed for registration were not an obstacle restricting the workspace of CSOs in northeastern Syria. Meanwhile, military operations did not pose risks to the work space of CSOs in areas controlled by the Syrian government, but they were an impediment to civic work in areas controlled by the armed opposition and areas under the Autonomous Administration's control. There is a stringent law that regulates civic activity in the north-eastern region; it lays out workspaces, accountability mechanisms, duties and rights, and how to register and obtain a license in the areas under the control of the Autonomous Administration. In contrast, there is no law regulating civic work in the areas of control of the Syrian government. There is Law on Associations and Private Societies, Law 93, which was issued in 1958 and has become outdated and is no longer suitable for managing or organizing civic workspaces, as it regulates charitable associations, requires many approvals from the executive authority, and requires security approval for every operation or activity that the associated intends to undertake. Those taking part in the sample agreed that the military authorities used to and still have the final say regarding civic workspace, but the administrative authorities are ostensibly in charge. In most areas, the oversight of military institutions, factions, and others has declined, even when there is a security problem, as the civil authorities usually deal with the matter, or officially transfer it to security directorates and institutions based on the directives of the administrative authorities.

4. The least prevalent and influential external factors were social and technical factors:
 - a. Social factors: tied to the social context, such as the community's intolerance of some of the ideas promoted by civil society activities because of the culture and the social make-up of the environment in which the intervention is made.
 - b. Technical and online obstacles, as well as cases of website hacking to which CSOs are exposed.

2- Internal Factors

Syrian CSOs agree that there is a broad a set of internal obstacles, namely:

1. Obstacles linked to staff: is one of the widespread internal obstacles, as most of the participants in the field study agreed. It takes many forms and affects CSOs' work on all levels. These obstacles range from psychological obstacles such as a weak sense of belonging and values to internal obstacles linked to limited capacities and skilled staff members leaving to work for international organizations. Another problem is the lack of funding for building the capacities of the staff working in CSOs. This undermines their human resources both quantitatively and qualitatively, and it makes institutions tend to rely on volunteers with less experience and time.
2. The least prevalent and influential internal factors were structural institutional obstacles. Some Syrian CSOs suffer from weak internal institutional structures, such as lack of planning, administration, and risk management. These internal factors are not widespread and do not have a strong impact on the workspace of CSOs according to the participants. However, we can say here that these obstacles are the most dangerous because they affect the essence of COSs as a whole. Moreover, some of them are widespread, such as the issues with governance and financial planning. Nonetheless, those taking part did not mention them in the discussion because they saw them as unimportant and failed to appreciate their seriousness.

Section 2.2

Best Practices for Identifying Risks and Understanding Their Contexts

CSOs, whether they operate locally, nationally, regionally or globally, could face obstacles and threats aimed at preventing them from carrying out their legitimate activities, reducing their influence or even shutting them down because of the positions they express, such as criticizing the government, or opposing its positions, procedures or policies.⁸ Thus, CSOs seek to follow a variety of strategies for identifying the risks they face or could face and set mechanisms to deal with them.

I. Contextual Analysis of Syrian civil society in terms of identifying risk

Most Syrian CSOs agree that they have not drafted policies and do not have tools for dealing with risks, following up and evaluating results. When these policies and tools are found, they are simple and not up to par.

On the other hand, there are some organizations that have prepared strategies and constantly conduct SWOT analysis (analysis of internal strengths and weaknesses and external opportunities and threats). Most forms of risk identification could be described as temporary, immediate and simple. However, they are fruitful and have been useful for facing many of these challenges. It is also believed that the adoption of temporary and immediate methods was to a certain extent effective within the Syrian context because of the constant and many changes, on all levels, to the Syrian environment. That means that practical experience and rapid responses could play a significant role in identifying risks and developing strategies or tools to deal with them effectively, even if they are subpar. What justifies this in the context of CSO work are the security, legal and economic pressures that Syrian organizations in general and unlicensed ones (the majority of Syrian CSOs) in particular suffer from.

⁸ UN OHCHR, Civil Society Space and the United Nations Human Rights System: A Practical Guide for Civil Society, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, p. 14.

II. Best practices for identifying risks

We can identify the immediate and temporary mechanisms most utilized by Syrian CSOs as follows:

1. Developing a risk analysis plan based on situational analysis and the analysis of the context in which the CSO operates, constantly developing analysis tools suited to the situation and setting precise measurement standards.
2. Some organizations are tasked with identifying risks and referring them to the monitoring and evaluation team who use data collection tools.
3. One of the CSOs believes that the situation in Syria is stagnant, there are few changes, and that risk management has become routine in the areas where it operates, which are relatively stable.
4. One CSO analyzes risks as they emerge or when they are expected, developing solutions accordingly. It could be said that this method is effective given that risks are constantly emerging in the Syrian context. The same organization believes that these methods were successful but that it would have been better to invest in building alliances, involving stakeholders, and building partnerships for identifying risks and developing alternative strategies.
5. Most CSOs agree that identifying risks based on data collection tools is effective, especially those working on community integration, and engaging stakeholders was the most successful for identifying and managing risks.
6. The CSOs agreed that they would continue to work with their strategies and tools because they have proven useful for identifying risks.

In fact, the researcher believes that following the SWOT analysis for risk management is effective and useful because it helps the CSO analyze its weaknesses and strengths, the threats it faces, and the opportunities it has. That enables it to overcome the weaknesses and threats it faces by investing its strengths and opportunities, in addition to using a risk matrix.

Section 2.3

Best Practices for Managing and Overcoming Risks

As well as identifying those risks, CSOs must map these risks out and develop strategies to deal with them so that they can be managed successfully and professionally. That is especially true for CSOs operating in rapidly changing environments, where the success or failure of practices can hinge on genuine and effective risk management. Although the significance of proper risk analysis cannot be denied, the most important thing is that the mechanisms for managing them are effective and relevant, whereby they achieve their purpose and the risk is eliminated, reduced to the greatest possible extent, or that damage is minimal if the risk does play out. We can identify the best practices for managing risks and overcoming them according to the following classification based on the criteria of the method used to overcome the risks. Are they external methods that benefit from the circumstances surrounding the institution, or are they investment internal factors and conditions within the CSO:

1- Good Practices for Overcoming Risks by Investing in External Conditions

1. Obtaining incubation contracts from licensed organizations contributed to expanding the workspace of CSOs, allowed them to broaden their sphere of operations, and mitigated potential security and legal risks.
2. Networking between organizations and relying on wide networks of relationships contributed to dispersing the risks between several parties and played a role allowing CSOs to expand their sphere of operations. However, it grants less space to work in than obtaining a license or working under the umbrella of a licensed organization.
3. Working to establish a network of relations with the authorities contributes to being granted legal protection, especially for initiatives.
4. Seeking to benefit from the expertise and experience of others undertaking civic work and making use of the skills of experienced members have contributed

to improving CSO risk management and the development of effective strategies for addressing threats and mitigating their impact.

2- Good Practices for Overcoming Risks by Investing in Internal Conditions

1. CSOs that have systematic risk analysis processes were able to cope with the divergences and changes in the context in which they work faster.
2. Transparency, engagement with the community and proximity to it, and seeking out key figures in the areas of intervention contributed to strengthening the position of the CSOs operating on the ground and helped them manoeuvre to avert the threats they face.
3. Resorting to self-financing and exiting the donor funding framework was an important factor for mitigating the risks facing the Organization.
4. Obtaining a license allows the organization to operate more freely. Although it entails security and legal follow-up, it reduces the potential for legal liability or arrest under the pretext of lacking a license.
5. Building a team with experience in strategic planning, analyzing stakeholder maps, and conducting field studies to analyze risk factors are crucial for protecting the CSO from the threats it faces.

3- Best Practices for Overcoming Risks through Networking and Coordination between CSOs

Before the reconciliations began, besieged areas were isolated from the civic and development activities surrounding them, and they had access only to the activities organized by associations within them. However, coordination and networking between CSOs in the besieged areas and the areas under the government's control had a positive impact. It allowed them to enter these areas, provide services through local partners, be accepted by communities, and reach local leaders. In this context,

the best practices sprung from the difficulties CSOs faced in accessing the areas that had reconciled to provide services and conduct activities in them. The CSOs operating in the areas that had reconciled and those operating outside them developed networking and coordination relationships, exchanged experiences and data, and worked on joint contextual analysis. That contributed to allowing CSOs to reach the areas that had reconciled and provide services that cover social needs.

Conclusion of Part II

I. Results

- 1- The impediments to safe spaces for civic work are numerous. They can be traced along the method of work, the people undertaking it, how funding is delivered, the laws in force, relations with the authorities, and the current context.
- 2- CSOs do not pay enough attention to the dangers and threats that emerge because of fragile and unstable management structures.
- 3- Civil workspaces vary across Syria and they are widened and tightened depending on several factors, for example, what may constitute a safe space for work at one stage may turn into an unsafe space at another stage. At that point, it is better for civil society to avoid these areas. The question of spaces' safety also hinges on the risk threshold set by the CSO.
- 4- The ever-changing Syrian civic work environment sometimes makes it difficult to develop studies on all the risks and potential risks that civil society may face, and CSOs must prioritize in such cases.
- 5- The infringements of the executive authority directly affect the safety of the space for civic work, though they do take different forms when done by different ministerial, security, or other bodies.

6- The weak and outdated legislation regulating civic work in Syria includes vague terms and has facilitated the infringements of the executive through circulars and administrative decisions.

