

**THE ROLE OF NGOS AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS IN THE
DEPLOYMENT OF RE IN RURAL AND REMOTE AREAS IN THE ARAB
REGION: THE NEED TO TRANSFORM CONSTRAINTS INTO OPPORTUNITIES**

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ACRONYMS

ANND	Arab NGO Network for Development
CSO	Civil Society Organization
ESCWA	Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HDI	Human Development Index
IGA	Income-Generating Activities
LSES	Lebanese Solar Energy Society
LEF	Liaison Energie-Francophonie
LUTW	Light Up The World
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MSP	Mediterranean Solar Plan
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PSSSES	Palestinian Solar and Sustainable Energy Society
PENTA	Program for Enhancement of Transparency and Accountability
RE	Renewable Energy
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SMEs	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
TAG	Transparency and Accountability Grants
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UfM	Union for Mediterranean
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WEF	World Economic Forum
WHO	World Health Organization

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Rural and remote areas of the ESCWA region are confronted with a lack of energy access which clearly affects their socio-economic development. Renewable energy (RE) sources represent the best opportunity to increase energy access in these remote areas and improve the life-conditions of local populations. In order for RE deployment projects to enhance the socio-economic development of the rural and remote areas, they need to be adapted and anchored in the local context. Involving the beneficiaries of these projects is therefore indispensable. Their implication can also contribute in raising their awareness on energy issues as well as favour social acceptance of the projects.

In recent decades, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs) have gained increasing legitimacy and influence worldwide. It is now unquestionable that they have a major role to play in tackling our societies' numerous issues. The recognition of CSOs and NGOs by the international community has enabled them to widen the range of their activities and to develop an unvalued expertise in the implementation of development programs. In the case of RE deployment in rural and remote areas, they are an indispensable partner and their contribution can, inter alia, favour the implication of the beneficiaries. Involving CSOs and NGOs in the deployment of RE insures the efficiency and the sustainability of the programmes implemented.

CSOs and NGOs of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) region have been through the same dynamic as the rest of the world, but their activity in the fields of energy and environment remains modest. These organizations are facing several barriers hindering their development and ESCWA member countries have an important role to play in supporting them to overcome these challenges. Several measures can favour the reinforcement of CSOs and NGOs and help consolidating their actions in order for them to take up their major role. The last part of the article proposes a non-exhaustive list of key ideas and levers of action aiming to enhance the role of CSOs and NGOs in the ESCWA region and to better involve them in the deployment of RE in rural and remote areas.

INTRODUCTION

CONTEXT

As our societies are facing numerous environmental and socio-economic challenges, sustainable development appears as the answer to implement a new model which is more respectful of natural resources but most of all which puts the accent on solidarity. In order to achieve sustainable development, all the world's countries have agreed on a set of objectives to reach by the year 2015, called the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs). As the finish line is approaching, an agreement was settled by governments during the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development held in Rio in 2012 (Rio+20) to establish Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to replace the MDGs as well as a post-2015 development agenda.

In this redefinition of the goals, a focus on the question of governance needs to be made, as was underlined by the 2013 Arab MDG Report : *“The first and foremost recommendation of this report is to make governance reforms a key measure of development achievement. It is widely recognized that governance and human rights issues were missing in MDGs, though they were included in the United Nations Millennium Declaration. The post-2015 agenda should consider goals that encompass those issues, particularly given growing evidence that both conflicts and bad governance pose major threats to development. »*¹

Improving the implication of civil society is one of the major issues of this new governance to implement. All around the world this stakeholder is fighting to make its voice heard. The upheavals that occurred in several Arab countries during the spring of 2011 emphasize the need to better include civil society in development processes. As international organizations have already taken a big step towards this objective, it now needs to be followed by countries in all regions of the world.

As the ESCWA member countries are considering RE as a solution to address the lack of energy access in the rural and remote areas of the region, it is necessary to question the role of civil society in the conception as well as in the implementation of such programs. This article will assess the opportunities as well as the challenges related to the implication of CSOs and NGOs in the deployment of RE in rural and remote areas of the ESCWA region. It intends to be a roadmap to transform the constraints into solutions.

The following article begins by assessing the situation of the ESCWA rural and remote areas in terms of energy access and by outlining the opportunity of RE as a factor of socio-economic development for these territories. The first part of the paper also analyzes the place of citizens in RE deployment and points out the advantages of their active contribution in the projects.

