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**Trends of development within civil society
Challenges and strategies in a sample of NGOs
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**Written by:
Dr. Alaa Shukrallah
Head of Training and Research Unit,
Development Support Center**

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Preface:

In working towards analyzing and monitoring essential features and trends in the development of the NGO movement in Egypt, this report attempts to identify some of the important challenges and strategies of a group of NGOs which the DSC has actively worked with during the past two years.

The sample chosen includes nine NGOs and two coalitions. Five of these organisations undertook strategic planning in addition to two coalitions through the assistance of the DSC.

The nine NGOs, although coming from different backgrounds and have different missions and entry points to development, share important features in their development. They all represent independent initiatives, which developed mainly during the end of the eighties and beginning of the nineties. Irrespective of their backgrounds and entry points they are essentially advocacy and lobbying oriented rather than service provision oriented.

The two coalitions chosen represent two important initiatives of joint work between NGOs in the area of women rights and gender equality. These initiatives took important impetus after the International Conference of Population and Development (ICPD) and the Beijing conference. They will be discussed at the end of the paper. In addition to these two coalitions to which a strategic planning was undertaken the experience of a third coalition formed around the issue of the NGO new law will be also briefly discussed.

The analysis depended on two major tools utilized in this relation namely findings from the strategic planning processes, led by the office to some of the organisations, as mentioned above, and a questionnaire (profile) built upon the major questions of strategic planning given to the organisations.

The objective of the report is related to an important component of the mandate and mission of the DSC. This component is related to assisting the exchange of experiences between NGOs on the one hand, and helping identifying common challenges and strategies, which NGOs meet and attempt to address on the other. The final aim is to assist in the process of helping NGOs to place their roles within the overall picture of developing civil society in Egypt.

Civil society and the NGO movement

The term civil society goes back a long way in history particularly during the rise of the role of the state in the 18th and 19th century as a major actor in the organization of social and economic development. However, the recent popularization of the term belongs mainly to the eighties and nineties, reflecting a growing international interest in the concept.

The motives behind such interest vary widely, yet they could be summarized as follows:

1. The growing realization of the problems encountered in the role of the state whether in the economic, social or political spheres. This fact was particularly enhanced after the collapse of the "Socialist Countries" of Eastern Europe.
2. The failures encountered in the development programs of many third world countries during the post second world war era. These programs were carried out mainly through the growing role of the state. A role which engulfed both the economic sphere as well as the provision of services.
3. The need to encourage private sector within the process of privatization and economic restructuring with its concomitant continuous decrease in the role of the state particularly in the area of service provision.
4. The need to cushion the effects of the restructuring and the gradual but dramatic withdrawal of the state from its role in service provision and employment. These effects range from making services increasingly of poorer quality and more inaccessible to a large sector of the population, to the dramatic increase in the rate of unemployment produced by these policies.
5. The growing interest and developments in the arena of human rights generally and its focus on the rights of many marginalised groups within society, particularly women.

Civil society and different definitions:

The different meanings given reflect different prevalent approaches to development.

In the widest sense the term is defined as "a multiple non state institution"; i.e., includes all economic, social and political institutions and groups which function outside the state, that is its military, police, legal, administrative, productive and cultural institutions, as well as political structures.

Civil society hence, includes all groups and institutions organized and functioning outside direct state hegemony. This starts from the smallest unit the family, to kin groups, unions and syndicates, societies, up to private business.

This definition constitutes many difficulties in our opinion. The major one is the demarcation implied between private enterprise (regardless of its size) and the state, both in policies and structures, at a time where state policies and legislation are increasingly directed mainly at promoting free market and private business. On the other hand, existing mutual interaction between state and private business makes it extremely difficult to separate them from each other.

Therefore, for our purpose, and from the point of view of human development with emphasis on the poor and marginalised groups, private business and the profit sector will be excluded from our definition.

The term "civil society" in this article will, hence, be used to denote all structures and institutions lying outside the state institutions and the private for profit sector.

NGOs and their definitions:

Within the context of the growing interest in civil society as a whole and in the role of NGOs in particular, many initiatives to study the phenomena and its significance have been carried out during the past few years. These studies included attempts to develop a criteria to define an NGO.