7- For the most part, Syrian civil society has not been able to identify potential risks and develop alternative strategies and means for dealing with it.

8- Syrian civil work organizations' reliance on grants as a main source of funding exacerbates risks they are exposed to. It exacerbates security risks if they are not registered, and it leaves the existence and structure of the CSO threatened if funding is suspended and it has no means of generating revenues independently.

9- The policies of donors and their financial constraints have significantly exacerbated the financial risks and threats facing CSOs, which has hindered the work of Syrian CSOs in general and small local CSOs in particular.

10- Syrian CSOs see the concept of safe workspace as multifaceted. They agree that a safe workspace is one that ensures the personal safety of those engaging in civil activity, as well as positive institutional conditions that have a clear framework, granting CSO workers peace of mind. That is realized when there are facilitating external factors and surrounding circumstances like a suitable legal environment that creates room for engaging in civic activity and ensures the CSOs are legally protected from the executive's infringements on its work space. Economic security, whether it is achieved through grants, self-financing, or income-generating projects, is another facet. They also stressed that social safety is no less important than the above because it leads to the creation of a work environment suitable for the implementation of CSO activities and achieving their goals.

II. Recommendations

The field study showed that Syrian CSOs face many types of threats that restrict their workspace. At the same time, several factors expand the work space. CSOs follow a number of strategies for identifying risks and developing solutions for them. That practical experience has led CSOs across Syria to arrive at a set recommendations regarding civil workspace and the threats it faces:

1 Recommendations directed to the official departments

- 1- Establish a legal framework that promotes and protects civil society's workspace.
- 2- There should be media supportive of civil society.
- 3- Obtaining licenses should be facilitated. That would create more space to work within, especially for small and emerging teams.

2 Recommendations to international organizations and local CSOs

- 1- Focus on networking more with individuals and institutions, and do so on the horizontal and vertical levels.
- 2- Embrace emerging and small teams.
- 3- Develop a deep understanding of the problems facing civil society and those working in the same context and find common grounds on which to work, disregarding emotion and impulse.
- 4- Provide sufficient support for building the capacities of CSO staff.
- 5- Advocate for the legislation of clear and appropriate civil labor laws.
- 6- Many Syrian CSOs, both inside Syria and in neighboring countries, are unable to register and obtain licenses permitting them to engage in civil work. That limits the funding opportunities of these organizations, threatens their sustainability given current donor policies and financial constraints and the terms they impose on CSOs. And so, we recommend that the donor community strive to ease its stringent conditions impeding Syrian civil society's access to grants and resources, such as those related to licensing and bank accounts. Instead, a collaborative space should be established so that unregistered CSOs can be part of the conversation and gain access to funding.
- 7- Loosen strict restrictions on funding, facilitate CSOs' access to it, and set stringent regulations for monitoring efficiency.

3 Recommendations directed at the CSOs themselves from an institutional perspective

- 1- Focus on sustainability, self-financing and building skills and capabilities.
- 2- Improve risk management within the CSO, increase documentation and the allocation of responsibilities within the team. CSOs should follow up on risks and develop their own risk and SWOT analysis, while also developing alternative plans for each of their projects or programs. They should also strengthen institutionalization and enhance their policies for dealing with risks, as well as involving beneficiaries and local communities in the process of identifying risks and developing strategies for dealing with them.
- 3- Communicate with donors to educate them about the local context and to ensure that funding is channeled in a manner that meets the real needs of the community.

Part III

Mobilization and Advocacy

Mobilization and Advocacy

Introduction

Issues relevant for public affairs play a role in motivating the popular base to exert pressure and obtain support in a particular economic, political, social or other context. However, a question arises here as to whether this pressure and mobilization of support is effective in regards to public issues, especially in countries that impose various restrictions on freedom of expression. Advocacy is defined as a set of efforts, approaches, and mechanisms that aim to bring about change in policies, or to achieve justice through pressure on a certain party or parties that have the power to make decisions for change, or to achieve a desired outcome. This process is primarily based on understanding the most pertinent needs and issues for communities, and is designed with the aim of persuading and offering solutions, not only critique, as it ultimately aims to achieve change and support for issues of public concern.

Before 2011, Syrian civil life had not witnessed any advocacy campaigns in the true sense of the word, as the concept of advocacy remains idiomatic and ineffective in the Syrian civil scene to this day. Moreover, there is a lack of real and effective media coverage of advocacy campaigns by audio-visual media outlets, unless these campaigns support the political positions of parties in control on the ground. This diverts the course of advocacy campaigns from their original purpose and spirit, which is to mobilize and pressure decision-makers to change public policy and meet popular demands. Instead, in order to be implemented, these campaigns take on another form and seek to satisfy the authorities and decision-makers on the issue in question.

This part of the study addresses advocacy in the Syrian civil experience, analyzing the obstacles facing Syrian civil society and identifying the best practices that CSOs have adopted in mobilizing, advocating, and overcoming obstacles, in the following sections:

Section 3.1: Advocacy Models and Strategies

Section 3.2: Best Practices for Implementing Advocacy Campaigns

Section 3.3: Best Practices for Overcoming Obstacles

Conclusion

Section 3.1

Advocacy Models and Strategies

The advocacy campaigns carried out by CSOs across Syria's geography that are included in this study vary in terms of method. The types of advocacy campaigns launched by these entities can be categorized according to several criteria such as topic, duration, and the objective of the campaign.

We will give an overview classification of advocacy campaigns according to each of the previous three criteria, as follows:

I. Advocacy Campaigns by Subject Matter

The theme or topic can be used to categorize advocacy campaigns, which means looking at the subject matter of campaigns as the basis for their classification. As such, the themes of campaigns can be categorized into legal, economic, and social services, as follows:

1- Legal campaigns: Advocacy campaigns that target legal texts. This is either conducted by highlighting them, such as legal awareness campaigns seeking to raise legal awareness and culture, mobilization campaigns to amend discriminatory legal texts or the law of associations, which was the most widespread legal advocacy campaign in government-controlled areas. In Autonomous Administration areas, they include campaigns against gender-based violence, and a few similar campaigns were undertaken in northern Syria.

2- Economic campaigns: Such campaigns are focused on economic activity and seek to impact economic conditions or policies. They primarily relate to supporting entrepreneurship and include helping small and emerging projects to be effective, training young people to enter the labor market, securing a dynamic and safe environment for them, and spreading entrepreneurial culture. These campaigns were widespread throughout Syria and across all regions. In one experience shared by a member of the sample in Autonomous Administration areas, a campaign was conducted to pressure the authorities during a fuel price hike, which led to the temporary suspension of the decision to raise the price of fuel. However, because the campaign was spontaneous and disorganized, the authorities later raised the price of fuel.

3- Service campaigns: These campaigns undertake the implementation of activities related to daily life or services of interest to citizens, and constitute a wide area of advocacy for service sectors such as health and education. These include campaigns to take children who had dropped out due to wartime conditions to school, as well as literacy campaigns, campaigns against dropping out from school, and those raising awareness about in-school violence among adolescents. Other campaigns are involved in the environmental sector, such as cleaning campaigns and those addressing environmental concerns or planting trees, etc. Campaigns to support education were widespread in government-controlled areas but few in other areas.

4- Political campaigns: These campaigns include political activities aiming to make an impact in political spaces. Examples include campaigns that promote the political participation of women and youths and those pressuring parties involved in the conflict to allow the entry of buses transferring displaced populations after they had been denied entry to some areas. Some of the most important and relevant advocacy efforts are campaigns related to elections and those supporting women to enter electoral contests, such as experiences in northern Syria in which some women were able to access positions within local councils. There have been political advocacy campaigns undertaken in government-controlled areas, but they have not been publicized due to security concerns, taking on different forms and titles to avert potential persecution.

5- Social campaigns: These include mobilization and advocacy efforts based on social issues whose aim is to make an impact on the social context in order to reach tangible results on problematic social issues such as:

1. Combating social issues that harm women such as child marriage, harassment, or stereotypical perceptions of unmarried women.
2. Peace-building campaigns aiming to put pressure on parties to the conflict and reach solutions to end the armed conflict.
3. Gender equality campaigns.
4. Community cohesion and integration campaigns between displaced and host communities.
5. Campaigns against COVID-19 stigma.

These campaigns have been widespread throughout Syria, with the exception of some areas in the north under the control of religious factions, as these severely restrict campaigns supporting women's rights or gender equality.

In order to categorize advocacy campaigns, it is also important to address the topics and issues these campaigns seek to address, as well as their time frames.

II. Advocacy Campaigns by Timeframe

Since advocacy campaigns have divergent time frames we can divide them according to duration, timing, urgency, and the sustainability of the need for them. Campaigns that advocate for time-sensitive issues are generally short-term. Long-term campaigns, on the other hand, focus on longer-term issues, often with the aim of achieving tangible results at the level of society as a whole. The following is an overview derived from the experiences of advocacy campaigns included in the research sample:

Short-term advocacy campaigns that are related to immediate, temporary issues:

1- Temporary political issues: These issues are temporary in nature but carry political implications. Examples include campaigns for political participation in the

elections conducted during the election cycle which, in turn, includes the periods preceding an election process, election day and post-election stages in cases of electoral oversight. Other examples include campaigns to pressure conflict parties to allow the entry of buses transferring displaced persons.

2- Temporary emergent issues: They are temporary and urgent in nature, and include campaigns against the spread of weapons and for disarmament, encouraging the return of students who had dropped out of school, and campaigns to combat the stigma of Covid-19.