In order to better understand the potential of CSOs and NGOs, the article then focuses on this particular stakeholder, its growing influence on the international level and the important expertise and capacities it has been able to develop. This second part also analyzes the specific role that CSOs and NGOs can play in the case of RE deployment in rural and remote areas.

The last part of the paper concentrates on the means to enhance the role of CSOs and NGOs in the deployment of RE in rural and remote areas of the ESCWA region. In order to do so, this third part starts by analyzing the situation of these organizations in the ESCWA region and more specifically the challenges they face. It then focuses on measures that can be implemented to reinforce CSOs and NGOs and to improve their capacity in contributing to development programs such as RE deployment.

¹ UN-ESCWA, 2013, p. 56.

DEFINING CIVIL SOCIETY

Defining civil society is a very difficult and debatable task. Generally, civil society is considered as the third part of a State-Market-Society triangle and must therefore be considered as not affiliated to governments nor private interests.

On its official website, the World Bank defines civil society as “*the wide array of non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) therefore refer to a wide of array of organizations: community groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), labour unions, indigenous groups, charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, and foundations*”². In this definition, NGOs are considered as part of the CSOs. The main aspect which enables us to distinguish these two types of organizations is the fact that NGOs address the specific issues related to the support of public good, whereas CSOs potentially cover all topics.

In this article, we will be using both terms (CSOs and NGOs) in order to emphasize on that difference. The expression “civil society” will be used to cover both types of organizations and more generally the third sphere of the State-Market-Society configuration.

² World Bank website

I-RE TO MEET THE CHALLENGES OF THE RURAL AND REMOTE AREAS OF THE ESCWA REGION

Rural and remote areas are characterized by their low population density and their distant location from urban sectors. Because of these two aspects, they are generally affected by energy poverty which clearly affects their socio-economic development. Renewable energy (RE) sources represent the best opportunity to increase energy access in these remote areas, while launching there the much needed and absolutely achievable energy transition. In this objective, it is crucial to actively involve citizens as a mean to insure that the investments made are both efficient and sustainable.

A –THE LACK OF ACCESS TO ENERGY IN THE ESCWA RURAL ZONE AND THE IMPORTANT SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES

Even though half of the worldwide oil and gas stocks are located in the Middle-East and North Africa (MENA) areas, the question of energy is an essential and problematic issue in the ESCWA region.

There is indeed an important disparity in the distribution of natural energy resources. Algeria and Libya have important hydrocarbon resources, which constitute an important part of their wealth thanks to exportation. Egypt, despite its reserves, has to import oil and gas due to the high demand of its population. Both Tunisia and Morocco need to import energy. The Sudan region shows great disparity in its energetic resources, mostly since the referendum of 2011 which divided it in two countries. While the South Sudan holds important hydrocarbon resources, North Sudan is facing important energetic poverty resulting in the recent riots (September 2013) due to the lifting of fuel subsidies.

The same heterogeneity is observed regarding energy access. In some countries, such as Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia or Morocco, the proportion of the population having access to electricity is around 99%, but many others are not as well off. For example, in Sudan (both North and South) and in Yemen the rates are below 40%.³

It is important to emphasize that the lack of electrification mainly concerns the region's rural and remote areas and that more than 43% of the ESCWA population lives in these rural areas⁴. There again, the situation is very contrasted among the ESCWA member countries. In some areas, the urbanization rate is over 70%, it is the case in Kuwait, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, Oman, Bahrain, Libya, Qatar, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia. But rural communities still represent 67% in Yemen, 56% in Egypt and 67% in Sudan (both North and South), 34% in Iraq and 44% in Syria.⁵

The main barrier hindering the development of energy in rural areas can clearly be identified as the geography of the region. Rural areas are mostly composed of scattered villages or remote communities, often located far away from cities or even roads, and sometimes in hostile territories (desert, mountains, or conflict zone) which do not facilitate the implementation of traditional sources of energy (electricity grids or fuel distributors) or even renewable energy.