In a study carried out by John Hopkins University in the United States ¹ the following criteria for an NGO were given:

1. The organisation should have a formal structure, which is relatively permanent and hence temporary groups, and non-institutionalized forms are discarded from the definition.
2. It should be a non-profit body and hence the definition discards organisations that divide its profits on the members of its board. In this criteria cooperatives would be excluded in addition to private for profit institutions.
3. It should be non-governmental; i.e., structurally not attached to the government even though the government could support it both technically and financially.
4. It should be self-governing and hence the definition discards any organisation controlled by government or any other outside force.
5. Utilizes a degree of voluntary participation whether in its governing or its activities.
6. It should be a non-party organisation; i.e., not an appendage or a front of a political party even though it could be involved in political activities.

Hence, the definition focuses on the idea that an NGO is an organized initiative that emerges independently from groups within society representing common needs and common goals. It is to be differentiated from civil society that it focuses on organized civil initiatives, which have a mission and a purpose for its group members rather than pre-given social structures such as the family or a neighborhood etc.

However, in many of the Arab countries and in Egypt in particular, the state of NGOs in the majority of cases comes far from this definition.

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Important milestones in the development of NGOs in Egypt

The history of NGOs in Egypt goes back to the end of the nineteenth century. However, this history could be divided into three major phases:

- the first starts at the end of the nineteenth century up to the post second world war era,
- the second starts after the second world war up to the mid seventies (Nasserists era),
- the third starts in the mid seventies till today. However, the eighties represent an important leap in such development.

The first phase:

This phase is characterized by being mainly charity in its orientation. Expatriates' communities developed social support systems for specific groups within the society. Inputs from missionary organizations were among the first to develop such independent institutions to be followed by rich merchants who were involved in charity work. Within the latter category, women played an important role, a fact which helped them break the socially enforced segregation which kept women within the private /domestic domain.

The role of such institutions ranged from help to the poor and needy with an aim of keeping them out of the streets as well as protecting society from social unrest.

As the role of the state in services was minimal the NGO sector played an important role in developing institutions for services provision. Expatriate communities, for example, utilized their resources to build services for their members, such as: schools, hospitals, etc.

The areas covered by the service focused mainly on fields such as health, disability, and education in addition to social and cultural activities. For example, TB and Leprosy sanitariums were among the first health services to be developed by the NGO sector.

The second phase:

This phase is characterized by the growing role of the state with the final monopolization of the state over all forms of the public domain including social, political and economic spheres.

The state becomes not only the political power but also the main service provider. Mistrust of all activities outside state control reaches its maximum during this era to be crowned with the passing of law 32, 1964 for organizing NGOs activities.

Within this law, absolute hegemony of the state through MOSA over NGOs is established. In addition, many NGOs are taken over by the ministry and new ones formed by the ministry. The majority of NGOs that developed during this era become near appendages of the state.

The approach of NGOs in general, although still carrying the charity orientation, becomes one of bureaucratic professionalism. Although the range of activities extends, certain areas of service provision such as formal education become outside the domain of NGOs in addition to large health enterprises.

The third phase: mid-seventies- mid-eighties

The seventies saw the emergence of a strong democratic movement within the student body all over Egypt. The movement, although initially triggered by the national issue, i.e. the 1967 defeat and the occupation of Egyptian land by Israel, targeted the complete political reform of Egyptian society, and at its head achieving democratization and full participation by the people in decision making. The student movement whose direct influence can be traced until 1977 (the bread riots) had helped stir a similarly strong democratic and social movement among other factions in society, mainly the professional syndicates and lastly among the factory workers, who from the mid-seventies saw numerous strikes stating their own demands for social justice. From the body of this movement, which had a strong leftist and progressive character, sprang many of the later institutions in society following the failure of either the professional syndicates or the political parties in embodying or realizing their particular experience or vision. The student body itself, however, since the mid-seventies became the target of the Islamist movement.

Therefore, although during this phase many of the characteristics of the previous two phases continue to prevail, a new growing trend could be discerned. The growing trend is characterized by the growth of independent initiatives with more orientation towards lobbying and advocacy rather than service provision.

The areas of activities include components such as human rights, workers rights, child rights etc. A move from charity orientation and bureaucratic professionalism to the domain of rights is among the most important features of this phase.