3- Economic issues: These campaigns aim to achieve economic goals, such as supporting small projects, supporting entry into the labor market, or supporting entrepreneurial projects.

4- Legal issues: campaigns that push for amending a law or a specific legal text or demanding the adoption of a new law are categorized as temporary. That is the case even if the campaign continues for a period or occurs at a certain frequency each year. Those things do not negate its temporary nature, as it aims to have a legal impact, which distinguishes it from long-term campaigns that target socially rooted issues.

Long-term advocacy campaigns, often related to issues entrenched in the political or societal context and with social impact goals, most notably:

1- Service issues that are long-term and relate to citizens' lived experiences, and the effects of these issues are constant and daily, not temporary. These include campaigns to eradicate illiteracy, integrate people with special needs, or confront school violence or violence among adolescents, as well as combating social stereotypes and gender-based violence.

2- Peacebuilding and community cohesion issues, and integration of displaced populations with the host community, as these are linked to stereotyping, social disintegration, as well as exclusion and intolerance. These are long-term issues deeply rooted in inter-communal and social conflict, especially between cities and rural areas.

3- Issues of gender equality and combating child marriage and discrimination against women, which are linked to deeply rooted cultural and social norms and require continuous and long-term campaigns.

4- Legal and political issues such as raising legal awareness or stimulating long-term political participation, which are also long-term issues that relate to political awareness and empowerment. They differ from temporary political issues such as voter participation, for example, or campaigns to amend specific legislation.

It is not possible to determine specific topics for advocacy campaigns that are shared across Syrian regions, which is primarily due to the nature of the forces in control. While work on human rights issues and legal advocacy campaigns related to women's issues are prevalent in Autonomous Administration areas, opportunities for political advocacy are less available in those areas. Moreover, in areas controlled by armed religious groups, advocacy campaigns around women's rights and secularism are prohibited, for example, while those are feasible campaigns in areas controlled by the government which, in turn, prohibits human rights campaigns. In addition to the particularity of each region and party in control, donors have a tendency to design advocacy campaigns without a real needs study in each region. Donors often support advocacy campaigns with vague titles and little substance for fear of addressing issues that forces in control find sensitive.

After researching the models of advocacy campaigns according to topic and time, a third criterion can be discussed which is the objective of the advocacy campaign.

III. Advocacy Campaigns by Objective

To some degree, this classification relates to the previous two, as the objective of an advocacy campaign is to shed light, and provide knowledge or insight into policies and policy-making with the aim of achieving desired changes through the means and strategies of the campaign, which we will discuss later. Campaigns can be classified according to objective or desired outcome, into:

Campaigns that aim at social mobilization, including campaigns that seek to mobilize the public on issues of public concern to all citizens. Among the most common social mobilization campaigns, according to those who took part in the sample, are:

- 1- Campaigns to combat arms proliferation, and disarmament campaigns.
- 2- Peacebuilding and community peace campaigns, and those rejecting hate speech and promoting gender equality.
- 3- Campaigns related to services such as health, education, and the environment.
- 4- Campaigns for legal, cultural, and political awareness.

Campaigns that aim to achieve the interest of a particular group, including those that exert pressure to bring about changes that further the interests of a particular group:

- 1- Advocacy campaigns for women's issues: These aim to support women by campaigning against discriminatory social phenomena. They include campaigns to combat early marriage, discrimination against women, and those that promote women's political participation.
- 2- Advocacy campaigns for specific age groups such as children, adolescents, or youths. These campaigns aim to address the issues and promote the rights of a particular age group regardless of gender. They include campaigns for political participation, combating adolescent violence and school violence, and campaigns to take children back to school, in addition to campaigns to address school dropouts.

Campaigns that aim to work on technical issues such as those that seek to bring about change in a technical topic. According to the research sample participants, the topics of technical campaigns can be delineated as follows:

- 1- Political and electoral participation campaigns. These include technical issues such as electoral campaigns, electoral systems, and political rhetoric, and they require experts specialized in these issues.
- 2- Law reform campaigns that target highly technical matter, namely drafting legislations and assessing their impact.

Most sample members agreed that the general aim of an advocacy campaign is to influence public opinion, while some believed that the goal is to bring about change in public policy and influence decision-makers. This disparity can be attributed to the civil and political realities in Syria, with their restrictions on rights and freedoms and the pervasive influence of the executive authority. Thus, civil society is not heard due to its nonrecognition by the executive authority.

It can be noted that many criteria can be adopted to classify advocacy campaigns, but the former was an overview of the most common types of campaigns implemented by Syrian CSOs. We note here that most advocacy campaigns have been region-specific and limited in scope, with no advocacy conducted at the national level. We also note that there are many intersections and redundancies across these campaigns, and that some supporters of the campaigns' causes reside abroad. In this regard, it can be noted that an important national advocacy campaign experiment that Dawlaty is preparing for through a group of local partners throughout Syria.

IV. Advocacy Strategies According to the Syrian Civil Society Experience

A question arises here about the mechanisms and strategies of advocacy campaigns, and the appropriate tools, means, plans, and goals they need to achieve their objectives. Advocacy strategies adopted by Syrian CSOs are diverse, ranging from peaceful dialogue and persuasion strategies, awareness-raising, and cooperation with stakeholders on peaceful action strategies such as engaging in protest or civil disobedience. They are outlined as follows:

1- Peaceful dialogue strategies: These are advocacy strategies that apply mechanisms of discussion, dialogue, and information-sharing, for the purpose of awareness-raising and peaceful persuasion, in addition to cooperating with the concerned parties, in order to achieve the goals and objectives of the campaign. A majority of participants view peaceful strategies as the most appropriate for the Syrian context regardless of the geographical area, particularly to avoid collision with de facto authorities. Some participants residing in the central and southern regions of Syria indicated that some CSOs engage in external advocacy at the international level and through international activists, with the aim of delivering to the world their message and the voices of Syrians in those areas.

2- Peaceful action strategies: These are strategies for peaceful confrontations that CSOs pursue with stakeholders. They either take the form of peaceful action or acts of civil disobedience such as going on strike. The majority of participants agree that these strategies are difficult to adopt due to the difficulty of coordination with other CSOs with various affiliations. Participants also believed that pressure and dialogue

are more effective methods than confrontation, fear tension with the security forces, and lack confidence in peaceful action strategies yielding fruit. Participants residing in northwestern Syria believe that peaceful action is feasible for issues agreed upon internationally, but not against a particular party in control. As such, sit-ins and demonstrations in those areas usually push for the implementation or enforcement of decisions, not the issuance of new decisions.

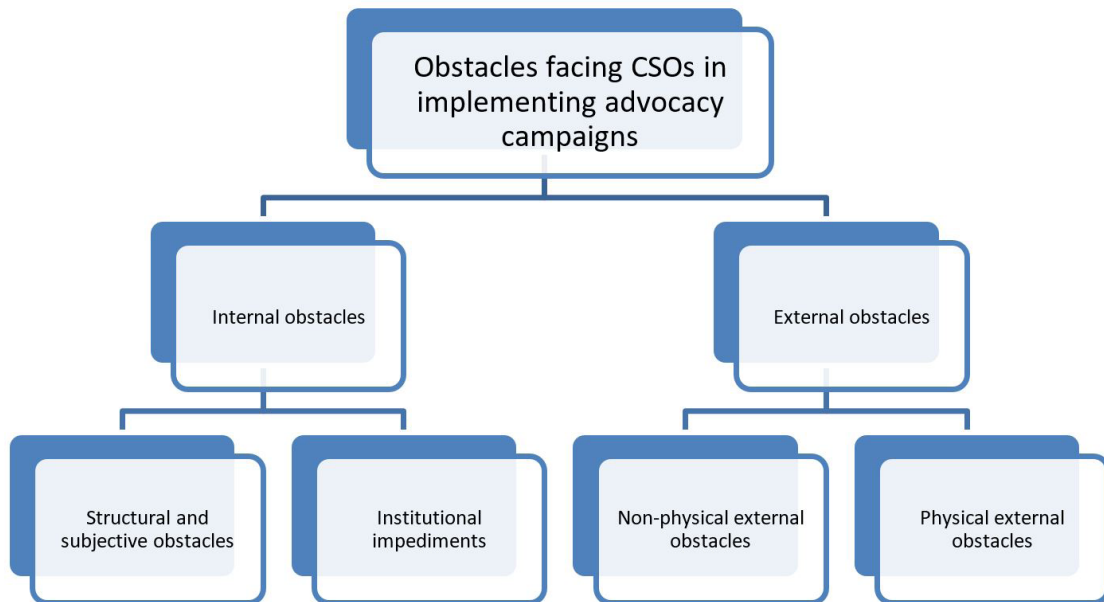
The means and tools of advocacy campaigns vary between the physical and the virtual or remote. As for the physical methods and tools used by CSOs, they include: In-person meetings with decision-makers, distribution of publications, holding training workshops, and others. While sit-ins are one of the physical methods for practicing public advocacy, very few CSOs adopt them as a method of advocacy campaigning in northwestern Syria, and no one attends or participates in sit-ins in southern and central Syria. Meanwhile, there have been sit-ins in Autonomous Administration areas when fuel prices were raised, but these actions were spontaneous and not organized by any CSO. As for the non-physical tools that can be used in advocacy campaigns, they include the use of conventional and social media, which are broadly used in advocacy campaigning by all CSOs working in Syria. Participants agreed that the community campaigning activism website Avaaz was among the primary platforms for remote advocacy for Syria but has been used in a few advocacy efforts. All sample participants agreed that Arabic was the primary language used in advocacy campaigns, as it is Syria's official language and spoken by most local communities. However, languages other than Arabic have been used in advocacy campaigns on an international level.

