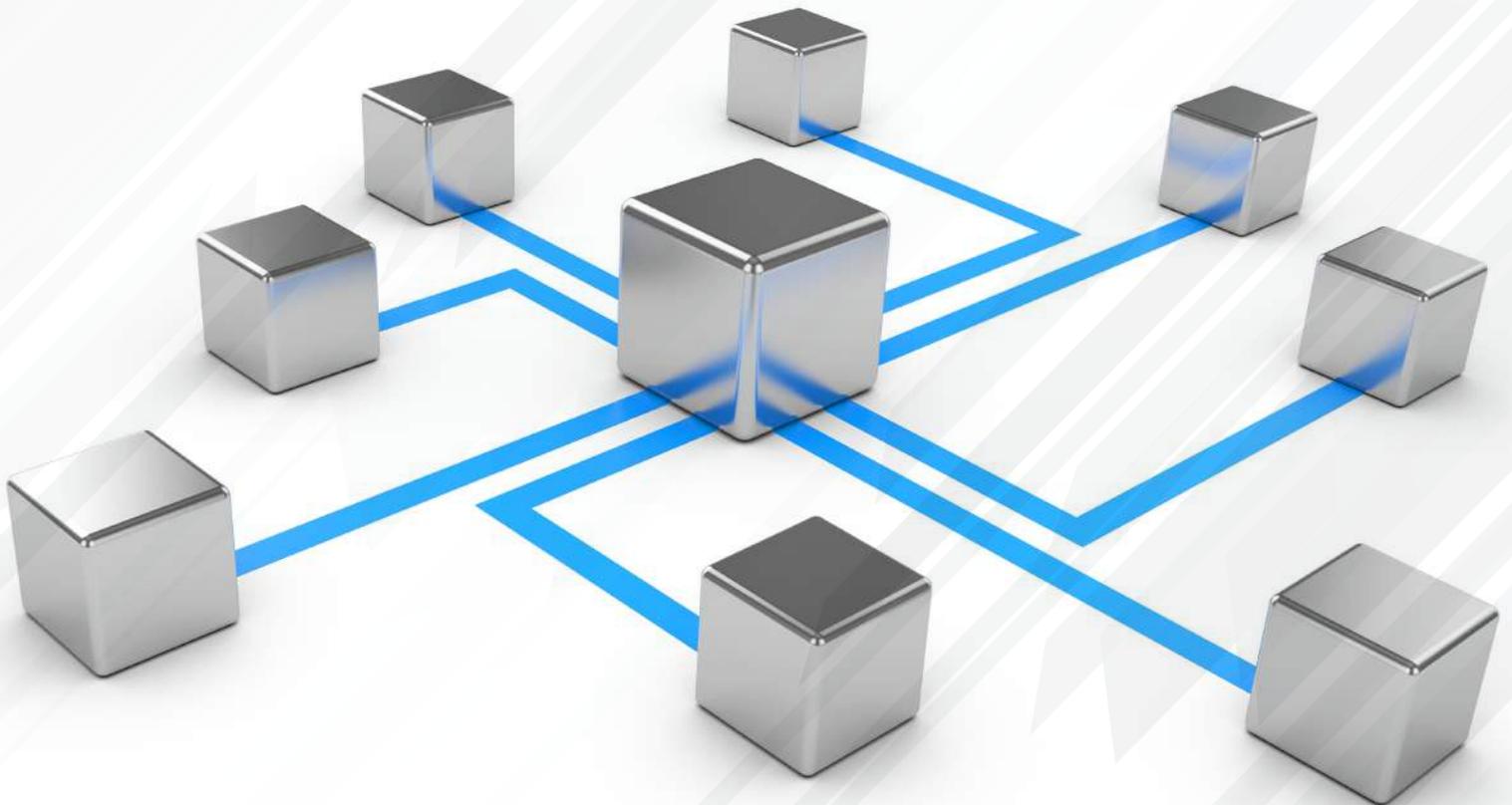


# Networking in the Arab Region

## CSO Networks in the Arab Region

### «Opportunities and Challenges»



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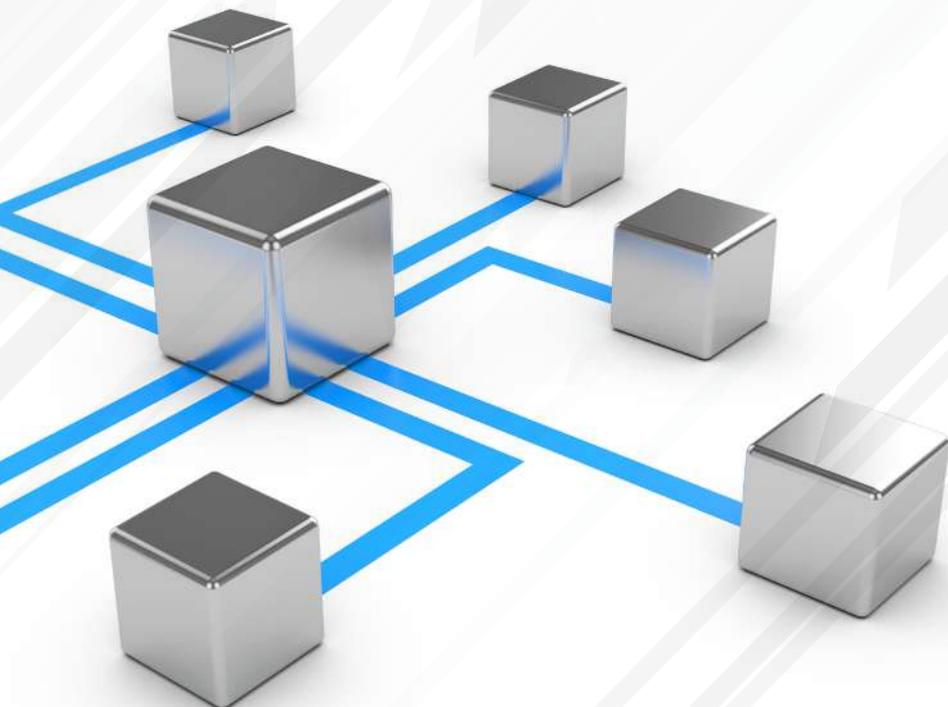
# **Networking in the Arab Region**

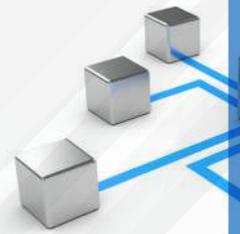
## CSO Networks in the Arab Region

### **«Opportunities and Challenges»**

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Dr. Faouzi Boukhriss





## Research Background

This research paper on networking in the Arab region comes in the context of dialogues organized by ANND members and partners on the various challenges faced by Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in the Arab region at the national level. It covers the presented alternatives and civil society's role in dialogue with public policymakers and developing action plans for future advocacy initiatives.

## Research General Goal

This paper seeks to monitor the reality of networking in the Arab Region and its opportunities and challenges. It hopes to provide accurate scientific information on the challenges facing civil society networking in the Arab region and possible advantages and opportunities. It also aspires to provide civil society actors and external parties with pertinent data on the various dimensions of networking in the region. It aims to help them understand actual challenges faced by the sector in recent years, provide awareness on the impact of crises on its work, and explore solutions to mitigate future risks.

## Plan and Methodology

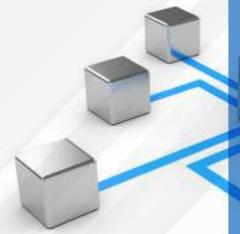
The paper addresses the reality of networking in the Arab region, focusing on specific countries and examples. The research strategy in this paper focuses on case studies, heavily employed in the social sciences as an empirical strategy allowing the study of actual phenomena based on background research. As its name indicates, this strategy allows the combination of a holistic view of

the reality of networking that includes the Arab region as a whole and an outlook that focuses on studying several cases (Tunisia - Palestine - Morocco). It could be helpful to deepen our understanding of some aspects of the reality of networking.