In addition, many of the community based organizations become more oriented towards community involvement and empowerment challenging traditional power structures in all spheres of life. Focus of such organizations in their community work became directed to widening space for communities at large and the most marginalised groups within them for channeling their needs and organising to gain their rights. The growing trend in many cases included the transformation of several traditional organizations with religious backgrounds from the charity orientation to one of community development. As well as the development of new organizations formed of activists from different backgrounds.

This development came about through the interaction of different forces, and different interests which were, even sometimes, conflicting. On the one hand, the growing international interest in developing the role of NGOs as an alternative service provider met with the growing interest of many activists to develop organic relations with their target groups. The latter owes a lot of its ideas to the experience gained through the democratic movement of the seventies as well as the experience of its decline in the eighties and nineties.

Hence, economic restructuring and the forces behind it met with the need to develop genuine people's organizations particularly with the shortcomings and the decline in political life.

A study of a developing trend within NGOs and civil society in Egypt

Essential features of the organizations under study

In the following sample, we will attempt to look at the development of the organizations under study to discern common features as well as common challenges and the different strategies.

The organizations under study ranged from being local organizations to national ones. However, it must be noted that even local organizations in the main have national objectives. This is very much related to the approach of these organizations where influencing national policy and society at large is an important goal within its strategy. Although fulfilling the criteria of NGOs, the majority of the sample took the form of civil non-commercial companies to bypass the restrictions and limitations of the law 32.

The vast majority of organizations under study were formally established in the beginning of the nineties. The seeds of the initiatives are to be traced to the mid eighties.

The original location of the majority of organizations is Cairo based, even though strategically the organisations have out- reach programs and plans for other provinces. In addition they are mostly Urban based. However important exceptions are two organisations located in the South of Egypt and working with rural population.

The main fields of action ranged from general human rights to rights of specific groups such as: women, workers, disabled, and children. This in addition to integrated community development.

The target groups hence included specific sectors of the population as well as the public in general and policy makers.

Activities concentrate mainly on training, mobilization, awareness raising, lobbying and advocacy. While to a lesser degree comes the building of integrated, comprehensive, community development models.

The goals and general missions focus on areas, such as: developing movements around social issues and changing legislation, raising general awareness on issues related to their target groups to formation of alternative policies and strategies and developing demonstrative grass root models and testing them. In addition, the concept of empowerment of their target

groups are a common feature whether related to specific sectors in the society such as women, children, etc. to empowerment of the local communities at large.

In the area of funding most of the organizations started through member contribution particularly through the preliminary phases of the grouping and formation of ideas.

However, the growing demand on the organisations on the one hand with the lack of resources on the other, made it imperative for the organisations to think of the question of finance, if impact is to be achieved.

The move towards institutionalization was hence concomitant with developing the required infrastructure where both material and manpower resources could be made more readily available on regular basis.

The above conditions pushed the organisation gradually to request outside funding. The lag between commencing activities and procuring funding on average is about 4-5 years.

General Lessons and Common Challenges

What does this trend represent?

In contrast with the previous historical trends, the nucleus and driving force behind the new trend emerged mostly from activists in the nationalist and democratic youth movement of the sixties and seventies. The movement, which started mainly in the student's arena, was later to be followed by different factions in the society such as workers and other professionals.

The trend came as a response to a need for a move from the general political national and democratic platforms towards establishing organized civil structures for particular groups within the society.

This response was strongly driven by the decline and ebbing of the general national movement with its overall political orientation and the many lessons of failures of its various structures.

The general orientation of this trend was to view development from a rights perspective, rather than a charity or a professional perspective. In addition, the concepts of involving communities and empowerment were central to these new organisations.

The founding membership and the fields of work of the organisations established was affected by the professional background of the founders, in addition to the target groups identified by them.

Particularly at the beginning the nucleus of some of these organizations was made up of different professional groups such as doctors, lawyers, workers, while others such as women organizations were made up of women activists from different professional background.

In the majority of cases, this make up witnessed important changes in its development, incorporating other disciplines as well as members of the target groups.

New impetus to the trend through international influence:

During the beginning of the nineties, growing international interest in civil society and NGOs movement as represented by the International Conference for Population and Development (ICPD1) and Beijing gave a new impetus to the general development of the NGO movement. This impetus was reflected in turn on the new trend.