Advocacy strategies also vary according to the region and the nature of the dominant forces, as well as the local community's interest in a particular issue –or lack thereof. Peaceful advocacy methods, such as raising-awareness and dialogue, are most prevalent in areas under the tight security grip in government-controlled areas, Autonomous Administration areas, and northern Syria. However, one participant found that there is broad space for demonstrations and sit-ins in northeast Aleppo due to the disparate police forces of local councils. Advocacy strategies and tools vary across Syrian regions, but they share a lack of sustainability. Advocacy campaigns appear as hashtags on social media for a certain period, without carrying out continuous and long-term campaigns in support of a cause.

V. Obstacles facing CSOs in implementing advocacy campaigns

Civil societies organizations and entities seeking to conduct advocacy campaigns face two types of challenges and obstacles:

External obstacles related to the environment surrounding the work of a CSO, and internal obstacles that are institutional or structural. This is discussed in the following:



1- External obstacles and challenges

They are the factors related to the environment surrounding the CSO, in a broad sense and different contexts:

A- Non-physical external obstacles

i. Social, cultural, and political obstacles are the clearest examples of non-physical obstacles. They affect advocacy campaigns as part of the context of the

surrounding environment but leave tangible results, and CSOs across Syria face such obstacles.

ii. The novelty of the notion of advocacy and cultural differences between Syrian regions. These include the reluctance of some communities to accept the idea of women's participation and their ability to carry out advocacy efforts. This reluctance arises amid fears by some community leaders that their social status will be undermined by women's activity –which some considered a gender obstacle. Additionally, there are customs and norms that protect social environments inciting gender-based violence, with a clear absence of social awareness or interest in civil rights.

iii. Legal barriers and security risks: These include many factors such as the multiplicity of military forces and their interference and the large number of bureaucratic procedures and legal licenses required. It also extends to the severe security measures against any civic work done outside the umbrella of authority. This is due to the absence of democratic laws regulating mobilization and advocacy, as well as licenses and security approvals to conduct large advocacy campaigns not being granted. This is obvious in the areas under the control of the Syrian government, which has issued several decisions to limit personal and civil status issues, such as marriage confirmation, divorce and birth registration, to certain organizations that work in close coordination with the government. This hindered the momentum of civil society and its role in problematic issues, a hurdle also faced by the organizations operating in Autonomous Administration areas and opposition-controlled areas, though to a lesser degree.

iv. Obstacles related to dealing with the media: Many CSOs operating in government-controlled areas believe that it is impossible for the media to play its role as the fourth estate. On the contrary, there is pressure on CSOs to appear in media outlets affiliated with the regime, which is seeking to polish its image.

v. Linguistic obstacles in reaching the target audience: This does not only refer to factors such as different languages, as in the case of advocacy campaigns in areas under the control of the Autonomous Administration. In these areas, civil society campaigns must be in Arabic and Kurdish, and some are in the English language as

well. However, there are other obstacles to communication with groups targeted by the advocacy campaign, whose comprehension and education levels may vary.

B - External physical obstacles

- i. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in reducing physical encounters and limiting access to some targeted communities.
- ii. The impact of the geopolitical situation and the presence of three areas of control in Syria, which means the dividing lines separating them. This is an obstacle to communication, coordination, and the implementation of joint campaigns across the three regions.

2- Internal obstacles and challenges

These are factors that hinder the planning and implementation of advocacy campaigns but do not stem from the surrounding environment. They have an internal source, and internal factors can be classified into:

a - Institutional obstacles: These include factors within the organization related to its institutional structure.

- i. Institutional obstacles related to resources take one of two forms: Lack of financial resources; basically, it can be said that financial resources are limited and not sufficient for covering the expenses of advocacy campaigns. The other form is the lack of human resources and experience necessary for conducting effective advocacy campaigns, as well as lacking the necessary technical knowledge in the subject matter of advocacy. This could stem from organizations' lack of experience or insufficient experience in the subject of the advocacy campaign. It also stems from the lack of a team specialized in advocacy campaigns in the CSO, as this negatively affects the design of the campaign, which prevents its effective implementation.
- ii. Lacking the competencies needed for technical advocacy campaigns like those around elections. This obstacle stems from a CSO lacking experts in these technical issues or being in an environment that would allow for the accumulation of expertise in technical issues.
- iii. Institutional obstacles to networking, coordination, and consensus among CSOs. An example of this are organizations unable to manage networking with

others due to a divergence of visions between them, which makes any networking untenable. This may result from conflicting visions on the same issue or due divergent donor agendas.

B - Structural and subjective obstacles related to the advocacy campaign itself

Another obstacle or challenge to the continued trust in CSO advocacy is that the campaigns have no tangible or direct impact, creating stereotypes about civil society being obsolete. Although some view this obstacle as external and a result of the community's reluctance to support advocacy campaigns, it is mainly the result of the advocacy campaign itself. Campaigns may be inappropriate or unsuitable to the local community, leading to the reinforcement of stereotypes about campaigns' ineffectiveness.

To this first section, we can say that many participants believed that advocacy campaigns address the effects and results of issues, stopping there. These campaigns rarely delve into the root of problems, which could be attributed to social factors such as the prevailing culture and norms, control by the clergy over public space, or political factors such as the narrow margin for free political expression as a result of the repressive policing of expression in various regions by the parties in control.

Section 3.2

Best Practices for Implementing Advocacy Campaigns

One of the most important tools and methods for sharing experiences is selecting and identifying the best practices, techniques, and approaches that have proven effective in reaching goals and achieving objectives and benefit both civil society workers and the target group. Many forms of advocacy campaigns were carried out by the CSOs taking part in the sample. However, most of these campaigns fall primarily within the framework of political participation or women's rights and protection.

I. Best Practices for Preparing and Implementing Advocacy Campaigns

- 1- For campaigns that adopt a community mobilization strategy, such as those to combat sexual harassment, the best practice is to plan extensively. Posters and media should be carefully designed so as not to be socially provocative, be acceptable as a nonviolent strategy, and use attractive campaign messages.
- 2- Using technology as a tool for advocacy campaigning, such as using social media to encourage the target group.
- 3- It is very important to prepare the baseline the campaign uses as a way to determine the status quo before its implementation. As such, the implementing CSO can measure the impact of the campaign and its success in achieving its goals.
- 4- The entity implementing the advocacy campaign must believe in its cause and be involved in it.
- 5- It is very important to target influential groups, as in the case of implementing advocacy campaigns to support women's participation in elections. Here, dialogue sessions and meetings were held with men in the region, as women were not decision-makers there, and this played a major role in the success of advocacy campaigns to support women's participation in elections.
- 6- To select themes for advocacy campaigns based on social needs so that members of the community feel that it addresses their actual needs.
- 7- Adopt non-confrontational dialogue strategies to avoid confrontation with the security services and de facto authorities.
- 8- The use of a legal cover when implementing advocacy campaigns increases the horizontal and vertical spread of the campaign.
- 9- That awareness-raising strategies are followed, and problems turned into issues of public opinion, especially in campaigns whose subject matter is social, legal, or political.
- 10- Coordination and networking with other organizations contributes to facilitating the sessions and procedures for advocacy campaigns.

- 11- Conducting opinion polls before launching the campaign to make the necessary adjustments, if any, to deal with any contingencies.
- 12- The use of a competent and experienced team, especially in advocacy campaigns whose theme is technical in nature.
- 13- Using the needs assessment study tools from initial questionnaires, focus group sessions, and interviews with the local community before launching the campaigns. This is necessary for an analysis of the culture and social norms and proper networking with the community and governance bodies.
- 14- The best campaign tools to use in advocacy campaigns in the Syrian context are:
 - a. Use of social media for easy access to the target audience, as these media are available to a large segment of Syrian society.
 - b. Use of physical meetings with stakeholders, decision-makers, and even the beneficiaries of the advocacy campaign.
 - c. Use of training workshops as mechanisms to provide information and raise awareness about the advocacy campaign. These three tools have been the most widely used in all Syrian regions, and training workshops top the list.
 - d. Distribution of leaflets is a tool, but it is used less frequently. As for demonstrations and solidarity sit-ins, they have not been found among the sample CSOs in the central, southern and eastern regions of Syria, and there was one experience mentioned of peaceful action in northwest Syria.
 - e. No respondents reported using the community campaigning site Avaaz as a tool, although a few CSOs did use the site.

The use of media, dialogue sessions, and workshops is one of the most widely adopted tools because it is safe and involves direct communication with the community.

II. Less Successful Practices for Advocacy Campaigns

1- Environmental campaigns can only be successful when extended for a relatively long period of time. This is because the issues are rooted in social customs and also require the support of state institutions, as well as coordination and networking with CSOs. This is the case even if the advocacy campaign successfully uses other methods such as awareness-raising, mobilization, and the distribution of hygiene baskets and brochures.

2- Adopting research as an advocacy tool does not achieve the desired outcomes or provide any support for the campaign unless a research team is involved in preparing the research studies.

3- The time constraints on advocacy campaigns that are long-term and address deep-rooted social norms or culture. This is a decisive factor in the failure of such campaigns, because they require cumulative long-term action, such as campaigns on violence against women.

Section 3.3

Best Practices for Overcoming Obstacles

The pursuit of best practices is not only related to the implementation of advocacy campaigns and strategies, but also their ability to overcome obstacles. It is therefore necessary to extract good and effective practices in this regard, with the best practices to overcome obstacles being:

1- In facing challenges related to different contexts, one of the best practices was to diversify the tools used in advocacy campaigns.