The paper takes into account the diverse aspects of networking in the region, regardless of their limitations, by including various types of networks, based on geographical scope (local, national, regional), temporal scope (permanent, temporary), thematic focus (comprehensive, sectoral [environmental, human rights, women]), or degree of structuring (structured, unstructured). It also considers organizational particularities and guiding principles (project, objectives, mission, vision). Networks are not necessarily organized in the same manner, as they respond in principle to specific and different problems faced by their constituent CSOs.

A methodological set is employed that combines the quantitative and qualitative approach, in particular content analysis (documents related to the topic, whether issued by CSOs [testimonies, reports, studies] or official bodies), targeted interviews (with CSO actors and experts in the Arab region<sup>1</sup>), and statistical analysis of data related to the topic issued by official and civil authorities or collected from the field through a survey.

As is the case here, the combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches is a source of enrichment, a path towards the universality of the approach, and a tool for bridging gaps and achieving integration between different points of view. Results obtained by adopting different methodologies in studying the same topic



are more credible and convincing.<sup>2</sup>

As much as possible, the paper attempts to address the research problem by adopting a back-and-forth debate between the theoretical constructions produced on the topic of networks and networking and field research with an exploratory tendency.

## Research Problem

This paper addresses civil society networks in the Arab region through an overview of the reality of networking in the region and the opportunities and challenges it poses. The central question addressed in the paper can be formulated as follows:

What is the reality of CSO networking in the Arab region? Its most significant opportunities and main challenges?

This broad and complex central question must be deconstructed into its basic sub-questions, expressed as follows:

1. What are CSO networks? What does networking mean?
2. What is the importance of networks and networking? Do they need to be strengthened?
3. What is the reality of the networking situation in the Arab region in general?
4. What is the position of CSOs on networking at the national and regional levels? How do they see the advantages and disadvantages of this networking?
5. How do CSOs generally engage in networks? (Traditional and contemporary methods)

6. What is the role of national dialogues in enhancing participation and cooperation at the national level and in the promotion of networking?

7. What are the main factors (internal and external) that hinder networking at the national and regional levels?

8. What are the positive lessons and practices learned from previous networking experiences?

Research Themes:

The themes of the research paper are consistent with the guiding questions presented in the project background document. They are divided as follows:

- I. Networks and networking: Definitions and Terminology
- II. Networks and networking: Justification, Relevance, and Necessity
- III. CSOs in the Arab Region and Networking: The Reality of the Situation
- IV. CSOs in the Arab Region, Building and Engaging in Networks: Motives and Limitations
- V. Networking in the Arab Region: Lessons Learned and Good Practices
- VI. Networking in the Arab region and enhancing the basic capabilities and competencies of civil associations and actors.
- VII. Networking in the Arab Region: Organization, Basic Values, and Governance.



## Networks and networking: Definitions and Terminology

The word network has been in use for a long time for a variety of reasons, from fishing nets to any netlike arrangement of threads or “anything formed in the manner of or presenting the appearance of a net or netting” to its use to refer to transport routes in the 19th century and to an interconnected group of people in psychological jargon in the 1930s.<sup>3</sup>

Along with its old uses, new uses appeared a few decades ago, popularized by the development of modern information systems and means of communication. The term also refers to complex groups of virtual transportation methods, such as the telephone network. Today, it refers to the Internet, “the network of networks,” including so-called social networks.<sup>4</sup>

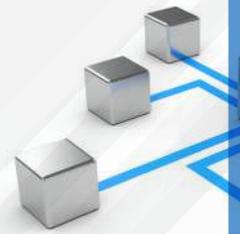
The extensive use of the word “network” and in various contexts is notable. Beyond physical networks, the term has organizational uses associated with strong collective representations (resistance networks, mafia networks). The word “network” also traditionally belongs to the science of electronic engineering to denote “a communication system linking a group of elements through electronic means.” However, it has recently been used in various fields, hence the emergence of network enterprise, network society, earth networks, local exchange networks, and CSO networks.<sup>5</sup>

As Manuel Castells emphasized, “[the] study of social structures that arise in the various

fields of human activity and experience reveals that the functions and processes of the era of information and communication technologies are organized in the form of networks.”<sup>6</sup> Today, networks constitute the new social morphology of our societies. To a large extent, the spread of networking logic largely determines the process of production, experience, power, and culture.

While social organization in the form of networks had existed in other times and places, today’s new ICTs paradigm provides the material foundations for the spread of networking logic in all components of the social structure: in the networked enterprise, networked work, the networked state, and, likewise, in an NGO or associative network. The network is an essential feature of society in the age of information, leading to the networked society.

According to Manuel Castells, a network can be defined as a set of interconnected nodes. The nature of the node depends on the type of network it belongs to. In the network of global financial flows, the nodes are made up of value exchanges and their subsidiaries. The broad network of new media is made up of television channels, variety studios, teams of journalists, and mobile technology units that produce, transmit and receive signals. From the perspective of social sciences, the social network can be defined as an organization consisting of social units and their mutual relationships established through channels that vary in length or extent. These social units can be made up of organized or unorganized individuals or groups of individuals, such as associations,



enterprises, and even countries. Relationships between elements refer to social interaction forms that may have very distinct natures. A network might relate to cash transactions, transfer of goods/products, exchange of services, transfer of information, physical contact (from a handshake to a sexual relationship), and all types of verbal or non-verbal interactions in general.<sup>7</sup>

Like any organization, the network is “a technical tool to mobilize human energies and direct them towards specific goals,” with what this implies in terms of the cooperation between individuals, distribution of roles and tasks, and the rational coordination of activities.

NGO networks consist of various nodes or elements that may have different natures: NGOs, individuals, or both.

In simple terms, an NGO network is “a coalition of NGOs or individuals working in them, based on mobilizing common capacities and resources to support the positions of its constituents, develop their capacities, and increase their external influence. It aims to achieve common goals and public interests while preserving the independence of individual members.”<sup>8</sup> As researcher Eric Lotterier explains, an NGO network is based on integrating its members into the whole and their independence as parts. Thus belonging to an NGO network becomes a means of living individually and independently.<sup>9</sup>

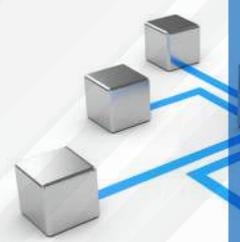
In the CSO field, a network may refer to the simplest and smallest organizational unit.

It may also refer to the most complex and largest organizational entity imaginable. An association is a network by force, made up of a group of people for a specific purpose (not for profit). A national association with many branches is a network. Likewise, a coalition or alliance between several organizational units, aiming to achieve goals that exceed their individual capabilities, is also a network.

Perhaps this is what the researcher Bernard Enjolras meant when he distinguished between organizations with a formal structure, and organizational systems, complex formations of organizations, which might include several organizational forms, agreements, or contracts, and aim to control and codify interactions and conflicts between organizations and actors.<sup>10</sup> CSO networks exist within this context. NGOs are formally structured organizational forms, while NGOs networks are organizational systems of complex combinations of organizations.

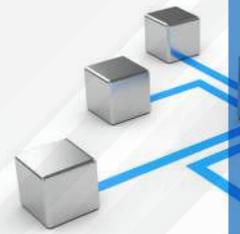
NGO network can also be defined negatively by indicating that it is not just a gathering of individuals or a team supervising a project. Its life span is generally not linked to the completion of a specific project. Networks are also different from other organizations, such as associations or NGOs, committees, or working groups, which have their peculiarities and goals.<sup>11</sup>

NGO networks are not merely a subject for description and analysis. They are a lived reality that revolves around a common goal, a set of values and partners, a project, and a timeline.<sup>12</sup>



In general, networking means forming a network of organizations, individuals, or facilities to achieve common goals.<sup>13</sup> Networking takes different forms and has different designations from one community experience to another. In terms of terminology, this paper tried to avoid overwhelmingly local conventions and those relating to specific national contexts. It adopted a more common terminology among NGO actors in the Arab region. In this regard, several terms are used to denote the process of networking, cooperation, and coordination between NGOs, the most prominent of which are the concepts of networking, union, coalition, or alliance.