The extension of grid connections, plus the follow-up and the maintenance and ultimately the collect of fees, imply high and very expensive investments that can only be supported by private or public sectors. The low population density and the poor demand in electricity in rural and remote areas make such investments not profitable. Without any perspective of profit such investments are no interest to a sector already struggling to

³ World Bank website, Data on Access to electricity - 2010

⁴ UN-ESCWA, 2011b, p. 1.

⁵ World Bank website, Data on Rural population - 2012

ensure the proper maintenance and development of its facilities in urban areas, saturated by an increasing demand of energy due to industrial and population growth.

This lack of access to a permanent and reliable electrical energy brings many challenges to the populations. Despite the wide differences existing between ESCWA member countries at political, economic and social levels, the challenges faced by rural and remote areas of the region are generally the same.

Without access to modern energy, rural communities are relying mainly on biomass - firewood and charcoal principally - as a primary source of energy. In addition to the important environmental impacts it causes – deforestation and its effects on climate change, land degradation and its consequences on food security – the use of biomass can lead to dramatic social impacts. Firewood and charcoal used for cooking create smoke and carbon monoxide emissions, releasing a high level of in-door pollution, to which people, and more specifically women, are exposed several hours a day, with all the health issues it involves from short-term to long-term.

In terms of health, the lack of energy can also lead to food and water insecurity, especially in this region where rural populations have to deal with extreme climatic living conditions with arid and semi-arid areas. Indeed, in these isolated communities or villages, electricity is fundamental for food conservation. For instance, ice making can help to preserve fish in coastal regions. It can also be used for sea or brackish water desalination. Access to energy is also determinant, directly or indirectly, for important issues such as the access to education, medical facilities, basic sanitation... Moreover, with no electricity, obscurity at night can be a source of insecurity.

Energy is essential for maintaining as well as developing local economic activities. In the agricultural sector, it can be used to pump and distribute water from surface or deep wells for irrigation. Without electricity, agriculture relies on both physical human and/or animal efforts. Energy poverty can also be a barrier to the development of other economic activities. *“Electricity supply is however a clear obstacle to the operation of rural SMEs, if a reliable and cost-effective source is not available.”*⁶ This is also true for complementary income-generating activities (IGA), such as crafts production. When dependant on daylight, such activities can only be carried out during limited hours.

The deficiency in energy access and therefore in services is an important factor to rural exodus. There is indeed a significant gap between urban and rural areas. *“On the one hand, urban residents tend to be rich and powerful (political voice) and to enjoy the fruits of the development process in terms of education, wealth, and services. On the other hand, rural populations tend to be saddled with illiteracy, lack of education and skills, poverty, poor services and informal institutions.”*⁷ As a result, it has been observed in some of the ESCWA member countries the *“rural-urban migration of the working class age group as it seeks education or work in urban centres.”*⁸

This work force transfer can have disastrous repercussions on the economy of rural areas of the region since they depend mostly on agriculture, a sector which relies greatly on human physical efforts. It must be noted that the rural areas of the ESCWA region are already marked by critical rates of poverty. *“In the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) region, it is estimated that 70 per cent of the poor live in rural areas.”*⁹ It is also necessary to point out that the rural areas represent an important asset for the economic sustainability of the ESCWA region. The agricultural sector is crucial since the region imports more than 50%

⁶ UN-ESCWA, 2011b, p. 11.

⁷ Ibid, p. 4.

⁸ Ibid, p. 4.

⁹ Ibid, p. 1.

of its food and is therefore subject to price volatility. Moreover, this sector still employs about 30 % of the Arab region's population (5% in Saudi Arabia, 30 % in Egypt, 44 % in Morocco and over 50 % in Yemen)¹⁰.

Rural and remote areas of the ESCWA region face numerous challenges which are, directly or indirectly, related to energy access. It must be noted that the consequences of climate change will only exacerbate these difficulties. *“As arid and semi-arid areas prone to frequent droughts account for 85 per cent of total land in the area, the region and its rural poor are particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of climate change, making water resources and well-being critical issues”*.¹¹

B –DEPLOYING RE IN THE ESCWA RURAL ZONE TO ADDRESS THE NUMEROUS CHALLENGES THESE AREAS ARE FACING

In order to address the numerous challenges which rural and remote areas of the ESCWA region are facing, developing energy access is essential. In this objective, RE appears as an essential solution, particularly well adapted to the context of these areas.