2- In overcoming legal challenges, networking with licensed CSOs and cooperating with government agencies was the best option.

3- For overcoming security challenges, the choice was to resort to licensing a commercial business, by opening special centers that charge low fees for education services and provide free charitable services that fall within civil work. In an experience shared by another organization, the activities of an advocacy campaign were suspended under the pretext of mingling between women and men. This problem was addressed by allocating some awareness-raising sessions specifically to women, as it is more appropriate to tailor activities to the specificities of each context and region.

4- Community adoption of a campaign is a successful way to overcome challenges. This was the most appropriate option to employ creative ideas to overcome conventional methods that failed to attract the participation of children in one campaign. The concept of learning by playing was incorporated and provided encouragement points in order to enhance the participation of children. One problem in another advocacy campaign was that its design was based on personal assumptions and lacked a proper understanding of the community. And so, it was not successful. These obstacles linked to communities' rejection of the ideas put forward were bypassed through the use of in person meetings and dialogue geared toward getting to know the views of the stakeholders themselves and making adjustments as needed. Another CSO, which was working to integrate displaced children with host community children, found that the best option was to set up a joint children's drawing exhibition.

5- Networking played a pivotal role in confronting many logistical, security, and legal challenges, and even poor financial resources.

6- Donations were the best solution to address the lack of resources for implementing advocacy campaigns.

7- Take advantage of any possible space within government institutions. Sometimes there are government departments that accept cooperation with civil society within a certain framework and on certain topics, especially relief issues, regardless of the initiative's license. It is very useful to invest in this space to make interventions in each region more broad.

8- Understand and analyze social problems using questionnaires and interviews

with community members. Through an example on the issue of school dropouts, it became clear that the real challenge and the problem primarily lies in parents motivating and encouraging their children to go to work due to financial need, and that the problem does not lie only with employers who use child labor.

9- Develop strategies and design tools for advocacy campaigns to be adaptable to the changing contexts in Syria, in addition to being patient and committed to their causes.

10- Sharing experiences and lessons learned among CSOs greatly helps to improve the ability of CSOs to benefit from them and apply appropriate solutions to overcome obstacles.

Conclusion of Part III

I. Results

1- There is no single advocacy strategy suitable for all types of campaigns, as each context and each advocacy campaign model may have a different strategy. Sometimes, in the context of advocacy campaigns related to political empowerment, peaceful dialogue and discussion sessions have a positive impact on achieving the goal of the campaign. However, in other contexts, peaceful action strategies such as civil disobedience may be the most appropriate, such as for political campaigns for example.

2- Weak political campaigns throughout Syria. This is primarily due to the imposition of controls by de facto authorities using security forces and the prosecution of those with emancipatory ideas that oppose the ideologies of these forces. Secondly, this stems from limited capabilities and experiences related to political participation and its methods as a result of the state of political stagnation, and the reluctance to practice politics for long periods in Syria.

3- The advocacy campaigns carried out by the Syrian CSOs are local or regional in nature, as there were no cross-regional campaigns due to the restriction of communication between CSOs distributed over different areas of control in Syria.

4- Appropriate advocacy strategies vary by region and according to the nature of forces in control, and even the community's interest, or lack thereof, in a particular topic.

5- In the Syrian civil society experience, most advocacy campaigns can be characterized as being far from the true spirit and purpose of advocacy campaigning, which is to mobilize public opinion and put pressure on existing authorities to achieve popular demands about an issue of public concern. The blame for this is primarily on the ruling authorities, due to their prohibition of advocacy campaigns outside of the narrow framework of supporting the positions these forces take in the short term. This is in addition to the weakness of Syrian civil society's knowledge and experience about the implementation and management of advocacy campaigns. This limited the concept of advocacy to social media campaigning (hashtag activism) or distributing leaflets and brochures.

6- In conclusion, when discussing advocacy campaigns, it can be concluded that most Syrian CSOs carry out campaigns and activities that are strongly related to their mission, vision, values, and goals. However, most CSOs do not have clear criteria for measuring the success of advocacy campaigns, the tools to verify that their objectives have been reached, or even to assess the baseline before the advocacy campaign is implemented.

II. Recommendations

I. Recommendations directed to CSOs working on advocacy:

1- Building a social media presence, and emerging from authoritarian media. This is achieved by expanding the use of social media to raise awareness about topics related to civil rights, personal status and discriminatory laws, as well as socially sensitive topics such as addressing the conflation of secularism and anti-religion.

- 2- Obtaining trainings in electronic media and dealing with social media. There is also a need for advocacy, media, and legal consultancy expertise as relates to the design, implementation, and dissemination of publications.
- 3- Expanding the space for cooperation with the media in order to achieve mobilization and strengthen community involvement in advocating with civil initiatives and with CSOs.
- 4- Develop strategic plans for advocacy that aim to bring about profound and far-reaching changes.
- 5- Announcing and developing advocacy campaigns in the media by using conventional and social media, developing hashtags and online campaigns, and other components such as logos, media, and tools.

II. Recommendations regarding the relationship between CSOs implementing advocacy campaigns:

- 1- Cross-regional networking to implement advocacy campaigns at the national level, in a manner that brings together organizations working in different sectors to organize joint efforts through periodic meetings and sharing of information and resources.
- 2- Use of a participatory online platform to counteract obstacles to in-person meetings and sessions.
- 3- Coordination of advocacy efforts within each area to become more effective and reduce the burden on each CSO.
- 4- Building relationships between activists to raise awareness of the concept of advocacy and the role of civil society, and to break stereotypes about its role being restricted to relief and development.

III. Recommendations regarding the relationship of CSOs with society:

- 1- Building the capacities of grassroots community organizations on civic concepts including advocacy, and involving the community in the design and implementation

of advocacy campaigns by providing trainings for community organizations in order to achieve participatory advocacy and community participation.

2- Attracting influential people and stakeholders in a manner that strengthens the campaign, through their influence on the community and their activity in support of the campaign.

3- Conducting studies into the most important community needs for a period of time to build advocacy campaigns in response to those needs. As such, campaigns are based on those real community needs, and do not only implement campaigns as part of contractual commitments within projects. The issues addressed must be appropriate for the context and approximate real needs, while community members must be trained in advocacy and involved in it on all levels.

4- Promote civic participation on a large scale.

5- Develop tools for mobilization and community organization for the local community and the target audience.

6- Capacity building of staff from youth and marginalized groups, to make them effective elements in activating community mobilization and achieving the goals of advocacy campaigns.

IV. Recommendations addressed to international organizations:

1- Allocating special funds for advocacy campaigns, not only providing funding for direct activities on the ground with direct results of monitoring and evaluation, but also to start working on long-term campaigns.

2- Providing a guide or special training to build the capacities of CSOs so they can design advocacy campaigns, lead them, and apply their methods particularly with regard to working with the media, as it has a direct impact on society.

3- Seek advocacy and pressure from international organizations and the international community for CSOs to obtain legal licensing in a manner that preserves their independence and effective role.

- 4- Providing support and facilities for the implementation of advocacy campaigns at the international level and facilitating access to international decision-makers concerned with Syria.
- 5- Supporting advocacy campaigns at the national and international levels.

Part IV

Financial Planning and Sustainability

Financial Planning and Sustainability

Introduction

Funding is an important factor in the ability of any institution to implement the projects and programs necessary to achieve its goals, and without it, no institution can achieve or implement any of its programs. Therefore, the continued existence and operation of any institution depends, to a large extent, on its success in financial management and its ability to provide necessary funding for the continuation and development of its work.

In this context, it can be said that failures in financial management inevitably lead to a collapse in an institution's work regardless of its technical and administrative efficiency.⁹

Regardless of their classifications, all CSOs seek to draw up their effective financial policies and achieve some form of financial sustainability. This can be achieved by carrying out a series of stages and operations which, in their entirety, constitute financial planning. Financial planning aims to manage the funds available to organizations through a financial plan outlining internal and external cashflows and expenditures over a specific period of time, insofar as they achieve the goals of the organization. Therefore, budgeting is an integral part of financial planning.

Financial sustainability can only be achieved through sound financial practices that can be contained in three main points:

1. Setting clear financial goals.
2. Preparing periodic financial reports to make the right decisions effectively and efficiently.
3. Adopting financial transparency methods using internal and external financial audits.

9 Khaled Jassim Ibrahim Hassan Al Hosani, "The Oversight Role of Civil Society Institutions and Its Impact on Community Development in the United Arab Emirates" (Arabic), Public Benefit Associations - Case Study, Master's Thesis in Political Science, Department of Political Science, College of Arts and Sciences, Middle East University, 2012-2013, p. 68.

With the expansion of the operations of Syrian CSOs, and the increase in the level of needs that they cover in various regions, it has become necessary to obtain sufficient and sustainable financial resources. These allow CSOs to carry out administrative processes, cover operational costs, and implement various programs and activities.

The sources of funding available to Syrian CSOs have also been diversified in recent years. Today, they include self-financing, donations, and grants from international organizations, income-generating projects, and other sources. While this diversity is important, and ensures that organizations can continue their work, the process of obtaining needed funding is not without its obstacles –for both subjective and structural reasons. As a consequence, CSOs have been attaching greater importance to financial planning, as it ensures funding can be sustainable and accessible from sources that are consistent with the organization’s goals and vision. Furthermore, over the past years, organizations have developed a set of practices based on accumulated experience of overcoming those obstacles, and methods of sharing experiences and information with other organizations.