## Networks and networking: Justification, Relevance, and Necessity

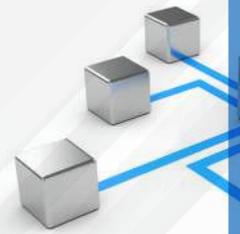
It is no longer possible to envision life in contemporary society without a minimum of organization.<sup>14</sup> Individuals and groups cannot meet their own needs by themselves. Due to limited resources and capacities, they are driven to belong to an organization or, rather, many organizations. Given the importance of organizations in our lives, some link the degree of society's development to the diversity of its organizations, linkages, and complexity.<sup>15</sup>

Organizations, including networks, are not "natural" phenomena that arise automatically and continue to exist independently. They are artificial constructs, always distinct solutions, created by relatively independent actors. They use their own resources and capabilities to solve problems presented to them, especially the fundamental question of cooperation to achieve common goals, regardless of orientation.<sup>16</sup>

Adopting a network-like organization (working in a network) is not an end in itself. Instead, it aims in principle to meet a need that cannot be met or is challenging to meet by other forms of organizing due to the limited resources of individual organizations and the complexity of the situations they face.<sup>17</sup> The more dispersed and isolated the NGOs, the smaller their weight and the softer their voice. Unhealthy competition prevails instead of cooperation, coordination, and solidarity. Networking, on the opposite,

does not threaten member organizations' identity or culture. It allows them to enhance their independence vis-a-vis other stronger civil organizations and interference by the authorities and donors, as much as it allows them to achieve a set of benefits and gains. The importance of networks and networking lies in the advantages and benefits they achieve for involved NGOs, which often exceed the declared objectives of the joint work framework.<sup>18</sup> Considerations governing the utilization of networking in various civic fields by NGOs in Arab countries seem not to deviate from the following:

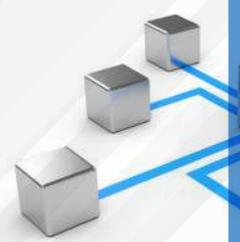
- Cooperation to collectively achieve what a single organization cannot accomplish
- Improved awareness of reality and its challenges by combining more than one point of view
- More effective action and better intervention
- Rational division of work by distributing tasks, burdens, and responsibilities among all member CSOs
- Exchange of ideas, opinions, competencies, qualifications, and experiences, and thus benefiting from the diversity of member expertise and capabilities
- Creating a sense of solidarity and helping develop the concept of team and volunteer work
- Mobilizing financial resources<sup>19</sup>
- Facilitating access to resources, information, and means
- Representing the interests of member organizations and target groups in their



- activities, and thus representing the most significant number of individuals and groups
- Strengthening members skills and capabilities and empowering them by raising their awareness, especially in small and newly established organizations
  - Consolidating efforts and discourses and increasing the ability to pressure and influence decision-makers while preserving independence<sup>20</sup>
  - Reducing harmful competition between CSOs and enhancing cooperation and teamwork to tackle challenges
  - Strengthening CSOs' negotiating position with decision-makers and public policymakers
  - Accumulating, compiling, and sharing experiences and expertise
  - Reaching a more significant segment of beneficiaries
  - Investing in the human and material potential of partner institutions within the network

In general, awareness of the value of networking varies among CSOs in the Arab region, both between organizations and within organizations. Some NGOs are aware of the strategic importance of networking and operate within networks, especially CSOs with a strong community presence. As time passes, more CSOs seek to network despite subjective and objective difficulties due to increasing pressures and challenges (political, economic, and environmental). However, some CSOs are unaware of the importance of networking and treat the issue in a functional and instrumental manner.





## CSOs in the Arab Region and Networking: The Reality of the Situation

Despite the lack of accurate statistics regarding networking in the Arab region, available data indicates that it takes different forms and functions at different levels from one society to another.

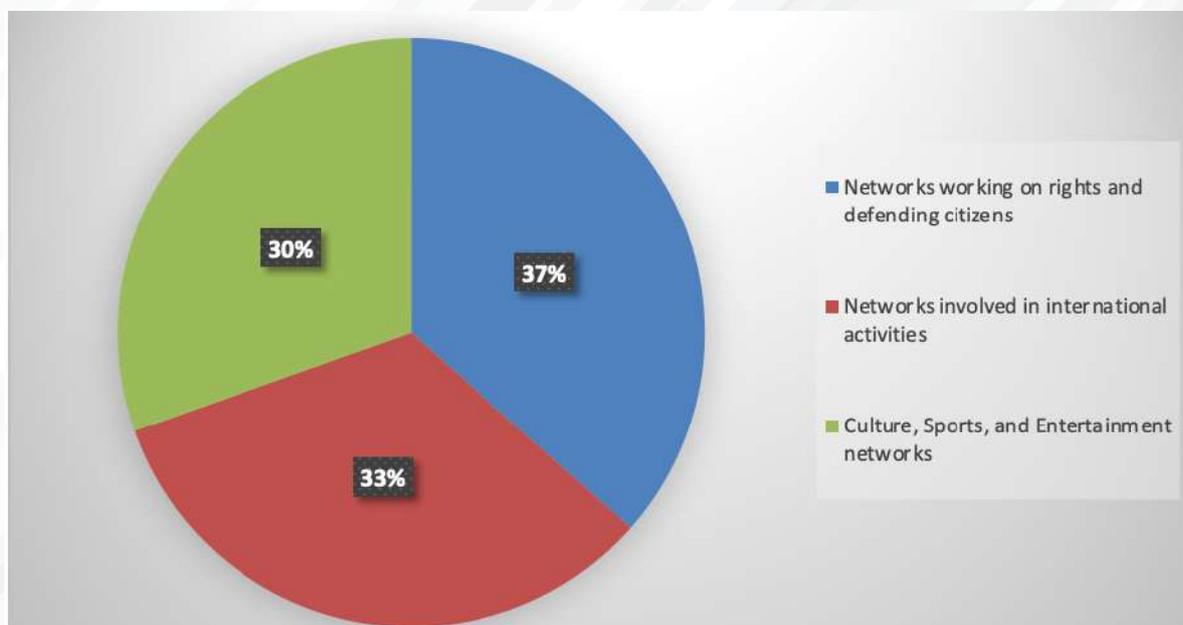
The past few decades have been marked by a clear tendency towards NGO networking. Several networks were formed, some were regional with holistic aims (such as the Arab NGO Network for Development), and some were sectoral or regional (such as AISHA, the Arab Network for Environment and Development, the Euro-Mediterranean CSO Forum, the Maghreb Coordination for Human Rights). Other networks had a national character (such as the Espace Associatif in Morocco, the Palestinian NGO Network, and the Lebanese Gathering of Civil Associations). Finally, some networks combined the national and sectoral orientation, and others were purely local.

An analytical survey of CSOs in the Occupied Palestinian Territories showed a new tendency among grassroots NGOs to participate in networks and alliances. In the Gaza Strip, only 15% of organizations participating in the survey had not been members of any network. Most CSOs participate in local and sectoral networks (such as the community-based rehabilitation network, the child protection network, the cooperative development network, local grassroots organizations networks), in addition to networks related to funding

sources (such as the International Disability Alliance). Other organizations were part of national federations of grassroots organizations (such as the Farmers' Union and the Cultural Centers Union).<sup>21</sup>

Without a doubt, the Palestinian situation largely explains the trend towards CSO networks. **Democracy-building and human rights protection efforts face a real threat, both by the occupation forces and the conflict between dominant political formations. Thus, joint NGO efforts in the framework of civil networks become vital in endeavors related to social justice, human rights, and democracy.**<sup>22</sup>

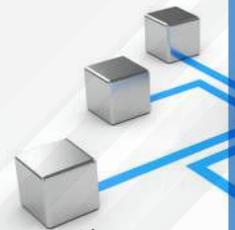
However, the Moroccan experience shows an opposite trend. The “National Survey of Associations (and Non-Profit Organizations) 2011” indicated that only a small percentage of associations belong to networks (21.9%). Most, or about 78.1% of the total, conducted their activities without being in a network of associations.<sup>23</sup> According to the survey, the highest percentage of associations (about 40.6%) belonged to networks “working on rights, defending citizens and consumers, and politics” They are followed by the 36.7% of associations working in the field of “international activities,” and then “culture, sports, and entertainment” associations with 33.8%. **The data demonstrates that networking is utilized more in the field of advocacy than in the areas of providing services, such as entertainment or culture.**



The table below represents the Associations Part of Networks in Morocco by Field of Intervention

Field/Sector	Total Organizations	Organizations in Networks	
		No.	%
Culture, Sports, and Entertainment	12134	4104	33.8
Education and Research	3814	786	20.6
Health, Social Services, Charity	8038	1816	22.6
Environment	1468	254	27.5
Development and Housing	15741	1995	12.7
Rights, Citizen and Consumer Protection, and Politics	871	354	40.6
Debt	598	20	3.3
Economic and Professional Associations	2077	445	21.4
International Activities	30	11	36.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>44771</b>	<b>9785</b>	<b>21.9</b>

Source: National Survey on Associations, Supreme Planning Commission, Morocco, 2011.