Indeed, even though the ESCWA region has important gas and oil resources –highly subsidized in the internal markets– they cannot be considered as a concrete and serious alternative to electricity grids for conventional power generation in rural and remote areas. The cost of purchasing and then transporting fuel to remote and rural areas, added to the environmental impact caused by this fossil energy, disqualifies it as a sustainable and reliable source of energy.

On the other hand, RE sources have the particularity of being locally available and are therefore well adapted to the context of rural and remote areas which cannot access centralized electricity grids. Moreover, the ESCWA area has a huge potential regarding RE sources, such as wind and solar energies or even modern biomass.

Concerning solar energy, the region benefits all year long from an important solar radiation. Arab countries can benefit from both methods of generating electricity from the sun: solar-thermal and photovoltaic technologies. Solar energy offers many advantages for the remote areas. For instance, it requires low maintenance which can be achieved by the local populations.

The Arab Gulf also has a tremendous potential regarding wind. According to a 2012 UN-ESCWA report, it can be found in various areas such as Jordan (Gulf of Aqaba), Tunisia and Algeria (Mediterranean coast and some inland locations), North Sudan (Red Sea coast), Oman (Indian Ocean coast), Egypt (Suez Gulf coast), Morocco and Mauritania (Atlantic coast), Yemen and in the Arab Gulf.¹² In addition to large wind farms, small size units can be deployed quite significantly and be in position to improve electricity in remote areas if coupled with other RE sources.

Modern biomass is another RE source which can be specifically adapted to the context of rural zones, mostly since agriculture is one of the main activities carried out in these areas. Indeed, biomass can be obtained thanks to residues of crops, animal dung or other animal and organic waste. Its potential is particularly high in Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Morocco, Sudan (North and South), Iraq...

Implemented at the local level, small scale wind energy systems, photovoltaic solar panels or biomass generators can be complementary solutions to cover partially or totally the energy needs for remote

¹⁰ UN-ESCWA, 2011a, p. 46.

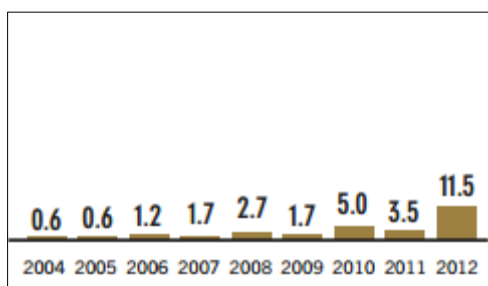
¹¹ Ibid., p. 1.

¹² UN-ESCWA, 2012a, p. 5.

communities and isolated villages, may it be for domestic use (lighting, hot water, cooking, television...) or for economic activity.

If the cost of RE is still generally higher than current networks, these technologies have made great progress in recent years enabling them to be more competitive, for instance thanks to reduced costs related to energy conversion and installations. Besides, in rural and remote areas, the cost of RE must be compared with the overall costs of installation and maintenance of connexion grids. The comparison with fossil fuels must also take into account the subsidies most countries provide.

It is fair to say that RE technologies are now matured enough, a fact that the ESCWA member countries are well aware of. Indeed, most of them have already launched strategies for the development of RE. While investments in RE were reduced in several regions of the world in 2012 relatively to 2011, the Middle East and Africa experienced an increase in these investments. *“There is striking momentum in the Middle East and Africa, where annual investment in renewable energy has risen from less than USD 1 billion in the middle of the last decade to USD 11.5 billion in 2012.”*¹³ The following figure shows the new investments made in RE in the Middle East and Africa, between 2004 and 2012, in billions of USD.



Source: REN21. *Renewables 2013, Global Status Report* (2013)

Even though many efforts have already been made by the ESCWA member countries to develop RE, another step needs to be taken towards rural and remote areas. Bringing energy access to isolated territories is a great opportunity for the socio-economic development of these territories. The previous chapter has emphasized the numerous challenges which are related to the lack of access to electricity. RE deployment in rural and remote areas is a mean to reduce the important gap between these territories and the urban space, by improving the community services as well as the general living conditions and by enhancing the development of new diversified activities (Small and Medium-sized Enterprises -SMEs, income-generating activities...). In a region where the empowerment of women is a crucial issue, improving the energy access with RE is also a great opportunity to favour gender equity. The Solar Lighting Project implemented by the Barefoot College is a good illustration of the capacity of RE to empower women while contributing to the general well-being of rural and isolated populations.