This part of the study discusses the forms and models of funding, the ability of Syrian CSOs to achieve financial sustainability in service provision, and the effective and efficient delivery of those services.

This part is divided into:

Section 4.1: Financial Models in the Syrian Civil Society Experience

Section 4.2: Best Practices for Financial Planning and Sustainability

Section 4.3: Best Practices for Overcoming Obstacles Facing Syrian CSOs

Conclusion

Section 4.1

Financial Models in the Syrian Civil Society Experience

I. Models of CSO Funding

Among the biggest concerns of CSOs were financial sustainability; the ability of organizations and associations to fulfill their financial obligations, and access to the resources that can enable them to provide services regardless of the sector in which they operate. All CSOs included in the study are concerned about donor dependency, but few can break the cycle of this phenomenon.¹⁰

We can consider that if 50% of the budget of a CSO is obtained from five different sources of funding, this is an indicator of its financial health. Revenues obtained by a civil society organization can also be classified according to the source of funding, namely:

1. Internal revenues, which have various forms:

- 1) Self-financing: revenue entering an organization's budget from its members' funds, contributions, membership or affiliation fees, etc.
- 2) Revenue-generating projects and activities: which are sources of revenue secured through activities or projects carried out by the organization for the purpose of generating revenue. This includes preparing a venue for rent, providing services for nominal fees, or managing public reading rooms.

Many view that providing expertise and labour free of charge by members of an organization is a form of in-kind funding no less important than financial donation.

2. External revenues of various forms:

- 1) External donations: These are revenues obtained from sources other than members of an organization, as in the case of fundraising campaigns, or through in-kind and material contributions made by individuals or institutions.

¹⁰ Jackie Camille, "Guide to the Management of Non-Profit NGOs" (Arabic), Produced by Friedrich Ebert Foundation - Egypt Office, Brent Wright Advertising, Egypt, 2016, p. 116.

2) Government funding: This is a source of funding allocated in the public budget that provides support to CSOs to achieve their objectives. This process typically requires the legal entity of the CSOs and its licensing, as per the conditions and procedures in force. This source of revenue can also be classified into two types: either funding from the local national government, which includes the condition of licensing, registration, and legal entity, or financing from an external government. The latter may have many risks involved, such as the risk of political agendas being imposed, or security and legal risks – unless this funding is legal and recognized by the country in which the organization operates. Many countries criminalize accessing funding from external sources, considering it an act that breaches the security of the state.

3) Grants from international organizations (IOs): These are some of the most common sources of funding available to CSOs, and are provided by IOs according to their respective goals and interests. Each international organization, or group of organizations, is interested in providing support and funding for a specific sector of civil and community work.

II. Contextual Analysis of Syrian Civil Society Financing

Based on the models of internal or external funding by source, it is possible to analyze the financial planning of the sample of CSOs operating across Syria as follows:

1. Throughout Syria, the main source of funding for CSOs is grants. The source of these grants is external to the organization, and is typically international organizations or other local organizations. In east Syria, grants from international organizations constitute the primary, if not the only, source of funding. However, in central, south, and northwest Syria, many other sources of funding are available. Grants are considered the best and most appropriate form of funding in the Syrian context, despite the need for a mediator in many cases.

2. Self-donations are an important internal source of funding for most organizations operating in central, south, and northwest Syria. These donations take

in-kind forms, sharing of expertise, in addition to cash donations; but not all of them have to be cash donations.

3. Collecting donations from the social circles surrounding an organization, including those abroad, is used as a method of external funding and takes in-kind or monetary forms.

4. There is insufficient awareness of funding methods by Syrian CSOs, especially methods based on fundraising via platforms or campaigns. This can be attributed to the weak institutional capacities of CSOs in terms of financial planning and policies, the ambiguity of the concept of funding, and the lack of legal entities for these CSOs –including registration and licensing in many cases. There are few cases of an organization implementing revenue-generating projects as sources of funding, or conducting donation campaigns during an event or through an electronic platform.

5. Government funding in Syria is the weakest form of funding that can be relied upon, and in the event that it occurs, it is conditional to what is in line with government interests.

The tendency of most organizations to obtain grants from international organizations or external donations can be explained by its ease compared to other methods such as donation campaigns or revenue-generating projects. Moreover, many CSOs lack a specialized team qualified in procuring funding for the organization, with some exceptions. Accessing funding is usually an additional task for a person or team, and not the exclusive task of a team for this purpose. Organizations adopt easy methods to secure funding such as forming relations with other organizations. These funding relationships are based on personal social ties between staff members rather than functional reasons. Obtaining funding is not free from security concerns in the absence of a legal license, as is the case for most Syrian organizations.

In fact, the ever-changing nature of the Syrian context makes it difficult to develop long-term financial plans. Some organizations in east Syria lack both long- and short-term strategies, as there is insufficient attention to financial planning in these CSO. This complacency is due to the realities governing CSOs in east Syria which receive direct funding from donors. This prompts CSOs to disregard the development of financial

strategies and plans, unlike the case in other Syrian regions. As the result of different contexts in their areas of operation, and reasons related to licensing, registration, and security control, CSOs are obligated to have some degree of financial planning. These organizations often resort to circles of intermediaries, which can occur voluntarily by unlicensed and unregistered CSOs that can obtain funding only through a licensed intermediary, and fall under the control of this intermediary. Some CSOs can be coerced due to the presence of certain organizations that enjoy strong influence, a security cover, and control over grants, such that organizations have no choice but to acquiesce.

Most organizations rely on grants as the primary, if not the sole, source of funding, which is especially the case for CSOs in east Syria. It is worth noting the disadvantages of total dependency on grants as the primary source of funding:

1. Organizations can be diverted from their goals in order to align with donor agendas with the aim of continuing to secure funding.
2. Lack of innovation due to total donor dependency, tailoring projects to the donors' preferences.
3. Services are often incompatible with the local context.
4. Donors impose their agendas in most cases, even if those agendas do not meet local needs.
5. Lack of expertise in among the staff of these CSOs, and their failure to develop institutionally or build their capacities.

III. Challenges facing Syrian civil society in obtaining funding

In order to obtain appropriate funding, Syrian CSOs encounter a number of obstacles and challenges, which affect their ability to choose an appropriate source of funding to achieve financial sustainability. Some of these obstacles are simple, while others are more complex and can be external or internal. The most common obstacles facing Syrian CSOs are as follows:

1- External Obstacles

These are obstacles related to the context surrounding the work of an organization. These factors can negatively impact access to funding and pose challenges to the financing of CSOs during the course of implementing their activities. Below are some models and forms of external obstacles to funding:

- 1) **Donor attitudes and priorities:** This poses the biggest challenge to CSO access to funding. Some donors build their funding priorities along specific agendas, which in many cases creates a gap between real needs and the projects being implemented. This is the result of discrepancy between the visions and missions of the local organization and those of donors. As a result, grants are provided exclusively to activities in line with their agendas. Donors often demand requirements and procedures that are difficult to meet due to present conditions and the political and security restrictions imposed on civil society work. The study also showed that the politicization of funding has had the least effect to restrict CSO access to funding. The primary obstacle today is not the politicization of funding, but rather that, in any zone of control whether the government, the opposition or the Autonomous Administration, organizations that give funding to civil society do not obtain a license to carry out or finance civil activity in other regions. Funding in such cases is limited to undisclosed funding for fear of security repercussions that may ensue. In addition, donors generally do not provide grants in areas where they do not have specific objectives, as conditions for funding vary according to what donors seek to achieve in those areas. Therefore, donors often pivot the allocation grants to another region without a real context assessment, but instead based on their own agendas. This, in turn, pushes some who engage in civil work as business, and transfer their entire scope activity to new hubs for funding. This means that those CSOs intervene in areas without being fully aware of their context and conditions, resulting in wasting of funds.
- 2) **Funding sources and quantities:** CSOs view the state of funding sources today as a challenge as donors and sources of funding diminish. However, in reality, these obstacles should prompt CSOs to seek various alternative sources of funding.
- 3) **Interference by authorities:** Another major obstacle to funding is the weak legislative environment in Syria, and its inability to protect CSOS from pressure

and influence by the dominant authorities. This is especially the case for de facto authorities that practice various forms of abuse in pressuring civil society, with security controls over funding and activities, demanding royalties and levies, and extorting CSOs that secure funding. For example, the Autonomous Administration in the northeast imposes restrictions on organizations, prohibiting them from setting up multi-purpose donation boxes, as they must have a donation box for each purpose. Opening bank accounts to receive funding also faces many obstacles, as once an account is linked to CSO funding, liability and security investigations occur.

4) Legal and administrative obstacles: These are closely related to the previously mentioned obstacles. This is a result of the absence of an appropriate legal text that fits the reality of Syrian civil society, covering its needs and protecting it from the arbitrariness of authorities. In the current situation, many CSO activities are referred to the security authorities in control of the territory. As such, the administrative regulation of CSOs is left to these authorities who boast about their complicated procedures, bypass legal text, and require security approvals to obtain licenses.

5) COVID-19, as the general lockdowns in different areas have affected banking operations. The impact of COVID-19, even on the quantity of available funding, cannot be understated. Many donors have restricted or reduced funding usually allocated as aid to countries suffering from conflict, instead diverting resources to respond to the need of their local communities during the epidemic.

