

REGIONAL PROGRAMME

GULF STATES

FRANZISKA HARTER

PHILIPP DIENSTBIER

DR MANUEL SCHUBERT

18 September 2017

Establishment of sector-wide networks for civil society organizations in Kuwait

THE SECOND AND THIRD EVENT OF THE PACE WORKSHOP SERIES PROVIDED CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS INPUT AND GUIDANCE ABOUT SYNERGY EFFECTS OF SECTOR-WIDE NETWORKS

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have always been the driving force behind social transformation and have made a significant contribution in Kuwait, especially in the face of current economic and social challenges. Nevertheless, the sector lacks visibility towards other actors, which adversely affects the legitimacy of NGOs and their ability to defend civic interests. Networks and collaboration between the organizations promise a great potential to improve this situation, as civil society actors could jointly better position themselves.

Kuwait's civil society is one of the most developed in the Gulf. Non-profit and civil society organizations play an active role in strengthening democratic practices in the Gulf State, providing a platform for citizenship and incentives for citizens to participate actively. However, the sector faces major challenges, partly due to the difficult legal framework for NGOs, but also because of the lack of visibility and understanding of the sector. For example, nonprofit organizations are not sufficiently perceived as relevant actors in parts of the population and government, especially towards established stakeholders. For instance, Kuwaitis are often unaware of the real added value of an active civil society. A stronger anchoring and institutionalized position of NGOs in the overall social fabric of the Emirates requires an open social exchange on the role of civil society, supported by structural reforms.

However, fundamental transformation processes within the NGO sector are long overdue. The sector as a whole could better communicate its achievements and progress that has been made, thereby drawing attention to civil society work. Joint representation of the sector would also allow NGOs to speak with one voice to other actors, while providing the government with a legitimate contact. Under these conditions, the civil society of the Emirates can receive more attention and at the same time increase its legitimacy.

Successful cooperation and synergies through networks

A development of the NGO sector as described above is based upon the formation of a cross-sectoral network, which institutionalises inclusive cooperation platforms and establishes permanent communication channels between organizations and other social actors. For example, an NGO network could help to give organizations and their objectives a presence in public discourse, thereby strengthening and promoting confidence and understanding of citizens in civil society and their role in developing the country. The value of networks in the fragmented civil society of Kuwait is therefore enormous.

In order to address the challenges of the civil society sector and to provide the tools for better coordination, the workshop series

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V.

**REGIONAL PROGRAMME
GULF STATES**

FRANZISKA HARTER
PHILIPP DIENSTBIER
DR MANUEL SCHUBERT

18 September 2017

"Promoting & Advocating for Civic Sector Enhancement" (PACE) was continued with two other events. PACE is a joint project of en.v, a local organization that promotes social development and civic engagement in the Middle East, and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS). The project aims to strengthen strategic coordination and communication between non-profit organizations in Kuwait, thereby supporting the social participation of citizens and empowering them to promote social development.

Using and broadening knowledge

The second workshop of the PACE series took place from 16th to 17th September 2017 bringing representatives of 16 NGOs together, some of which had already been introduced to the basic characteristics of networks and their significance in a workshop in May. While the previous training focused on the thematic cooperation of similarly aligned NGOs, the follow-up workshop focused on sector-wide networking. Therefore, the coaches Karolína Miková, director of Partners for Democratic Change from Slovakia (PDCS), an NGO with a strong network building expertise, and Ninnar Al Kames, social work leader at LOYAC Kuwait, a local youth organization, highlighted on the first day of the workshop the difference between thematic and sectoral networks and helped participants to identify the key challenges they face as NGOs in Kuwait. Essam Nada, managing director of the Arab NGO Environment and Development Network, was invited as a guest speaker and gave a presentation in which he outlined the example of the Egyptian NGO network, its specific challenges and lessons learned. On the second day the participants then divided into four groups on the basis of their priorities, working on: (1) strengthening communication between NGOs, (2) raising public awareness of the role and work of civil society organizations, (3) establishment of a joint research committee to promote results-based programs, and finally (4) development of a formal network structure between NGOs in Kuwait. Afterwards, the organizations collaboratively developed initial action plans and presented them in order to

receive feedback and support from the group.

Focus on sector-wide networking

Following the workshop, the third part of the PACE project took place on 18th September, with gathered further representatives from the non-profit sector. The target group of the one-day forum was a wide range of charities and clubs in Kuwait who had not previously attended the workshops. Together the 60 representatives from 32 organisations discussed sector-wide challenges and how they can master them through the development of networks and coalitions. The action plans developed in advance in the second workshop were presented and discussed in order to attract more organizations as members of the four working groups and to enrich the action plans with new ideas and perspectives. The forum thus built a bridge between the NGOs that had already participated in both workshops and the wider civil society of Kuwait. This increased the event's support for a potential NGO network in Kuwait.

Dynamics and scope of the project

Following the event, the organizing team released a short promotional video introducing the concept of the civil society sector and its role in Kuwait's development. The video, released in social media channels, showed that the sector is part of a natural process that has its roots in everyday situations and is an inherent part of resilient, participatory societies. In addition, the video conveys impressions from the workshops in order to create visibility and attention for civil society organizations beyond the project frame.

As part of the PACE project, seven collaborative initiatives have emerged in 2017 to support social and charitable causes. These were carried out in cooperation between NGOs who had previously participated in the PACE project - this is evidence of initial progress in building joint civil society work in Kuwait. All four working groups continued to be guided and financially supported by the KAS Regional Program Gulf States, even

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V.

**REGIONAL PROGRAMME
GULF STATES**

FRANZISKA HARTER
PHILIPP DIENSTBIER
DR. MANUEL SCHUBERT

18 September 2017

after the last workshop, which should enable the participating organizations to develop initial network structures.

The PACE series and its influence on the civil society sector

The long-term goal of the PACE project remains to build a cross-industry national NGO network in Kuwait, which should play a key role in the country's social and economic development. On the one hand, the project's three events in 2017 laid the foundation for a shared understanding of the sector's challenges and action options among NGOs and, on the other hand, provided the tools to successfully set up and build a sector-wide network. In the long term, this can enable the civil sector to gain more trust and attention in society, maintain dialogue with government and other agencies, and ultimately act as a more legitimate and effective player in sustainable development.



Imprint

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V.
Regional Programme Gulf States

P.O. Box 831025
11183 Amman
Jordan

Phone:
+962 6 592 97 77
Email:
gulf@kas.de