



Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute

Mapping of Palestinian Non-Governmental Organizations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip

By:

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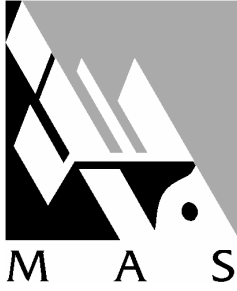
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Mapping of Palestinian Non-Governmental Organizations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip

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6. The study is presented for discussion at a public workshop attended by academics, researchers, and representatives from public and private sector institutions related to the subject of the research.
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Summary and Initial Recommendations

This study is particularly important as it is the first to provide a comprehensive and accurate database on Palestinian Non-Governmental Organizations (PNGOs). During past years, the acute lack of information about the features, capacity and needs of this vital sector left the door open to all sorts of unproven assumptions. As a result, this sector was dealt with from a political and ideological standpoint without basis on accurate facts and figures.

Summary

The study registered that there are 926 active PNGOs in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (WBGS) working in various sectors. Only 881 have completed the data sheets and they are therefore the subject of analysis here. These are mostly charitable organizations, youth clubs and sports groups. The ratio of new registered PNGOs is 29.2%. There was a considerable increase in the establishment of PNGOs following the inception of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA). One third of the surveyed PNGOs were established after 1993 and the increase in registration shows that this sector is subject to legislation and regulations.

The active PNGOs in the WBGS vary in their missions and programs but a common feature is that the majority fail to focus on specific goals, objectives and programs. In other words, most of these PNGOs are not specialized in specific areas but tend to have a wide range of missions and goals. The number of NGOs with general goals is higher than those with specific targets, reflecting the absence of a clear vision among most PNGOs.

The study reveals clear distinctions in the types of leadership and administration of the various PNGOs. Charitable organizations, youth and sports clubs are headed by a general assembly, while new PNGOs are managed by boards of trustees or administrative boards. The study indicates that institutional building in the new PNGOs is stronger than in traditional organizations and has implications on the efficient provision of services and the successful achievement of their stated goals.

Another fact brought to light in the study was a general weakness in the internal structure of PNGOs, especially as regards planning. Some 17.6% of

PNGOs do not draw up a timetable for the implementation of their programs, indicating the lack of a clear and specific vision of their role in serving the community. The prevailing approach towards work is unsystematic and unplanned. Even in those organizations that followed schedules, many failed to successfully meet set deadlines on a regular basis. Most organizations only succeeded in meeting planned programs occasionally, indicating that planning is not made on an accurate basis. These organizations have declared that several constraints prevent them from achieving their goals. These constraints include donors who interfere in their work programs, the decrease in financial support, lack of adequate expertise and skills, and shortage of time, especially for those organizations whose workers are unpaid volunteers. Other constraints relate to the lack of involvement by beneficiaries in the work program.

The study reveals a disparity between the West Bank and Gaza Strip in the ratio of PNGOs to population. Although it was not concluded that this affects the range of benefits available to the community from these organizations, a number of factors such as the number of NGOs, the number of paid staff and the amount of funds available clearly indicated in favor of the West Bank. The central areas of the West Bank are the most favored while the capacity of PNGOs in the north and south of the West Bank is comparatively weaker.

The study shows that urban communities have more PNGOs and also enjoy a better caliber of organization in terms of capacity and efficiency. PNGOs working in rural communities and refugee camps are fewer in number and are also generally weaker in structure. These are mainly made up of charitable organizations, youth clubs and sports groups. There are few new organizations in these areas, except for some local cultural centers. A similar distinction is also seen in individual geographical areas, where certain communities are completely neglected, in addition to the deprivation of rural communities and refugee camps.

The programs implemented in the WBGS follow this same pattern. There were a total of 3084 programs conducted by PNGOs in the WBGS, distributed according to category and according to the number of NGOs in each geographical area. The programs were distributed among urban, rural and refugee camps in ratios parallel to the percentage of NGOs in each community. Linking these facts with other elements such as the amount of finance for each type of activity and the number of staff, it is apparent that the general weakness of PNGOs working in deprived areas is reflected in their programs and activities.