6) Sanctions and the Caesar Act: European sanctions and the Caesar Act have played a major role in limiting opportunities for funding CSOs. This largely diminished funding opportunities due to difficulties, or often the inability, to receive remittances. It is also due to the closure of bank accounts as financial institutions adopt a zero-risk rule in dealing with Syrians and Syrian institutions, for fear of being affected by sanctions imposed on Syrian individuals and entities. In fact, currency exchange companies have attempted to exploit these fears, to the extent that banking contracts have become contracts of subordination to authoritarian parties. This deprived many CSOs of their funding in banks and diminished, if not upended, future funding opportunities. It is also worth to mention the emergence of financial intermediary circles that resulted as a response to this problem. Intermediaries take two models,

either as other organizations that are licensed and have influence seeking to achieve material benefit while imposing their conditions on CSOs which may be more stringent than donor conditions. Intermediary circles can also take the form of financial and exchange companies which practice a monopoly of sorts, and maximize the rates they charge as intermediaries.

7) Geopolitical designations: Many donors are reluctant to provide funding to areas of northern Syria which are under the control of armed factions such as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, or areas of Turkish control in eastern Aleppo. Others, albeit fewer, are reluctant to fund CSOs and projects in areas controlled by the government or the Autonomous Administration. In Idlib, due to geopolitical considerations, funding is directed towards relief more than developmental sectors. However, in today's Syria, donors are predominantly focused on relief work, although in 2017 funding tended towards development work. This is a result of the relative stability at that time, and an acknowledgment of the status quo that prevailed. However, since late 2019, and after the deterioration of the Syrian and Lebanese economic situation and the COVID-19 pandemic, relief work has returned to the forefront and funding for development programs declined, due to increased need to support relief work on the ground.

Organizations operating in northeast Syria face difficulties related to funding, such as the fear of banks and donors of sanctions that may affect them, but at the same time have more available opportunities to obtain funds. Many of these have opened offices in Erbil, allowing them to obtain funding, and to transport or transfer it through companies to the northeastern regions, thus alleviating those burdens. Organizations operating in the north of Syria have fewer funding opportunities than the eastern regions, but higher than the funding opportunities for civil society in government-controlled areas. The latter live in an environment with a high level of risk and difficulty in terms of obtaining funds. This is due to the reluctance of many donors to provide grants for reasons related to fear of sanctions, or because their adoption of a stereotype accusing organizations operating in government-controlled areas of having security relations, so they instead support organizations in the north. In conclusion, in analyzing this problem, it can be said that there are more funding opportunities in the northeast and in the north of Syria than in government-controlled areas, due to the presence of offices in those areas that facilitate cash transfers, within less complex supervisory conditions.

Some CSO representatives believe that obtaining a license in government-controlled areas is a general obstacle to the civil work space, because these organizations are subject to direct and continuous controls by the various authorities.

Another obstacle facing Syrian CSOs is control by dominant financial authorities. In government-controlled areas, licensed associations and organizations are allowed to carry out their activities and obtain funding exclusively through the central bank, and at the official currency exchange rate –which is considerably lower than informal markets. In areas of northeastern Aleppo under Turkish control and supervision, companies were launched that provide postal services, cash transfers, and courier services. Such centers have also been established in every city in the region, and they impose the financial policies of their companies such as exchanging grants obtained by organizations to the Turkish lira, according to the rate of the Turkish Central Bank, while only delivering 20% of these grants in US dollars. Thus, CSOs in northwest Syria are forced to abide by the policy of these companies to obtain licensing from Turkey. In Autonomous Administration areas, most organizations resort to dealing with local cash transfer companies to deliver their funds, and these organizations find it an acceptable and practical solution.

2- Internal Obstacles

These are obstacles related to the CSOs themselves or their volunteers. Internal obstacles are not clearly visible, or perhaps not to an external observer, and do not initially seem to have an impact on financial planning. However, in reality, internal obstacles are no less dangerous than external ones, and their forms vary according to the following:

1) **Lack of Expertise:**

This factor relates primarily to economic need, and secondly to the misconception of volunteer work in civil society. Many experienced people are reluctant to volunteer, seek income-generating work, or volunteer in response to economic pressures. This deprives many CSOs of qualified expertise, as those opt to work for international organizations and CSOs that provide decent financial compensation.

2) Organizational Framework:

The framework of an organization, and its vision, mission and goals, sometimes constitute an obstacle to obtaining funding from a specific donor. However, this cannot be considered merely an obstacle to funding, as it is justified by the internal system or charter of the organization. Therefore, an organization seeks funding from donors who are consistent with its vision and mission.

3) Stereotypes:

There is considerable defamation targeting civil society, accusing it of corruption, which leads to loss of trust between CSOs and communities.

4) Administrative and legal obstacles:

Based on an analysis of the Syrian situation, internal obstacles related to licensing can be classified into two types:

a) Obstacles of licensing faced by most organizations in areas under government control, and Autonomous Administration areas in northeastern Syria, but were found less common in northern Syria. It may be strange to consider legal licensing as an obstacle to the financial planning of CSOs. Unfortunately, in the case of Syria, obtaining a license means allowing for the imposition of controls and security restrictions, supervision by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor, and even interference in every detail of civil work. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor can appoint member of the board of directors as its representative. Moreover, obtaining licensing and funding through bank accounts mean permanent exposure to security monitoring, and currency exchange according to the Central Bank rate which is less than the real market value, i.e. loss in the value of money and negative impact on activities. The inavailability of licensing may often mean being forced to access funding through an exclusive intermediary with security ties and authoritarian relations. These intermediary organizations have a monopoly over the first cycle of funding, and play the role of intermediary in the second cycle.

b) Obstacles imposed by lack of licensing: They are faced by many organizations in northern Syria, government-controlled areas, and Autonomous Administration areas. It is accepted that lack of licensing is an obstacle to CSO work due to the absence of a bank account bearing the name of the organization. Therefore,

financial transfers are made in the name of one of its members, which constitutes a security risk as a result of linking financing to the personal accounts of CSO members. Moreover, obtaining funding in foreign currency, and resorting to the informal market for currency exchange, raises risks related to financial processes. There are other risks inherent to transferring funds from outside Syria to carry out activities within Syria. On the other hand, many CSOs view that, while it mitigates the security risk to some extent, having a license increases the level of security pressure, restrictions, and monitoring by governmental agencies including the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor.

Section 4.2

Best Practices in Financial Planning and Sustainability

I. Setting financial sustainability strategies

Choosing the best practices in setting up financial plans and achieving financial sustainability requires active funding for development as a prerequisite for reaching this sustainability. Active funding for development contains three main determinants:¹¹

1. Revenue-generation: This includes all revenue-generating strategies that a CSOs might adopt to generate the financial resources needed to carry out its mission.
2. Revenue diversification: There is need for diversified sources of revenue and a multi-pronged approach to financial development.
3. Private revenues: Generating revenue in ways other than receiving grants and funding, in order to invest in its growth and development. This is described as a type of unrestricted revenue that an organization can generate for its activities.

¹¹ "Financial Sustainability in Nonprofit Organizations" (Arabic), Union of Maghreb Associations, link: <https://bit.ly/3pN5gsP>

¹² Jackie Camille, Management Guide, op. cit., p. 119.

Given that financial sustainability is the primary concern of CSOs, a set of basic elements must be available to achieve financial sustainability strategies: ¹²

1. Diversification of the source of private fundraising carried by the organization, and adoption of a hybrid system.
2. Regarding grants, it is important to work with multiple diverse donors, as small grants and funding opportunities must not be neglected.
3. Building reserves and assets that help finance activities and the core team of the CSO.
4. Application of prudent financial management practices. It is very important for the CSO to remain sensible in disbursing financial resources, so as not to overspend during the availability of funding. This is because overspending makes it difficult to manage the interim stage between funding cycles. It is also necessary for CSOs to understand the nature of funding, its cycles, the volume of its reserves, and how and where it is spent.

After identifying the elements for setting financial sustainability strategies, we can determine best practices in financial planning adopted by Syrian CSOs in the experience of Syrian civil society.

II. Best Practices for Financial Planning

1. Preparing financial plans in advance a year or more before cycles, by setting estimated budget plans with margins for risks and emergency situations.
2. Building relationships with donors and strategic partners to guarantee minimal financing.
3. Implementing revenue-generating projects that help securing a financial cover for CSOs.
4. Use of self-financing has in many cases contributed to overcoming lack of funding. This is done by making financial donations or providing in-kind donations, expertise or training.

5. The use of networking between CSOs was one of the most effective means to save some of the expenses of preparing research and studies. This is achieved by obtaining important information and data for research through networking relationships and tracks. Networking and partnership between different organizations has also played a role in securing alternative funding sources and sharing costs.
6. Accurate financial planning and organization. The existence of alternative strategies achieves higher sustainability and saves many financial resources.
7. Team spirit among individuals working in CSOs has helped overcome challenges during periods of lack of funding, by offering some volunteer work, or some members agreeing to the delay or reduction of compensation and salaries.

III. Practices that have a negative impact on financial sustainability

A number of errors by CSOs can be identified which negatively affect financial sustainability:

1. Dependence on funding within the basic cycle because it does not achieve operational sustainability. Project-based funding affects the relationship of the organization with the staff and with the community itself.
2. CSO lack of awareness of the power that they possess and through which they can pressure donors.
3. Non-performance of any advocacy by CSOs towards donor conditions regarding funding issues and the pressures they put on organizations.
4. Lack of networking, coordination and communication between organizations.
5. Guaranteed access to funding kills the spirit of innovation for many organizations. Guaranteed, permanent sources of funding and donors makes organizations uninterested in designing new projects or innovative ways to attract new donors, while also making them hostages to their experience without looking for its development or improvement.