In Palestine, the analysis above provided by Costantini et al. showed a contrast between participation in these networks and the tendency of grassroots organizations to focus on service delivery.<sup>24</sup>

In a study on CSOs in Morocco in the framework of the CIVICUS Civil Society Index project in 2010, the respondents (from a sample of 200 associations and organizations) indicated that there are about a hundred different organizational structures in the field of networking in Morocco, including networks, coordination, federations, unions, or leagues. The predominant form is the network, followed by federations, then unions, then leagues.<sup>25</sup>

In comparison with networks (or coordination entities), the other forms are more organized and structured. In terms of themes, the most frequently discussed fields are networks or coordination groups centered around specific areas or territories and local development.<sup>26</sup> They are also present in education and culture, childhood and youth, health, and sports.

The weak networking culture of NGOs in Morocco extends to the future. CIVICUS research revealed future trends indicating that only 18.9% of these organizations consider joining a federation or a network, such as openness to funding, domestic (35.4%) or international (34.1%).

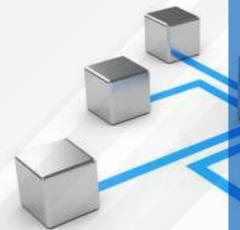
The above is confirmed by the adopted initiatives to improve their performance. Only 3.9% of associations believe in cooperation with other associations and belonging to a network, compared to 28.2% seeking to own a headquarters and 45.6% seeking funds and resources.<sup>27</sup>

In terms of themes and fields of intervention, the most prominent structures are networks or coordination entities centered around certain areas or specific territories, followed by those working on specific issues (such as local development, consumer protection, right to health, camping).

In addition to networking on the national level, CSOs in Palestine, Morocco, and several other countries in the Arab region established links with well-known and active regional and international networks. Many civil society activists from the region are in the leadership of such organization, including the World Social Forum, the International Federation of Human Rights, ANND, Social Watch, the Euro-Med Human Rights Network, the Peoples' Health Movement, the Euro-Mediterranean Forum for Civil Society Organizations, the International Forum for National Civil Society, and the Maghreb Coordination for Human Rights.

Obstacles generally leading to weak networking culture among NGOs in the Arab region include the following:

- Partner organizations lack faith in the importance of networking, so the process is not taken seriously.
- Lack of clarity in direction and the absence of a road map could lead member organizations to be lost along the way.
- There appears a lack of trust between partners (especially between older and younger NGOs) and their weak willingness to participate in the building and management process, particularly in networks with a closed member requiring the approval of old members.<sup>28</sup>
- Leadership struggles.
- Partners' knowledge and experience,



especially when analyzing problems, setting common goals, and providing and mobilizing resources (material and intangible).

- Lack of financial resources (to employ permanent and secretarial staff or purchase equipment, for example).
- Weak internal governance and democracy.

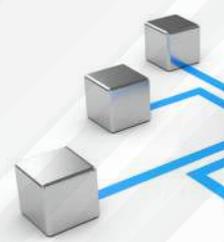
## Case Study: Tunisia

The transformation witnessed in Tunisia had a positive impact on civil society. It manifested prominently in creating a legal and institutional environment that allows civil society to develop and encourages networking. Networks were set up among associations that share the same goals. One example is the «Coalition for Tunisian Women» network, established in 2012, which seeks to constitutionalize women's rights and defend and develop their gains. Another is the «Reunification» network, established in 2011 and devoted to human rights and equality between women and men, achieving a civil state, separation of religion and state, and respecting freedom of belief and conscience. Single-issue networks also emerged, such as the National Coalition Against the Death Penalty, established in 2007. Other networks took the form of local coalitions focusing on the management of local affairs, as is the case with the «Madinati Associations in Menzel Bourguiba,» the Ben Guerdane City Associations, or the Coalition of Associations for the Oases, which was established in 2011.

Networking does not always take the form of legal entities around an alliance or networks. It may take a more natural form, especially in dealing with issues imposed by public affairs. An example is election monitoring. Associations specialized in elections on the national level were joined by local associations that did not necessarily work in the electoral field. They were involved by virtue of proximity and ease of communication with those targeted by the electoral process. Some examples include the Tunisian Women Voters Association's work with local associations such as the Tala Solidarity Association, the Mwatana Association, the Freedom Association in Djerba, and other associations in the cities of Nabeul and Bizerte.

In general, although networks in Tunisia are often circumstantial and dictated by the general context of social developments. Little thought is given to their institutionalization and ensuring their sustainability. However, networking experiences in Tunisia revealed the close connection between the questions of civil society and democracy. If democracy is related to the effectiveness of citizen activity, then civil society can only play its role within a democratic state. Its development is both a manifestation of democracy and a tool for democratizing the political system and strengthening the state of rights. One such example is the Tunisian Alliance for the Rule of Law, which seeks to support democratic participation and strengthen citizens' consensus on constitutional rights. It also aims to create formal and informal dialogue spaces to deepen the national dialogue on constitutional issues focusing on remote rural areas. At the same time, it aims to contribute to building organizational capacities and individual and collective skills for the target groups and members of partner and local associations. Another example refers to national dialogues among CSOs, leading to the Quartet, which sponsored the national dialogue and won the Nobel Peace Prize. It consisted of the Tunisian General Labor Union, the Bar Association, the Tunisian League for the Defense of Human Rights, and the Union of Industry and Trade.

The situation in Tunisia today is akin to that when the concept of civil society took on a new context in Eastern Europe in the 1980s, strongly linked to the delegitimization of political tyranny and adopting democratic transition processes.



## CSOs in the Arab Region, Building and Engaging in Networks: Motives and Limitations

Not a single perception of networking in the Arab region, no matter how advanced, can constitute a ready-made recipe for building networks simply because there is no “one best way” to form networks. The condition for success always requires creativity and understanding the particularities of each case.

**CSO networks in the Arab region were not necessarily formed or organized in the same manner. Each of those networks emerged in a specific context to respond to specific problems faced by the constituent organizations.**

However, the various experiences of building and managing the engagement process can constitute an appropriate entry point for understanding networking.

NGO experiences in the Arab region have shown that when associations are far from each other, it becomes challenging to meet, and decisions tend to be restricted to a few people or only one person. Thus, the decisions are not representative of the group as a whole. When members feel they are not well represented in the network, they tend to withdraw. On the contrary, as researcher Catherine Flament asserts, when members engage in close (and not identical, so that competition does not occur) activities and have common interests and issues, it becomes easy for the network to deal with problems effectively.<sup>29</sup> On the contrary, when interests diverge, it becomes a problem of reconciling the varying positions with the

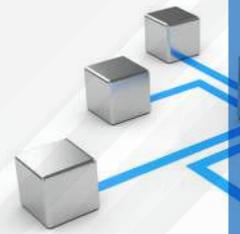
general position of the network. Members tend not to participate actively in the functioning of a network, except when its goals are in line with theirs.