The concepts of community involvement participation and empowerment, advocacy and lobbying became more popularized as a result in the general arena of NGOs in Egypt. Service provision oriented NGOs started to adopt the new concept, while others paid lip service to it. However, the atmosphere created by this development, made conditions more favorable for the spread of this growing trend in Egypt.

On the other hand, the events as well as its concomitant atmosphere created wider space for this trend and its constituent organizations to have a bigger impact in the general discourse in society. In addition, interaction between this trend and other more traditional organisations as well as international ones was strengthened.

The effects of this interaction and the opening of this trend on new forces, previously not perceived as important on its agenda, will have paradoxical impact on its further development.

In the aftermath of these events, an influx of new recruits entered these organizations. The new recruits with different backgrounds represented a new generation that was attracted to the particular fields of interest targeted by these organizations as well as its general conceptual framework and orientation.

This development gave new blood and vitality to the organizations on the one hand while creating a dichotomy between the old and new generations in these organizations. The interaction between the two generations resulted in widening of and enriching the conceptual framework of these organizations and approaches in varying degrees in each organization.

Visions, missions and identified objectives

Challenges in choosing the goals and missions

On the whole, among the essential features of this trend in its creation was the strength and unity of a vision between the founding members of these organizations with a vagueness and generality in identifying the specific missions and objectives to be achieved.

A clear vision of the type of society striven for and built on principles of social equality, non-discrimination and democracy are shared by the majority of the founders of this trend.

On the other hand the general missions identified, as mentioned before, were mostly related to the professional background of the founders and the type of target groups sought. Hence, doctors identified the general mission of improving society's health and health policies as their major mission while lawyers tended to direct their efforts in the areas of human rights and legal aid.

These missions were to later on interact with new international concepts and develop more specifically. For example, in the area of health, primary health care was to be adopted as the general mission, while in disability for instance, Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) was adopted by those interested in addressing the disability question.

However, in all, there was a deficiency in the formulation of clear and specific achievable objectives in this trend, particularly at the start. The move from the formulation of general visions and missions to identifying specific objectives to be achieved within a specific span of time, faced important obstacles both in the level of discourse and on the skills available to these organizations.

On the conceptual level, the contradiction between becoming action oriented versus change oriented was among the issues that created heated debates particularly in the founding years. Many of the founders found in the attempt to formulate and achieve specific objectives in the different fields a shift from the goal of the overall social change envisioned by the organization.

The balance between holding a general vision and the process of reaching it through stages and achieving specific gains along the path was among the most delicate questions that challenged the unity of the founding members particularly at the start.

The demand of international and funding agencies from organizations to identify specific achievable, feasible goals as a pre-requisite added more heat to the debate. Such demands were felt by many not only diverting the movement from its original goals but also making the agendas of the organizations directed by and subservient to foreign funders.

The challenge of keeping an independent agenda, while keeping positive interaction with international donor agencies is among the important challenges that continues to face this trend in its development. On the other hand, the changing agendas of international donor agencies constituted an additional obstacle to NGOs in keeping independent agendas.

Issues previously supported by international agencies, in many times, were to be dropped in favor of new more fashionable issues. In such an atmosphere, organizations in many cases faced the dilemma of keeping their own priority interventions which are no longer supported by these agencies, particularly at a time where the fruits of addressing these issues were much more ripe than before.

Meanwhile, the dichotomy between advocacy and lobbying versus service provision continues to be among the major challenges facing the role of NGOs. The dilemma between focusing on the role of advocating and lobbying on behalf of the target groups rather than providing services to these groups continues to create important problems and heated debates among NGOs.

On the whole, the climate that these NGOs were created through was witnessing important changes in the role of the state. The role of the state as being the major service provider and employer has been on the decline from the mid-seventies. This was particularly within the framework of economic restructuring and privatization policy, which dominated thereafter. These organizations and this trend as a whole were basically created in opposition to these policies and their hazardous effects on the society as a whole and particularly the poorer and more marginalised sectors.

The major role was for long seen as advocating and lobbying on behalf of these sectors against such policies. However, the impact of these activities was very minimal. Limiting the role of NGOs to advocacy and lobbying was more and more to be seen as deficient. The deficiency was not only due to the little impact it created, but also due to the lack of credibility, which such actors had in the absence of actual gains achieved for the target groups.