The study shows that there are PNGOs working in a wide range of areas to meet various community needs but problems exist in the capacities of these organizations, their programs and activities, and their unequal distribution amongst geographical areas and communities. The latter is most important in judging the adequacy of services provided by PNGOs. The study revealed that high capacity organizations are concentrated in certain areas, mainly the central West Bank, and in urban communities, although studies indicate that the need for services and developmental programs are greater in other areas with higher poverty rates.

The study also shows deficiencies in the number of new organizations and the quality of charitable organizations, youth clubs and sports groups. Poor quality is manifested in the financial constraints facing these organizations, the lack of infrastructure to implement programs, lack of qualified, trained and efficient manpower, plus general weakness in institutional building due to the use of traditional administrative practices.

These results prove that the need for NGOs still exists in Palestinian society and it is important to strengthen and enhance NGOs to meet the requirements of this community. NGOs, and PNGOs in particular, have traditionally played a significant role in the development of communities, especially in their adherence to community priorities and awareness of the surrounding social and political environment.

To strengthen and develop NGOs, the sectors most in need of empowerment and the areas and communities requiring services must be identified. Rational plans and strategies must be designed to ensure the sustainability of these organizations, to minimize dependency on donors and to enhance community participation among direct beneficiaries and all members of society.

Recommendations

This study has emphasized the importance of the non-governmental sector in the unique political situation of the Palestinians and in the context of the Palestinian community's extensive needs following the long Israeli occupation. The destruction of Palestinian infrastructure and the severe economic and social problems resulting from the occupation still face Palestinians. The current study reveals a number of problems and deficiencies in the work of PNGOs that must be tackled by a framework of policies, regulations, internal resolutions or decisions pertaining to donors

and the PNA. Some problems are of a methodological or policy nature that require improvements in work practices.

This study highlights the inadequate professional administrative and financial documentation of the surveyed PNGOs in time series form. This caused many difficulties in verifying information and in studying the important characteristics and work features. The absence of documentation in several PNGOs means that their institutional history has been lost and it is impossible to benefit from their previous experience or to attempt an objective evaluation. In addition, the lack of transparency and unwillingness to provide accurate information, for a number of stated and unstated reasons, posed great difficulties in accessing accurate reliable data on these organizations. There is no doubt that the credibility of NGOs is linked to the level of openness with beneficiaries and the extent of communication with them.

The resulting recommendations are addressed to four parties. First, to the NGOs themselves, second, to policy and decision makers, third, to donors and fourth, to all beneficiaries.

The results of the study indicate that the activities of charitable societies are confined to traditional roles such as kindergartens, aid and relief services. Although these are important for some sectors of Palestinian society, they neglect development and the activities of these organizations lack creativity and diversity. They have been unable to adapt to the new needs created by the political, economic and social changes in the Palestinian territories. The administrative structure of these societies remains traditional and dependent on unpaid volunteers. In general, administrative boards plan and implement programs and their general assemblies play a minor role. Therefore, it may be concluded that their main problems are the lack of professional qualified staff and poor relations with donors and new NGOs (locally and external), which has a negative impact on financial capacity and professional and practical experience.

Nevertheless, the charitable societies are considered an important and essential part of civil society in terms of numbers and strengthening this sector is crucial to the support of NGOs. It is particularly important for the support of local rural communities where most charitable societies are based. The study shows that this sector needs financial support, institutional building, professional trained staff and a network of relations that will enable it to play a part in Palestinian development.

The initiative to improve charitable societies should be taken by the new NGOs whose accumulated experience enables them to fulfil this role. In addition, the PNA, as represented by the relevant ministries (Ministry of Social Affairs and Ministry of Education), must make available every facility for this important sector. Responsibility also lies with the General Union for Palestinian Charitable Societies, whose mandate is to improve the efficiency of this sector.

The study indicates that youth and sports clubs are similar to charitable societies and are equally important. They address the largest section of Palestinian society, i.e. young people. There are similarities in that both youth and sport clubs suffer from financial constraints and a lack of professional staff or modern institutional building. Although numerous in number and widely dispersed, these groups have limited contacts with one other or with other active civil society organizations locally and internationally.