Building networks generally requires the availability of essential resources, including links between the actors, which helps establish the network and its continuity. The positions and principles guiding the network’s activities, its associated leadership and decision-making bodies, and, finally, its material pillars (financial, human, logistical) are next.<sup>30</sup>

**Building requires a democratic approach, a degree of professionalism and experience, and the awareness that networks are not established in one day. They are a collective learning process. The networking process is more important than the network itself, meaning the network’s formal structures.**

Prerequisites to networking include:

- Analyzing common problems faced by concerned NGOs; setting goals and a general feasibility study.
- Identifying the means to be used and the actions to be taken.
- Planning the business model and distributing the roles accordingly, based on the principle of participation and sharing (not top-down), so that everyone contributes to expressing their views and vision regarding all relevant matters.
- Animating a network must also be based on flexible management and the ability to adapt with time and changes in surrounding conditions.
- Avoiding conflict of interest between the purpose of the network and the goals of each member organization.



## Case Study: Morocco

As in most Arab countries, CSO networking in Morocco is a recent phenomenon, which started less than 50 years ago. It did not develop or take root due to the weak civil work culture. Despite some notable exceptions (human rights, the rights of women, children, and the disabled, development, and the environment), the concept of networking did not spread to all areas of civil action.

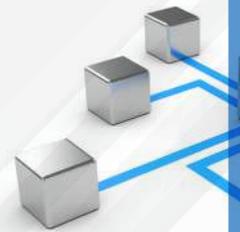
In Morocco and the Arab world in general, some networks appeared for objective reasons due to awareness spread by other CSOs. Sometimes, by request or guidance from donors and partners, associations are encouraged to unite in networks. An example of a network emerging under the guidance of international donors has been the network to supply Moroccan villages with drinking water. Similarly, when the Ministry of Youth and Sports decided to organize camps, it helped create the Union of Camp Associations, consisting of 6 large organizations (with a sizable number of chapters) working in camping. It aimed to facilitate annual camp management through dialogue with the concerned ministry.

However, some networks formed for specific reasons, such as defending women's and human rights. In this context, the network exists through members' voluntary and conscious participation as a primary determinant.

The experience of CSO networking indicates the presence of functional and strategic dimensions. Functional dimensions appear when individuals involved in networking aim to achieve some shared material benefit, such as the need to conglomerate to receive financing (for example, to supply drinking water), without necessarily sharing the same ideas or interests. The strategic dimension is when the functional is overlooked in favor of a long-term shared vision. In this regard, at least two environmental networks can be mentioned: the Moroccan Coalition for Climate and Sustainable Development and the Coalition for Climate Justice. Networks of human rights organizations are also strategic, mainly when they focus on building a democratic society and human rights and believe in the need for concerted efforts to promote public policies in line with human rights principles in the constitution and international conventions.

The clear difference between the two dimensions is that the benefits are few in the strategic dimension, but the shared vision is solid. Furthermore, institutions based on the functional dimension are temporary and usually fold after the job is done. Strategic institutions, however, exist for a long time. They pass through stumbling blocks and pauses but soon take another form to get back together.

It is also possible for institutions based on functionality to shift to the strategic dimension. One example is the "Rabih al-Karama [Spring of Dignity]" network, which aimed to reform the Personal Status Code. Once the primary task of disrupting Morocco's legal and organizational structure and the issuance of the Family Code was completed, the network practically ended, but the strategic horizon for equality remained. Following the 2011 constitution, the network adopted the name "Spring of Equality" and a new outlook, which continues today.



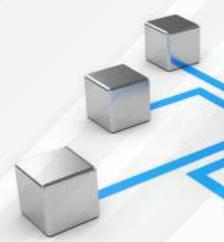
Networking should not be based merely on sharing the same positions but also on sharing the same benefits, expectations, and goals, including transferring or strengthening capacities, exchanging experiences, and exercising influence. In this context, two prime examples are L'Espace Associatif and the Carrefour Forum, a network of 8 major associations (the most prominent is the Moroccan Association for Solidarity and Development - AMSED).

Networking in Morocco could have stemmed from national associations creating internal networks as they expand to cover various regions in the country. Following the creation of the central association, the objective need to establish branches appears. The network expands and contracts according to circumstances. An example is the largest and most active human rights association in Morocco (Moroccan Association for Human Rights), with around 99 branches distributed throughout the country's regions.

Morocco also lacks an organized legal framework for all kinds of networks in their diversity and complexity. However, some legal and regulatory frameworks exist, such as the Network of Microcredit Associations, made up of organizations specialized exclusively in microcredit and organized within the Federation of Microcredit Associations. Chapter 14 of the Associations Law (07/09 of 2009) stipulates that “[associations] may establish their own unions or groupings, through a permit submitted per methods stipulated for the establishment of associations. (Chapter 5) and includes the names of associations making up the federations or assemblies, their objectives, and their headquarters. The same methods shall apply to new societies, federations, or assemblies joining them. The same system applied on unions and assemblies shall apply on associations.”

However, if the network does not intend to become an association, it needs to file papers with the authorities. When CSOs meet to agree on establishing a network, each organization selects one or more coordinators and picks its representatives to consultation meetings within the network. Thus, a network is created without the need to present any regulatory documents to the authorities. However, internal regulatory documents are prepared (charter, internal law, roadmap) and it is organized according to internal organizational rules that are not necessarily submitted to the authorities.

A prominent experience in Morocco involved the networks formed to defend women's rights to political participation and increase their representation in elected councils. These networks had many achievements and developed steadily over the last twenty years thanks to women, human rights organizations, and civil movements. It was able to raise the women's quota in parliament and the territorial communities. Another example is Espace Associatif, an association made up of various components of the association movement in Morocco, which succeeded in amending the Law of Associations in 2002.



## Networking in the Arab Region: Lessons Learned and Good Practices

Without a doubt, the analysis of pioneering networking experiences in the Arab region provides an opportunity for contemplation and drawing lessons. However, as previously mentioned, **the condition for networking success cannot be based on ready-made prescriptions, no matter how effective they seem. Success requires creativity and understanding the local context.** In addition to getting acquainted with pioneering local experiences and the theoretical foundations of networking, it is essential to present a picture of the optimal practical experiences and applications in this field. It is based on lessons from international experiences and their local application and adaptation.

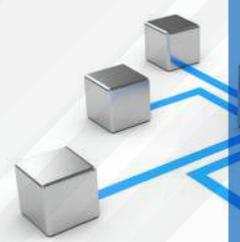
NGO networks serve as spaces for various organizations and civic actors to meet and exchange, regardless of their different orientations, experiences, resources, and competencies. However, the logic of “networking” often conceals the hegemonic tendencies of some associations, where “big” organizations benefit from the process first and foremost, while the rest of the “small” and emerging organizations follow without actual participation. Networks may reduce representation to a limited class of influential and capable NGOs and, at times, might be dominated by external actors. Thus, **the success of the network’s organizational experience depends on adopting flexible, horizontal, and agreed-upon organizational mechanisms by all member organizations in a manner that guarantees equality, mutual interest, and mutual recognition and appreciation.**<sup>31</sup>

The Moroccan Coalition of Human Rights Associations is considered a successful networking experience in the country. Established in February 2011, the network of 23 human rights organizations is now more than 10 years old. However, why hasn’t the decade-old coalition imposed itself in the arena? What impact does it have on member associations? What were its effects on human rights policy in Morocco in terms of suggestions, pressure, and follow-up? What was its contribution to human rights intellectual production in the country?

According to the testimony of actors who had followed the experience closely, the outcome was negative, except perhaps in issuing statements. However, even at this level, there seems to be a notable decline in performance since the beginning of COVID-19. The coalition did not issue any positions on the subject.

These characteristics in terms of functional performance cannot be separated from organizational difficulties. The Coalition, like most networks in Morocco and the Arab region, lacks material resources, especially human resources dedicated to the network. It does not have even a single employee to help manage its affairs and facilitate coordination among members, relying on a volunteer coordinator. It manages its affairs thanks to the support of the incubating association (the Moroccan Association for Human Rights), which provides necessary logistical resources.

Among the lessons learned from the various observed networking experiences is that **well-functioning networks include NGOs that are not far from each other in terms**



**of interests, field of intervention, and specialization.** When organizations are distant, it becomes challenging to meet, and decisions tend to be restricted to a few people or only one person. Thus, the decisions are not representative of the group as a whole. When members feel they are not well represented in the network, they tend to withdraw. On the contrary, as Flament asserts, when members engage in close (and not identical, so that competition does not occur) activities and have common interests and issues, it becomes easy for the network to deal with problems effectively.