The strategies to address this gap were reflected in many cases in carrying out different forms of service provision with advocacy and lobbying. Developing grass-root models was seen by some as the other side of the coin of advocating and lobbying on the national level. However, the question continues to what extent can NGOs and civil societies keep away from developing independent civil institutions in face of the apparent failure of the state to fulfill this role.

The role of the state and civil society in developing social institutions continues to be a vital issue to be addressed.

Lessons and challenges to widening impact and addressing external challenges

Naturally among the major prerequisites of the growth of organizations and their success in reaching their goals is reaching their target groups.

Reaching the target groups within the conceptual framework of this trend is essentially the empowerment of the target groups on different levels. A task, which is much harder than the success in the mere delivery of a service to the target group.

Empowerment differed according to the type of mission governing the role of each organisation. However, the major underlying factor is making the members of the target group active actors in change, an owner rather than a recipient.

As mentioned before, in reaching the target groups, organisations identified the need for the provision of a good quality service. This represented an important entry point.

However, service provision, particularly at the start was not in itself a goal but mainly a method for mobilization and an important prerequisite for gaining credibility.

As long as activities in reaching the target groups was mainly limited to service provision, this did not antagonize the existing power structures, whether on the national or the local levels. However, when activities reached to areas such as mobilization of the target groups to press for change in their conditions, this in many times came in conflict with existing power structures.

A balance had to be kept, between limiting activities to providing services, and/or widening activities to include mobilizing communities and groups for change.

This balance was always problematic. Driven by the need to ensure safety to the organisations a tendency towards limiting activities to those not antagonistic to power structures naturally grew.

Meanwhile, the limitation of this action, particularly in relation to the goals of these organisations and approaches were contradictory to such limitations.

A tug of war between the two trends continued for a long time. The events of the nineties particularly pre and post ICPD gave a strong impetus to the new trend as mentioned

above. This impetus was particularly to those tendencies related to advocacy and lobbying for change.

As a consequence, a new space for this trend with a bigger role for activities related to advocacy and mobilization was created. However, the major weight for this space was created not by the hands of its actors but more so by the international pressures supporting this trend. A fact, which continued and still constitutes a problem for this trend and its ability to long term continuity. In the meanwhile, power structures, which were antagonized by this trend, started to look at in a more unfavorable way. Hence, concentration on redirecting and controlling the NGO movement with focus on this trend became a major challenge facing this trend during the second half of the nineties.

Power structures wanted NGOs to increase their role as service providers to cushion the effects of the receding role of the state and replace it. Meanwhile, the same power structures wanted to surround and limit activities related to advocacy, mobilization and lobbying for change. In addition, in face of the realization of the growing independent trend, these power structures wanted to ensure more control and dominance over NGOs and their activities. The change of the Law 32 became the arena for this debate.

Pre and Post ICPD coalitions and widening impact

As mentioned before another important aspect of the pre and post ICPD era was the widening interaction between organisations belonging to this trend and more traditional NGOs on the one hand as well as several other actors on the international scene on the other.

Coalitions both national and regional became an important arena for widening impact. Concomitant with widening the space and the growing interest of the international bodies in the NGO movement, a drive towards the formation of a coalition was strengthened. To ensure bigger and faster impact, international bodies felt it more cost effective to support coalitions rather than individual NGOs.

Moreover, coalitions were formed within the conceptual framework of advocacy and lobbying more than service provision. Among these coalitions, two important coalitions that included a large number of NGOs covering many governorates of Egypt were: the NCPD - Reproductive Rights/Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) coalition and the Unicef coalition formed around Women' s rights and the CEDAW.

Institutional development challenges?

Among the major areas of challenges facing the development of this trend, was its institutional development. On the whole, this trend emerged from organizations whose founding members were dedicated and committed to an idea. Their input was provided completely on voluntary basis. Receiving money for this input was considered on the whole an unethical act.

However, in the years following inception of these organizations, efficiency and effectiveness challenged not only the development of these organizations, but its actual ability to continue. The need for more professional institutionalized development became apparent in nearly all these organizations.