RE deployment for the socio-economic development of rural communities : The Barefoot College Solar Lighting Approach

Barefoot College is a non-governmental organization addressing the issues of rural communities in terms of access to basic services. The main goal of this NGO is to make these populations self-sufficient and sustainable. The Barefoot College has a large program of Solar electrification of villages in developing countries, with an important inclusive and capacity-building approach.

¹³ REN21, 2013, p. 59.

The specificity of the Barefoot College Solar Lighting Project is that grandmothers (usually illiterate) are chosen to be trained as solar engineers and are the ones who will install, repair and maintain the solar lighting units. Once trained, these elders will not leave the village in search of a job as younger ones might do. The objective is also for these women to gain self-confidence and to take up an important role in the development of the village.

Since 2008, the Barefoot College has been able to capitalize the results of their numerous projects. Beyond the electrification of rural villages and the contribution to climate change mitigation, the deployment of solar energy technologies has brought numerous benefits to all basic services (public facilities such as schools, hospitals, local administration offices, community centers,...) as well as to the economic development. *“Solar lighting has enabled the extension and improvement on the continuity of economic activities after dark. This has had particularly positive implications for women who are now able to expand income-generating activities into the night.”*¹⁴ The possibility to carry on activities after dark gives also more time for children to study.

The electrification of isolated villages has also contributed in improving the access to information and communication technologies. *“All communities noted a substantial increase in mobile phone usage as solar energy users were able to charge their cell phones on a regular basis. In addition, radio, television, and other electronic media facilitated more efficient information gathering and educational activities.”*¹⁵

This project is a good illustration of the multiple benefits, in all areas related to local development, which are brought by addressing a single issue: energy access.

Reference :

The Barefoot College website

C – THE PLACE OF CITIZENS IN RE DEPLOYMENT

The previous chapter has shown the opportunity and the potential benefits of introducing RE technologies to rural and remote areas. However, there is an important factor which conditions the success of RE deployment and which must be taken into account in all stages of the process: the implication of the beneficiaries. Not only is this crucial to guarantee the implementation of adapted measures and technologies, it is also necessary to insure the sustainability of the investments made. This part will focus on the place of citizens as individuals. Their role as federated structures, CSOs and NGOs, will be analyzed in the second part of the article.

If the deployment of RE in rural and remote areas of the ESCWA region answers to an urgent need - accessing energy -, it is important to keep in mind the global objective which must be aimed: the energy transition. Beyond the development of RE sources, this necessary transition for our societies involves managing the energy demand and therefore promoting energy efficiency and, when it is possible, sobriety. It is commonly accepted that once a resource is made available, consumption tends to substantially increase, leading most of the time to an excessive and inefficient use. Therefore, developing access to energy should systematically be accompanied by information campaigns as well as training to insure an appropriate and rational use of the new resource.

It is crucial to take into account these complementary aspects when implementing energy programmes in order for our societies to become resilient as well as contribute to climate change mitigation. In this shift towards more responsible behaviors, the implication of citizens is decisive. By actively involving the local populations in the deployment of RE, the overall goal must be for them to become actors of change and not just consumers

¹⁴ The Barefoot College website, Solar Lighting

¹⁵ Ibid.

of the service provided. In the LEF¹⁶ review n°93, an article on the “Energetic citizenship” emphasizes this point. *“Rethinking energy governance by involving civil society must allow citizens to reclaim the energy issue and feel as a stakeholder, may it be in the development of the major structural choices or in the implementation of the decisions that will be elaborated.”*¹⁷

Beyond the opportunity of contributing to the energy transition, involving the beneficiaries in RE deployment is a mean to guarantee the efficiency of investments made. Their implication in the conception of programmes and related projects is essential to insure the implementation of policies and measures adapted to their needs and to the local context, as opposed to a “one-size-fits-all” approach. This is crucial in order to benefit from all the opportunities of RE regarding the socio-economic development of the rural and remote areas. For instance, RE deployment can create job and business opportunities, especially when it is adapted and integrated into the local economic context.