Section 4.3

Best Practices in Overcoming Financial Obstacles Facing Syrian Civil Society

I. Obstacles to Financial Planning in the Syrian Civil Society Experience

Syrian CSOs face obstacles of different forms during the financial planning process, and a set of determinants can be set for those obstacles that are permanently enforceable during civil work in fragile and rapidly changing contexts:

1. Difficulty to obtain accurate information and data can become an obstacle to the organization in its ability to develop real and realistic financial plans. It can also lead to the development of incorrect financial plans, which has a disastrous impact on the work and credibility of the organization.
2. It is difficult to develop effective financial plans in light of changing environments. This is often faced by organizations operating in rapidly changing and fragile contexts, and affects its operational stability.
3. Planning requires experience, money and time, making it very costly, requirements which are not equally met by all organizations. Moreover, planning means bringing about change which is often faced with resistance by individuals within the organization who had grown accustomed to earlier practices.¹³



¹³ Mahmoud Hassan Al-Hawasi and Haider Shaker Al-Barzanji, "Principles of Modern Management Science" (Arabic), No Publishing House, 2014, pp. 63-64.

II. Best Practices to Overcome Obstacles to Financial Planning

The set of best practices can be included in the framework of overcoming the obstacles that face the Syrian civil society during the course of many projects of Syrian CSOs:

- 1- Bypassing the licensing requirement set by donors in many cases, through licensing a training and skill-building center. It was accepted by a large number of donors and in more than one funding opportunity.
- 2- Bypassing the bank account requirement in light of economic sanctions. There is no direct solution for this, but brokerage firms have been the most suitable solution in obtaining funds, even if they charge high rates as intermediaries.
- 3- Having a personal account outside Syria was an acceptable option in many cases to obtain funding, as well as using an alternative account to house the funds of organizations or their partners.
- 4- Use of Facebook and WhatsApp platforms and personal knowledge circles, plus the Syrian community that helps collect donations from those residing abroad –Syrian and non-Syrian.
- 5- Following the method of networking and partnership with other initiatives as a mechanism for obtaining alternative financing, in order to cover the financing needs of activities.
- 6- Diversifying sources of revenue and building revenue-generating projects. This contributes to the sustainability of funding to some extent, as financial resources must not be linked solely to donor grants.
- 7- Reliance on self-financing and donors as a source of alternative funding, allows projects to continue, without depriving the beneficiaries of the service if funding is ceased by donors.
- 8- Donations from Syrians living abroad were an outlet in many cases for the continuation of the project. However, there is a stereotype by the Syrian expatriates that the initiatives and organizations operating in the areas under control of the Syrian

government have security ties.

9- In some cases, licensing and registration have caused risk and doubled pressure by the security authorities in government-controlled areas. Therefore, resorting to work without licensing has sometimes been an effective means of overcoming these risks and pressures.

10- Cooperation with government agencies facilitates the implementation of a project, and in many cases, government agencies do not inquire about sources of funding.

11- It is necessary to create an internal sustainable funding source that plays a role in building trust with the community, for example:

i. Licensing as a private company for specialized training, with some training services being paid and others free of charge. This provides an internal self-financing source. Some CSOs resort to using the company's license as a legal tool to obtain grants from international organizations, working under the legal cover of the company, and conducting free trainings and workshops. Therefore, the company would be the legal face of CSO activities, and they are commercial activities carried out by the company by charging fees for services. However, there are elements of civil work in the background, represented in obtaining funding and carrying out civil activities.

ii. A youth club that has a subscription and spaces for study or entertainment, which creates communication with young people, while providing revenue for the institution and its staff.

12- Registration of CSOs and institutions outside Syria, especially in Lebanon, Erbil, Turkey, and Jordan, due to the geopolitical positions of donors and the sanctions on the Syrian government. This can help overcome financial difficulties, banking problems, and the unavailability of banks in some areas.

13- Investing in the social responsibility clause of private companies to cover civil activities.

Conclusion of Part IV

I. Results

1- In conclusion, it is possible to narrow down the financing activities of Syrian CSOs to certain models far from the public eye, either due to security concerns or as a result of institutional weakness in capabilities and expertise.

2- The reality of Syrian civil work, with different contexts across Syria, imposes obstacles to obtaining multiple sources of funding. These obstacles range from the difficulty of finding revenue-generating resources, the difficulty of collecting funds, as well as obstacles and bureaucratic procedures in many stages. This prompted organizations to continue to rely on donors through grants and their extension.

3- Throughout Syria, the financial planning of organizations is characterized as being short- and medium-term. Despite the CSOs' awareness of the importance of developing strategies and financial plans, and diversification of funding sources, they develop simple strategies that are not sufficiently predictive to incorporate into long-term financial planning.

4- There are no sufficient experiences for most Syrian CSOs to be able to set financial plans that achieve financial sustainability and stability.

II. Recommendations

A set of recommendations can be included that can contribute to improving the financial planning of organizations and ensuring better financial sustainability:

1. Recommendations for CSOs

1) Building and strengthening social accountability, which represents a monitoring network from the local community and within civil society, to detect cases of corruption and lack of transparency.

- 2) Building local alliances to pressure towards ceasing unfair or irrelevant projects, and carrying out advocacy campaigns to protect civil society from corruption that occurs under its name.
- 3) Forming ad hoc partnerships and alliances between CSOs for large projects in which many CSOs can participate, in order to unify the agenda of Syrian civil society and transcend the barriers of geographical and military partisanship.
- 4) Continuous exchange of expertise between initiatives and organizations, establishing a pool of mutual common resources, and coordination and advocacy between organizations to find solutions to licensing problems.
- 5) Obtaining different financing methods, building capacities in the field of planning and diversifying funding sources, and allocating experts to deal with revenue-generating projects while preserving the content of civil work.
- 6) Organizing networking between organizations in an institutional manner and through a special platform, and drawing up mechanisms for coordination and strategic direction with the aim of enhancing networking between initiatives and organizations. This can facilitate joint work, sharing of resources, and access to larger and more sustainable resources through collective efforts.
- 7) Facilitation of obtaining legal licensing for organizations, opening bank accounts for initiatives or groups of initiatives.
- 8) Expanding the circles of personal contacts for collecting donations and gifts.
- 9) Creating databases for local and international bodies, to facilitate the access of CSOs to funding sources.
- 10) Focusing on the principles of participation, and the spirit of initiative and working as a team. There is no need to wait for an outside entity to help organize CSOs, but rather its members must take the initiative without paying attention to personal matters as much as to the success of the group as a whole.
- 11) The existence of civil oversight from organizations to overcome cases of corruption that harm other organizations.
- 12) Organizations should seek funding that aligns with the mission and vision of the initiative.

2. Recommendations for donors

- 1) Reducing difficulty and mitigating complex conditions such as bank accounts, and moving away from traditional methods of evaluating CSOs as a condition for forming partnerships or providing funding. Instead, funding should be based on the CSO's impact on the ground and the effectiveness of its activities, through the adoption of external evaluations and methods for working with greater flexibility.
- 2) Strengthening the partnership between donors and CSOs at all stages, especially planning, and not only as an implementing partner.
- 3) Adopting an alternative licensing mechanism to government licensing, such as registration with the United Nations.
- 4) Main donors must support local CSOs rather than provide funding to intermediaries.
- 5) Transforming the relationship between donors and CSOs into strategic partnerships rather than financial ones.

Concluding Remarks

Concluding Remarks

In light of a constantly shifting environment, the experiences of the Syrian civil society organizations have demonstrated a good degree of adaptability and response. This is the case in terms of implementing activities, and choosing good practices, and even in responding to and addressing challenges. However, due to it being recent, the Syrian civil society experience is not devoid of factors that affect its operational and institutional framework. This causes the emergence of a set of bad outcomes that hinder the proper and effective exercise of the role of civil society in a manner commensurate with the support provided, or to meet the level of societal need.

The role of Syrian civil society was not limited to exercising its usual role as conceived internationally. Instead, the role of Syrian civil society was distributed across many societal needs of all forms: relief, development and awareness. However, due to the realities governing the Syrian context, challenges stand in the face of civic awareness and proper engagement. For example, in areas controlled by the government, and those of north and northwest Syria, the predominant role of civil society is to cover the relief needs of communities, and fill gaps caused by the weakness of the controlling authorities in the performance of their duties and tasks. Conversely, in Autonomous Administration areas, the scope of CSO activity was broader and more comprehensive than other regions, and covered developmental work and awareness-raising.

Syrian civil society suffers from severe polarization and isolation due to various forces in control of different areas. This affects the substance and dynamics of civil action and response at the national level, and confines civil activity to regional frameworks. Other weaknesses in networking, coordination and communication, further this isolation and estrangement between different parts of Syria, which is set to create future difficulties to communicate and accept others in post-conflict Syria.

The experiences of Syrian civil society organizations, in different contexts, suffer from many gaps due to various factors. These include restrictions of various forms, political realities and conflict conditions, and the international community and donor community which often provide services and support based on interests. However, despite all of the above, the experiences of Syrian CSOs were often characterized by creativity and innovation in finding appropriate solutions. Syrian civil society is unique in its dynamism and adaptability, especially in the second half of the Syrian crisis and after their accumulation of sizable experience in civil work and civic action.

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Booklet

Syrian Civil Society

Status and Best Practices

For Civic Engagement, Civic Space,
Advocacy, and Financial Planning

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