The dilemma faced in this transition was dual. On the one hand, the ethical considerations made many of the founders oppose such a move and prevented others from accepting such a role. On the other hand, practical problems, in some of the organizations, also stood in the path of such transition.

The question of which type of personnel is to leave their position as volunteers in the general supervisory decision making bodies to executive paid positions was a difficult one. The problem placed by this choice was double faced. On the one hand, if the choice is to employ founding members, then the decision meant leaving established job opportunities to a risky one, particularly in the atmosphere created by the moral considerations surrounding the issue. On the other hand, shifting founding members from the general decision making body to executive personnel weakens it and transforms it to a mere "figurehead"/ token.

Meanwhile, recruiting new professional cadres from outside endangers the direction, whereas placing junior members of the organization endangers the efficiency of the organization. The combination of placing founding members in senior posts with junior members in other posts was among the strategies adopted by some organizations. In later stages, professional cadres were recruited mainly in consulting posts.

The transitional stage witnessed important obstacles and difficulties in crossing it and continues to do so for many of the organizations belonging to this trend. The question continues for many; how to successfully combine a strong supervisory and decision making voluntary body which has actual charge along with the responsibility while having an effective and powerful executive body which absorbs and adopts the spirit and orientation of the founding members.

In the move towards developing civil institutions, a strong need for more democratic structures was felt by the organizations representing this trend. Democracy was a central theme and principle, as mentioned before. However, the processes of implementing democratic decision-making have been and continue to be fraught with difficulties. The type of difficulties encountered varied according to the legal structure adopted, on the one hand, as well as the degree and type of the institutional structure developed by the organization.

Created as a voluntary group of people, decision-making process on the whole was more linear than hierarchical at the start. All members felt an equal share of responsibility as well as rights. Meanwhile, the size of the organization and the rarity of activities with concomitant minimal responsibilities attached, narrowed in turn the number of decisions needed to be taken and their levels. Organizations met to discuss general problems related to concepts and ideas, and decisions related to functions and activities which most members took part. Such activities were held on rare occasions, and required few decisions with few obligations attached.

Success of the initial initiatives with concomitant increasing demand for widening and increasing activities challenged the existing structures of the organizations. Linear structures were obviously incapable for addressing the challenge and the need for institutionalization, as mentioned before, became more apparent.

Institutionalization meant the development of different levels of decision-making bodies. New processes of decision making had to develop to respond both to the needs for effective management and at the same ensuring democracy.

On the other hand, and in face of the inimical general environment particularly within the framework of the Law 32, many NGOs from this trend took the form of civil or limited responsibility companies. These forms were in many ways in contradiction with the nature of the organizations. Moreover, these forms, in many instances, dictated their terms on the types of processes for decision-making as de facto.

Unequal share of responsibilities dictated by these forms could not contain shared rights by all members. Liabilities were limited to few of the founders who could not afford to sub-serve all decisions to general voting. In addition, the question of transparency towards sensitive questions in such a situation faced immense obstacles.

Finally, democracy and democratic processes could not be equated to participation in decision making only or in voting on decisions, equal access to information and knowledge to all members of an organization still constitutes an important challenge to all NGOs today.

Likewise, the relationship of the organizations with their constituency represented an important goal since the inception of this trend. Organizations belonging to this trend placed involvement of their constituency in decision-making as a central principle of their work. However, the road to achieve true involvement of the constituency not only in activities and/or programs but also in decision-making is a long and a complicated one.

Again, the inimical environment and its effect on community participation on the one hand, and the ability to reach absolute transparency with the constituency on the other, places important barriers along this road.

The question of the relationship between organizations and their constituency still constitutes one of the most important challenges facing the development of civil societies in Egypt.

Bridging this gap can only be a part of extending and developing strong institutional structures within and by the constituency themselves.

Sustainability challenges?

During the past few years, the question of sustainability was raised on the agenda of all NGO discourse. Inputs from various sources emphasized the question. International donor agencies place it in many instances as a pre-requisite for funding. NGOs themselves look at it as a vital question. In many instances, the term sustainability has been equated to ability of the organization for financial independence after the termination of project's funding.

However, in this article sustainability is viewed as the continuous ability to bring about change which can ensure the continuity of the impact of the organizations rather than the organizations or the projects themselves. The lives of projects and organizations is not an end in its self, the final goals of change and the process of change is the final goal which sustainability must be evaluated and ensured.