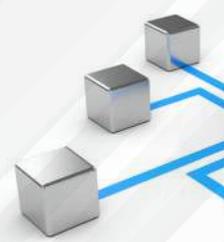
**Another lesson learned involves the need to document and record experiences.** On the one hand, preserving the history of the networking process and protecting its memory from damage and loss is vital. The process also allows developing identity, self-awareness, and present distinctions, through an extended awareness of the past. However, documentation is also helpful in case of internal disputes and introducing the network to external parties.

Some of the main obstacles that prevent the success of networking experiments and their continuity include:

- Failing to share options, goals, and visions, which weakens opportunities for coalition and networking among the network's member organizations.<sup>32</sup>
- Blurring perception (divergence of unspoken interests).
- The absence of precise coordination mechanisms and spaces for dialogue.
- Giving priority to personal attitudes and interests within the network.
- The emergence of disputes about the conditions and mechanisms of joining

the group.

- Poor communication between group members.
- Weak leadership capabilities: the emergence of individual leaders, the emergence of small groups, and the difficulty of delegation.
- The increased cost of networking in terms of effort, resources, and time compared to the goals being achieved.
- The novelty and limitations of network organizations versus the complexity of objective reality and the difficulty of influencing the situation.
- Emphasizing the functional and instrumental dimension over the strategic dimension in the network's work.
- Exclusivity of decision-making and the network's containment.
- Legal recognition of networks and the resulting lack of funds.
- Linking the establishment of networks to personal will, not collective will stemming from the organizations' spirit, which makes these experiences disappear as soon as people leave or internal differences.
- The risk of dependency of some NGOs on others, mainly when resources and decisions are concentrated in the hands of one party within the network, creating a permanent need for its presence for other parties.



## Networking in the Arab region and enhancing the basic capabilities and competencies of civil associations and actors

Networking is not always a simple matter. Forming, managing, and maintaining networks usually requires time, effort, wit, and efficiency, which assumes that civil actors have unique capabilities and skills. However, networking presupposes more than the availability of a collective will among associations to confront problems and issues imposed by the political, economic, and social circumstances. It requires concerted efforts and mobilizing capacities and allies to achieve the desired goals.

However, **networking experiences in the Arab region reveal that the process is not merely attitudes, convictions, and values. Civil actors who believe in the project must also possess the needed skills and capacities** in communication, decision-making, negotiation, diplomacy, tact in dealing, time management, leading meetings, organization, planning, the ability to mobilize, and material and moral contribution to building the network. They must also believe in the values of difference and intellectual and political plurality, among the many competencies required to build, animate, and maintain such networks.

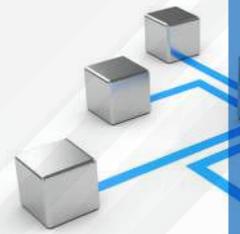
**Networking experiences, especially between associations, also reveal what Alex de Tocqueville called a tremendous instrument for social change.** Once its capacity is developed and performance improved, this tool can become more fruitful and capable of achieving its tasks (such as mobilization, proposals, lobbying and

advocacy, and establishing and operating projects).

In Morocco, the National Initiative for Human Development shed light on the widespread socio-economic vulnerability of regions, neighborhoods, and social groups. However, it also highlighted the fragility of associations. It revealed what Périer Florence had previously noted: the associative field is one of the least professionalized in the country.<sup>33</sup> Networking requires expertise and capacities beyond what those entailed in managing an association.

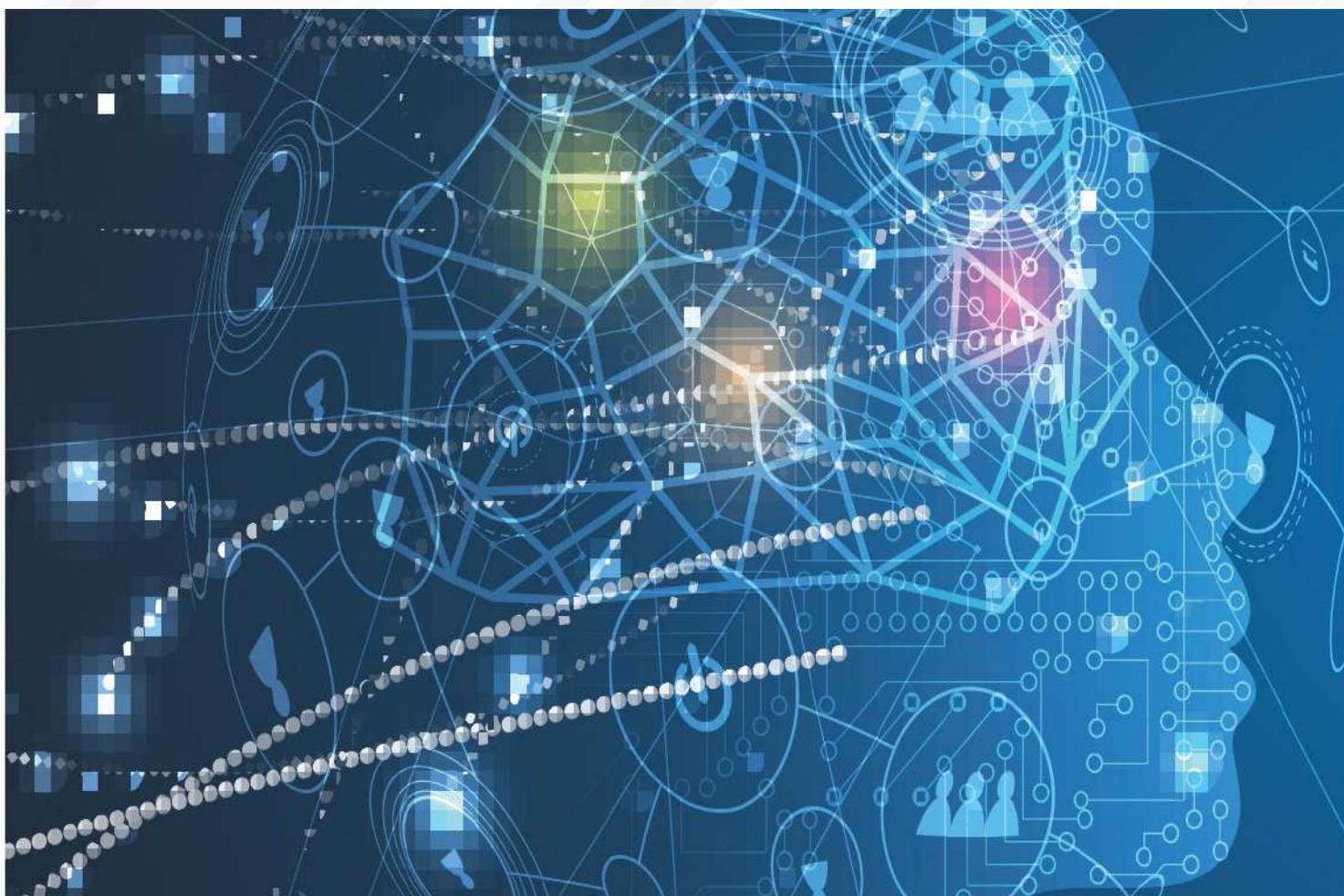
Given the quantitative and qualitative weakness of the networking culture of civil actors in general and the importance of strategic networking, the Ministry of Social Development felt the urgent need to support associations' capacities. It had previously supervised a program to rehabilitate associations, strengthen their capacities, and support "networking" associations. The Social Development Agency, entrusted by the Ministry of Social Development with the advancement of associations, proceeded in the same manner. It oversaw several programs directed to associations over the years, the most recent of which was the Irtiqa' program for rehabilitating associations, including networking, communications, coordination, and partnership between associations. It aimed to "create and promote a positive space for the automatic production of collective initiatives such as networking and creating regional expert pools."<sup>34</sup>

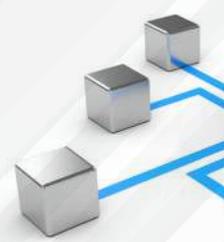
In Tunisia, the positive impact of transformations on civil society provided a legal and institutional environment for civil society development. It encouraged the



emergence of networking experiences between associations, by investing in strengthening CSO capacities, primarily through the Ifada Center affiliated with the Presidency of the Tunisian government, which encourages “associative networking.”