This study emphasizes that support for the youth club sector should be given a high priority due to the widespread distribution of these organizations, especially in rural communities. This is the responsibility of the Ministry for Youth and Sports through sponsorship, the organization of activities on a national level to bring groups together, and the provision of technical support to enhance institutional building. New NGOs can also pass on their experiences in administrative and institutional building and conduct networking that will enable these groups to move beyond being isolated local organizations. Expertise in financial affairs by new organizations is another important skill to share.

The characteristics and profile of most charitable organizations, youth and sports clubs indicate that they face serious problems, with some exceptions such as those in urban communities. It is therefore necessary to study the successful experiences in order to replicate them.

The study stresses the essential divide in the status of the new NGOs from the aforementioned groups in terms of the diversity of activities, financial capacity, availability of professional staff and wide breadth of networking. The major problem lies in the dependency of traditional groups on external financial support, apart from some service providers in the field of health, agriculture and education. This raises questions regarding the sustainability of these groups and has negative implications on their goals and programs.

At the same time, it is apparent that networking between new NGOs fluctuates between coordination and competition. The degree of networking depends on the specific goals of these organizations. They all coordinate with the PNA but compete for financial support. Their services are sometimes redundant and duplicated.

There is no doubt that the new NGOs have succeeded in building a reasonable network among themselves and with other Arab and international organizations, but have not established a standard model that meets the requirements of non-governmental organizations and the community in general. This is due to inconsistency in goals and activities, as well as the lack of a centralized body to coordinate their work.

In the years following the Israeli occupation, these new NGOs have been able to accumulate experience that has strengthened their developmental role. They have the professional expertise that enables them to adapt to political and social changes. Yet, it is vital to reflect the high professional capacity in the quality of services provided as the satisfaction of beneficiaries should assume a higher priority than that of donors.

Despite the professionalism of staff in the new NGOs, the study shows that institutional weaknesses exist in the form of a low level of transparency and a lack of documentation. This is manifested in the adaptation of programs to fit the agenda of donors.

It is difficult to propose inclusive recommendations for all NGOs due to their wide range of goals and programs. An in-depth study of the new NGOs is needed to evaluate and improve their administration and to develop new means of self-financing to enhance independence and sustainability.

The needs of various PNGO sectors and their development requirements differ according to their geographical distribution. The study reveals a disparity between geographical areas and communities in the capacities of NGOs that was reflected in the level of services provided.

Efforts should be concentrated on areas and communities that are most in need of services. The study reveals that there is insufficient support for services directed to all Palestinians, such as health care and education, especially in the south and north West Bank, the Gaza Strip and refugee camps. The study also indicates acute weakness in youth and cultural activities in these same areas.

In NGOs working in the fields of human rights, women, research and democracy, it may be stated that they do not follow clear evaluation and monitoring procedures. This is due to the nature of their activities and the fact that they were established recently with modern ideological and political goals. In addition, their work takes place on a general level and does not affect the immediate needs of beneficiaries. Nevertheless, these are important organizations with missions that will contribute positively to the development of civil society and the enhancement of social justice.

The study reveals that organizations related to children's activities are integrated in the charitable societies, with the problems and limitations described previously. The activities offered are of poor quality and concentrate on academic activities only. There is an absence of activities and programs targeted at the development of children's physical health or building creative mental ability. This is particularly clear in deprived areas.

The need for charity is increasing concurrently with the growth in poverty rates in certain areas and communities. However, charitable work must play an active role in poverty alleviation rather than the present role of intermediary between the donor and beneficiary. It is possible to develop the work of these organizations from that of providing relief and charity to a specific developmental strategy.

This study has attempted to provide an accurate profile of PNGOs to contribute to the debate on the role and future prospects of this sector. The database provided will enhance knowledge about this sector and allow for the formulation of appropriate policies aimed at organizing its work in order to develop both Palestinian civil society and the entire Palestinian community.

It must be admitted that the study leaves some gaps that need to be addressed in future studies. For example, the study does not cover good governance, the quality of services provided or networking. The data collected indicate the need for more in-depth studies of active PNGOs, charitable societies, youth and sport clubs as essential constituents of Palestinian civil society. Successful NGO experiences should also be evaluated, in addition to the experiences of those that were unable to survive, in order to draw useful lessons in this regard.