In response to equating sustainability merely to continuity of funding project and organizations, NGOs tended to divert their attention from achieving their goals and sustaining the process to finding new forms of funding. In many instances, this process was equated to cost recovery, a tendency that came into contradiction with the original principle of the organization. Saying that, ensuring the continuity of finance of activities, without endangering the process itself till impact and social change, still constitutes an important challenge.

Another aspect of sustainability, is manpower sustainability. Manpower investments in NGOs constitute an important aspect of its work. However, the turnover in such organizations particularly on the grass-root level is still quite high. Members working for nominal fees recruited, in many cases, from young women in particular face this problem.

Ensuring continuity of staff and the continuous transfer of knowledge and skills to new members, is an important strategy, which is being realized by many organizations. Hence, staff development and capacity building of organizations not only in the technical skills but also in areas that is related to governance, leadership and management is an essential need realized by many organizations.

Moreover, sustainability and continuity on the long run is related to the ability to achieve ownership by constituency. In organizations where such a goal is well articulated and activities in this direction are carried out. This goal has much better luck than in others, which have not yet placed it on their agenda. However, the type of target groups and conditions uniting these target groups play an important role in making such a goal more feasible on the short run.

On the whole, true ownership of the target groups to institutions representing them and working for them is a long goal, which is very much related to structural changes in the different spheres of life.

NGOs and the new law " a challenge to the future"

The unique features of the NGO law Campaign:

During the past year the NGO community engaged in a broad campaign against the new law governing the voluntary sector. Since 1994, a new law was being drafted as a result of the severe criticism, from both Egyptian NGOs as well as the donor community against the old law, which had been in action since 1964. The old law had dealt with Associations as appendages of the government and tools for the implementation of its social program, which had a strong welfare substance at that time, an element long since eliminated.

Following the ICPD, the government gave a promise that the new law would be drafted with NGO participation. During the years that followed a number of heavily funded projects, by UNICEF as well as USAID to name but a few were made with the objective of encouraging the government to see the NGO point of view regarding the old law and create common platforms between them. On the other hand, the government tried and rejected different scenarios to create acceptable governmental structures and bodies, with the aim of projecting the necessary international image as well as controlling the rising phenomenon of

independent NGOs. This was finally resolved with the appointment of the new minister of social affairs who had the necessary 'international face' as well as being internally unthreatening.

With regards to the modification of the law, the government, informally appointed a number of individuals to play the role of liaison between it and the NGOs and thus a committee was born to draft the law following the ICPD. According to members of said committee, they were invited to meet only once before the drafting of the law and had no actual part in the later work on the law which lasted for almost two years. To all eyes, the law had gone into hiding until it was leaked to the NGO community early 1998.

Why was ICPD a turning point:

The ICPD had represented a sort of "coming out" for activist advocacy-like organizations, who had been forming since the mid to late eighties. For the government, it represented a step towards its integration into the international community and its chance to present a 'civilized' face. However, in the aftermath of the conference scores began to be settled, reflecting the fact that whereas the government might want to play the international game, it had no plans on making this an internal reality, which can threaten its method of political rule. The following years until the drafting of the law saw the different tactics and methods used by the government which reflect the conflict between its "international façade" and the internal reality. The outcome was a law, which not only secures the political rule, since that was never in doubt, but the particular method of rule based on centralized control over all facets of social and political activity.

NGOs on the other hand, who had come out of the ICPD with a stronger sense of unity and common purpose passed through a period of fragmentation due to internal divisions and differences. This division was triggered in the way NGOs responded to the attempt at stronger governmental control over NGO participation in the International conference and was reflected in the fact that the preparation for the Beijing conference saw two NGO committees competing together.

Nevertheless despite of the fragmentation and disunity which continued for some time among NGOs, whether for political reasons or as a result of the competition for donor funds, knowledge and interaction grew among different kinds of organizations and associations during that period. This fact contributed greatly to later developments in the confrontation with the law. However, NGO response continued at that time to be sporadic and weak, marked by the lack of ability to sustain a confrontation or to take positive action.