With the Moroccan and Tunisian experience and the rest of the Arab region, CSOs feel the need to enhance and strengthen their networking capacities. Together with their partners from national and international NGOs, they continue to show interest in upgrading their capacities and expertise in network building and management.





## Networking in the Arab Region: Organization, Basic Values, and Governance

Networks are complex entities, which take multiple forms and refer to structures of multiple sizes. Their scope cannot be divorced from their goals and missions. Their membership ranges from less than 10 to a few dozen to 90 organizations.<sup>35</sup> Sometimes, it is much more, like in some official or semi-official networks (such as the Arab Network for NGOs).<sup>36</sup>

The extent or size of a network as a set of relations between individuals or organizations does not know definite limits. In theory, networks can be infinite. According to Claude Levi Strauss, as a network of networks, society is formed of individuals and groups communicating together to an unlimited extent, because communication between its components does not stop at the borders of society, as it includes the planet as a whole.<sup>37</sup>

In the case of large networks, experience shows that it is difficult to define a common goal. It is even more challenging to control interactions between members.<sup>38</sup> Due to the different aspirations of members, they become difficult to reconcile with the network's general outlook. Conflicts become challenging to manage, and the network then turns from a means to achieve goals into an obstacle.

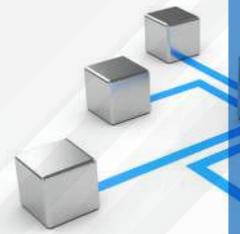
Thus, in the case of many organizations wishing to form a network, it might sometimes be more fruitful to establish more than one, to avoid the added burden.

**Successful networking experiences in**

**the region also indicate that it is easier to strengthen and consolidate existing old networks rather than build entirely new ones.** It is also possible for networks to expand, within reasonable limits, after an initial stage of successful work and formative experience.

As for the minimum number of organizations that can form a network, social sciences may provide a valuable lesson. George Simmel, for example, believes that, from a methodological point of view, the simplest sociological form is the relationship between two elements. It is the primary relational unit. However, researcher Michel Forsé believes that this bilateral relationship has a particular character, which prevents us from making it an “atom” for analyzing social networks, given that it “relates to the pure individuality of each of its elements.” In other words, if one of the two components disappears or stops, the existing relationship would follow suit. The relationship remains imprinted with what Simmel calls “the intimate character of the relations between the two.” Consequently, the binary relationship between two elements cannot constitute a unit higher than its individual elements, logically and sociologically.

S. Nadel, however, considers that the term network does not merely refer to its individual elements and the links existing between them. Instead, it expresses a relationship between the links themselves, meaning that the bilateral relationship constitutes a level of observation that makes it impossible to analyze the relationships between the links. Thus, this relationship cannot constitute the basic unit to analyze social networks.<sup>39</sup>



However, as soon as relations between the three elements are established, they acquire an impersonal dimension. The group could remain, even if one of its elements withdraws. Thus, the organizational form consisting of three elements is not merely the sum of its three components. In this case, logic is no longer additive but combinational. It opens the possibility of looking at alliance and mediation strategies and goes beyond relationships and ties. The relationship between three elements, therefore, could be considered the smallest conceivable network. **Small-sized networks are characterized by organizational structures with solid links, especially when they are direct and face-to-face. Conversely, institutional links in networks tend to be weak when communication is poor, indirect, or in one direction.**<sup>40</sup>

Values shared by individuals guarantee the unity and cohesion of social organizations. Organizational cohesion in a network may be measured by the strength of the values that unite its members. As collective preferences and supreme examples, values are fundamental in driving and directing behavior and individual and collective social action while underpinning solidarity among members.

One such example was the advocacy experiment led by a group of NGO networks (Espace Associatif, AMSED, and the Forum of Associations) in Morocco in 2007. It emphasized fundamental civic values concerning the Ministry of Social Development, Family, and Solidarity and the collective national debate on values and ethics of associative work. It led to a

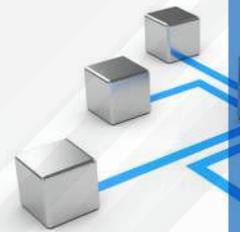
Code of Ethics for Associations, inspired by international standards.<sup>41</sup>

Civil society networks and NGOs represent a non-institutional authority and a fundamental actor in the governance system,<sup>42</sup> given their connection and proximity to the population and experiences and participation in various spheres of social life. Through this position, they endeavor to redefine citizenship aimed at change by exercising authority “from below” through local grassroots organizations.<sup>43</sup>

Civil society cannot exercise its role in the governance system without respecting the principles and standards of basic governance in its organizations, including network organizations.

In the Arab region, network governance is needed both in network management and interaction among members and partners. Networks are more robust if their members believe in the fundamental values (altruism - cooperation - responsibility - independence - trust - mutual respect - commitment - solidarity - participation),<sup>44</sup> rights (participation in decision-making, discussion, planning, and evaluation; making use of the network’s accumulated experiences), and duties (participation in meetings and activities, payment of annual membership fees, and financial contributions).

In organizations such as networks, governance can be defined as a process of coordination and consultation between the organization’s actors to achieve goals that have been discussed and defined collectively.<sup>45</sup>



According to this perspective, governance is based on three main principles:

- Free access to essential information and documents and the rules for the organization's operation and management (principle of transparency)
- Responsibility of decision-makers, tracking and monitoring their work within the organization (the principle of accountability)
- Participation of various organizational actors in decision-making and the activities, in terms of capacity building, as delineated by Amartya Sen's conditions (the principle of participation and capacity development)

In the three chosen cases (Palestine, Tunisia, and Morocco), the perceptions of interviewed civilian actors on network governance and standards were in line with principles set forth by the literature of international organizations and institutions, such as UNDP,<sup>46</sup> which emphasizes the following:

- The principle of appropriate response, which assumes that the real needs of the target groups in the networking process are met and requires a transparent and participatory identification of these needs and priorities.
- The principle of the right to differ, respecting the culture of all partners, accepting their work methodology, and mutual appreciation and listening between partners.
- The principle of participation, by ensuring everyone's right to participate in decision-making in the network.
- The principle of the right to access information, through the democratic circulation of information, and regular

communication with members and partners, with constant reminders of the goals and expected results, while ensuring that the goals set and agreed upon are still relevant and reflect the partners' aspirations.

- The principle of transparency, by controlling the network's financial and administrative procedures clearly and adequately.
- Circulation and rotation of tasks and responsibilities inside the network.



## Case Study: Palestine

Palestinian NGOs have various concerns, from politics to human rights, humanitarian and cultural issues, development and environmental protection, and all kinds of social support and relief.

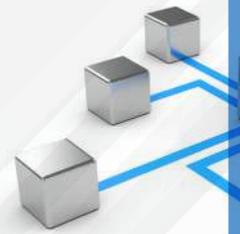
An analytical survey of CSOs in the OPT showed a tendency by grassroots NGOs to participate in networks and alliances.

Within the framework of civilian networks, joint work between NGOs is vital in light of the real threats facing the endeavors to build democracy and protect human rights, both by the occupation forces and by dominant and conflicting political frameworks.

Most organizations participate in several networks and alliances, such as:

- Local coalitions (such as the Jerusalem Alliance and alliances limited to specific geographical areas such as the “Tulkarm Association of Institutions”).
- Sectoral coalitions and specialized coordinating bodies (such as the Union of Local Rehabilitation Committees, the Union of Non-Governmental Organizations, the Federation of Networks of Youth Organizations, the Networks of Human Rights Organizations, the Women’s Organizations).
- Alliances that are based on specific issues or campaigns (such as the “Stop Building the Wall” campaign, the “Settlement Product Boycott” campaign, the Right to Abortion Coalition, and the Forum for Combating Violence against Women).
- International networks related to specific geographical regions or cultures (such as the Euro-Mediterranean Forum, the Mediterranean Union, ANND) or those limited to specific issues (such as the Global Environmental Protection Coalition)
- Networks associated with projects or donors, such as the Palestinian NGO Network, the NGO Development Center Network.
- National networks, such as the Palestinian NGO Network, the Union of Palestinian Charities, and the Palestinian Civil Society Organizations Union.

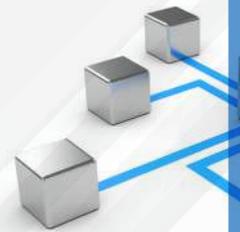
A significant area of civic networking in Palestine, according to most respondents, was the defense of rights violated by local authorities or the Israeli occupation and meeting urgent humanitarian needs in the event of war or crises. Other coalitions focus on external interference from donors to prevent the imposition of their agendas or conditions that are not in line with the interests of Palestinian society.



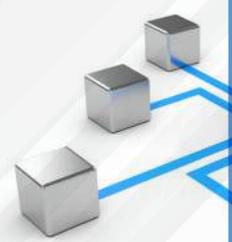
## Conclusion

The following conclusions can be drawn from the above:

- The word “network” is old and has taken a long path. However, networks today are the main feature of the information age, the networked society, where the term has many organizational uses, including CSO networks. Networks are organizations representing “a technical tool for mobilizing human energies and directing them towards specific goals” and the implied cooperation of individuals, distribution of roles and tasks, and rational coordination of activities. Thus, **NGO networks can refer to “a coalition of NGOs or individuals working in them, based on mobilizing common capacities and resources to support the positions of its constituents, develop their capacities, and increase their external influence. It aims to achieve common goals and public interests while preserving the independence of individual members.”** It means that networking - which takes different forms and carries different connotations from one community experience to another - means creating a network of organizations, individuals, or facilities, to achieve common goals.
- **Establishing networks means adopting organizational solutions** by relatively independent actors. They use their own resources and capabilities to solve problems presented to them, especially the fundamental question of cooperation to achieve common goals, regardless of orientation.
- Thus, the adoption of a networked organization is not an end in itself. In principle, it aims to meet a need, which cannot be or is difficult to meet by other forms of organizing due to the limited resources of dispersed organizations and the complexity of the situations they face.
- Networking does not threaten the identity and culture of member organizations. It allows them to enhance their independence, vis a vis other, more powerful civil organizations interference by authorities and donors, as much as it allows them to achieve a set of benefits and gains.
- Awareness of the value of networking varies among CSOs in the Arab region, both between organizations and within organizations, as indicated by the various forms and levels of networks from one country to another.
- The past few decades were marked by a clear tendency among NGOs in the Arab region towards networking. In light of the fundamental challenges and threats facing the endeavors to achieve development, establish democracy, and protect human rights, joint NGO action through civil networks becomes vital in serving social justice, human rights, and democracy.
- The experience in the region revealed that **networking is utilized more in the field of advocacy than in the areas of providing services, such as entertainment or culture.** It also indicated a **strong link between the question of civil society and the question of democracy.**



- Not a single perception of networking in the Arab region, no matter how advanced, can constitute a ready-made recipe for building networks simply because there is no “one best way” to form networks. The condition for success always requires creativity and understanding the particularities of each case.
- CSO networks in the Arab region were not necessarily formed or organized in the same manner. Each of those networks emerged in a specific context to respond to specific problems faced by the constituent organizations.
- Experience in several countries shows that building networks generally requires the availability of essential resources (financial, human), a democratic approach, and a degree of professionalism and experience. **It entails the knowledge that networks are not established in one day. They are a collective learning process. The networking process is more important than the network itself, meaning the network’s formal structures.** Networking does mean the loss of identity or culture by member organizations, as they shall be enhanced and enriched with new dimensions.
- **Networking in the region points to two different forms: functional, when individuals involved in networking aim to achieve some shared material benefit, and strategic, when the functional is overlooked in favor of a long-term shared vision.**
- It is clear from experience that **networking is not about merely sharing a common stance but sharing the same benefits, expectations, and goals. Efforts are united to influence and pressure, exchange experiences, and transfer or strengthen capacities.**
- The condition for the success of networking in the Arab region should not be based on ready-made prescriptions, no matter how effective they seem. **Success requires creativity and understanding the local context and challenges.**
- **Success also means that coalitions should be made up of NGOs close to each other in terms of interests, field of intervention, and specialization. They must adopt flexible, horizontal, and agreed-upon organizational mechanisms through equal participation by members and guaranteeing their interests. They must allow for mutual recognition and mutual appreciation.** The process is not always straightforward because forming, managing, and maintaining networks usually requires civilian actors’ time, effort, skills, and efficiency.
- Networking experiences, especially between associations, also reveal what Alex de Tocqueville called a tremendous instrument for social change. Once its capacity is developed and performance improved, this tool can become more fruitful and capable of achieving its tasks (such as mobilization, proposals, lobbying and advocacy, and establishing and operating projects).
- **In the case of large networks, experience shows that it is difficult to define a common goal. It is even more challenging to control interactions between members. Due to the different**



**aspirations of members, they become difficult to reconcile with the network's general outlook.** Conflicts become hard to manage, and the network then turns from a means to achieve goals into an obstacle. Successful networking experiences in the region also indicate that **it is easier to strengthen and consolidate existing old networks rather than build entirely new ones.**

- On the contrary, small networks are characterized by organizational structures with solid links, especially when direct and face-to-face. Conversely, institutional links in networks tend to be weak when communication is poor, indirect, or in one direction.
- **Network governance is sought both in network management and the level of interaction among members and with partners.** Networks are more robust if their members believe in the fundamental values (altruism - cooperation - responsibility - independence - trust - mutual respect - commitment - solidarity - participation),<sup>47</sup> rights (participation in decision-making, discussion, planning, and evaluation; making use of the network's accumulated experiences), and duties (participation in meetings and activities, payment of annual membership fees, and financial contributions).



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## Endnotes

- 1 Interviews were carried out in person or remotely with a number of CSO actors, namely from Palestine, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, and Mauritania and especially those part of civil networks: from Morocco (Anas Al-Hasnawi and Othman Makhoun from Espace Associatif, Aziz El Ghali from Moroccan Association for Human Rights, Saeed Al Tabl from the Moroccan Association for Human Rights, Ahmed Dahmani from Mwatna initiatives), from Tunisia (Radwan El Fatnassi from the Tunisian League for the Defense of Human Rights), from Egypt (Wael Gamal - writer and civic activist), from Palestine (Manal Najjar from Ma'an Development Action Center, Nahed Armana from Ma'an Center, Sharek Youth Forum, Azzam Shaat from Palestinian Center for Human Rights, and Said Agha, Palthink Foundation Palestine), and from Mauritania (Muhammad Ahmad Mahboubi, Consultant expert in the field of development studies, media and gender).
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- 41 The charter, directed towards associations to sign, was drafted in a national meeting on May 29, 2007. It affirms the following: "We, the associations signatories to this charter, announce our involvement in the modern, solidarity-democratic society project and reaffirm our commitment to:
- Respect the fundamental and internationally recognized human values and rights: respect of human dignity, rejection of gender, racial, religious discrimination, respect for children's rights, respect for cultural diversity, respect the environment, respect the principle of the peaceful resolution of disputes.
  - Advance democracy, citizenship, and modernity and defend individual and collective freedoms.
  - Promote sustainable human development in the country in all its dimensions.
  - Respect the non-profit character of the associative act.
  - Advance the democratic management of associations.
  - Respect accuracy and transparency in administrative and financial management of associations.
- (Please see Appendix for image of charter)
- 42 The governance system is formed in general of three main spheres: 1) the state and public institutions, the official party to governance responsible for preparing the political, legal, and institutional environment to help build the governance system, 2) the private sector, enterprises that aim to create wealth and provide job opportunities, 3) CSOs aiming for social good and supporting citizen participation and community interaction. The private sector and civil society are two informal parties to governance.
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