The latter half of the nineties was marked by growing criticism of the disunity existing among NGOs, specially the advocacy like organizations and attempts were made to reestablish a closer working relation. This culminated in a growing tendency at the closing of the nineties towards greater unity of action and the healing of the fragmentation which had reached its peak by that time, specially among human rights organizations. This had a definite impact on the level of organization that was later to appear in the campaign against the law.

The law was finally drafted in secret and leaked in May of 1998 to the NGO community. Following this a campaign began among the NGOs, mainly the human rights organizations established in the late eighties and early nineties. This campaign however, was later expanded to the more traditional NGOs, who were functioning under the old law and a coalition was established in defense of the right of Association from 100 organization. While the campaign undertaken by the human rights organizations has mainly targeted the international NGO community, international and local press, the coalition addressed other Associations all over Egypt, as well as the decision-making mechanisms involved in the drafting of the new law.

As a result of the initial pressure exerted from the international and donor community in response to the campaign, the government acceded to the request of NGOs and initiated a process of consultation on the law. This took the form of:

- A meeting organized by the Minister of Social Affairs where representatives from NGOs were invited.
- Meetings organized in different governorates to discuss the draft law with officials. The result was that similar critiques were made of the law in the different meetings, which culminated in clear statements being sent to the drafting committee.
- Four NGO representatives were invited to participate in the drafting committee to introduce the amendments, which reflect the legitimate wishes of the NGOs.

The newly established NGO coalition played the role of monitoring this process by:

- Holding regular conferences and meetings for Associations from all over the country to disseminate information as well as create common stands.
- Holding meetings with members from the drafting committee to create a process of transparency and accountability between the NGOs and its representatives.
- Holding meetings with members of parliament to listen to their critiques of the law.
- Holding press conferences to disseminate their position regarding the law.
- Publishing a newsletter, which disseminated all developments in the new law as well as any problems facing NGOs to different NGOs all over Egypt.

At the same time, the human rights organizations, especially those engaged in legal studies continued to provide material and studies on the legislative and constitutional problems within the law and to hold meetings and seminars on the law.

The last draft of the law was reached with numerous amendments introduced and with more amendments requested. The law, according to legislative procedures would go through the Ministerial cabinet for approval and then to parliament.

After a lull of several months, a new law was drafted and given to the ministerial cabinet and speedily approved. This law was then presented to parliament's two committees for discussion and approved. It was leaked from parliament to the NGOs before its final presentation to the body of parliament.

A second campaign was initiated first by the human rights organizations and then the NGO coalition. Different protest actions were harnessed to stop the law from being passed in parliament. These took the form of:

- a symbolic hunger strike, press conferences and protest statements,
- a conference organized by the coalition for over 80 organizations, a statement and a press conference.
- A combined delegation from representatives of human rights groups and representatives from the Coalition to parliament,
- a demonstration before the parliament building during discussions of the NGO law,
- Furnishing parliamentarians with the necessary documents and critiques of the law raised by NGOs prior to the discussions.
- Following it being passed in parliament despite of the extreme opposition from within, a signed statement was sent to the president asking him not to ratify this law and to return it to parliament. This statement was published in a paid advertisement in one of the daily newspapers.

The impact of the campaign resulted in:

- The mobilization of different actors in civil society, such as prominent journalists, writers, academics, party members, artists, etc. This was expressed in a statement of protest against the law signed by over 500 prominent names in Egyptian cultural and social life.
- A statement written by the drafting committee stating that they disowned the present law under discussion as it had no relation with the draft law they had been working on for the past year.
- The mobilization of both the local and international press around the issue of the new law and its impact on the development of civil society.

Nevertheless, the law was finally passed and ratified by the president without any of the amendments requested by NGOs, albeit as has been stated by numerous NGOs "it has been born dead".

However, a crucial gain had been realized represented by the creation of a common platform between the newer type of 'defense' NGOs and the traditional type of NGOs.

This not only bridged the gap in the experience of these two types of NGOs and created a new framework of common struggle together, but also helped reclaim the 'silent majority' of NGOs registered under law 32, which had been consistently used as a legitimating tool for the government's policy towards NGOs in Egypt.

It is these elements which have to be reinforced when thinking of the future strategies of NGOs after the law, despite of the once more changing rules by which organizations are to be governed.