The implication of the local populations can also contribute in gaining social acceptance of the projects implemented, a key factor of their success. In a Position paper for the Union for Mediterranean (UfM) Meeting on Energy, which took place in Brussels in December 2013, key representatives of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Civil Society have proposed a set of recommendations to take into account in the Mediterranean Solar Plan (MSP) and related EU-supported initiatives. One of them emphasizes on the need to: *“Establish systematic participatory consultation processes allowing free and informed consent prior to the approval of any infrastructure project affecting local communities and their lands as well as other natural and social resources, with special attention to vulnerable and marginalized groups”*¹⁸. More than just avoiding local resistance to the projects, social acceptance can favour the use of the energy service provided and therefore improve the profitability of the investments made. Gathering all beneficiaries around the conception and the implementation of RE deployment projects is an opportunity to federate the energy demand and therefore improve the return on investments. On this matter, social acceptance is also crucial to insure payment of the energy service fees.

Developing the feeling of ownership among the community members is another important factor of success for the deployment of RE technologies in rural and remote areas. The local population must be actively involved in the programmes in order to guarantee their sustainability and continuity. For instance, local committees can be created with the objectives of representing the beneficiaries, monitoring the projects, collecting the taxes and centralizing recriminations. Basic training on how to use, maintain and repair the RE systems can be organized with selected community members. This last point is essential to insure the autonomy of the local populations in the management of these technologies, an important aspect in the case of rural and remote areas. In addition, the development of local skills can reduce the cost of imported human resources and promote the creation of jobs in the areas of research and development (R&D), production, construction, installation, maintenance and engineering.

Implicating the beneficiaries in the conception and implementation of RE deployment programmes is a guarantee of success and sustainability as well as an opportunity to generate various socio-economic benefits. As seen previously, improving energy access can beneficiate to many different activities and services which need to be considered with a systemic approach. No use of the energy must be made to the exclusion of an overall community service. RE deployment is an opportunity to reintroduce the notion of energetic service at the heart of the rural space and the implication of all beneficiaries around the project is essential.

¹⁶ Liaison Energie-Francophonie (LEF) : review of the International Organization of la Francophonie (OIF) and its subsidiary organ, the Francophonie’s Institute on Sustainable Development (IFDD)

¹⁷ POUFFARY Stéphane - ENERGIES 2050, 2013, p. 128. (non-official translation)

¹⁸ European Commission website, Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, MENA Civil Society Position Paper for the UfM Ministerial Meeting on Energy, 11th December 2013, Brussels

The example of renewable energy cooperatives is a good illustration of the important role of citizens in the development of RE.

**When citizens become drivers of energy transition :
The Renewable Energy Source cooperatives (RES-cooperatives)**

RES-cooperatives are groups of citizens who join their financial and material resources with the objective of developing, producing and selling renewable energy production. Energy cooperatives are widely spread in Northern European countries such as Germany, Sweden or Denmark where an important part of the renewable energy production sites are owned by citizens. The local and democratic management of energy production through the cooperative model shows many advantages.

In certain cases, RES-cooperatives can help palliating the eventual insufficiencies of the public energy service. *“Let’s recall that historically, the development of energy cooperatives in Germany dates to the needs of rural electrification in the 1920s, long before the arrival of public energy services.”*¹⁹ This is an important aspect in the context of rural and remote areas, which are often affected by a lack of energy access.

RES-cooperatives also show important advantages in terms of local economic development. *“The economic potential of RES-cooperatives is in locally-owned investments, creation of new jobs and new income for local communities; it brings more energy stability (less energy-import) from locally-available sources, at a price that could be adjusted if necessary, to prevent energy poverty which comes with high prices of uncontrollable and/or imported energy.”*²⁰ Participative financing is also a mean to overcome financial constraints related to a difficult access to bank financing or exterior investments. Moreover, citizens who invest in such projects can in return benefit from the revenues of the RES-cooperatives.

By giving citizens the occasion to participate in the development of renewable energy projects, RES-cooperatives can contribute in raising social acceptance as well as ownership of those projects. More than just a consumer, citizens become an actor in the necessary energy transition to implement.

Reference :

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) website, UNDP in Croatia, Renewable energy cooperatives project

RUDINGER Andreas (2013). Les mécanismes de financement participatif. *La transition énergétique ou les énergies que nous aurons*. Liaison Energie-Francophone n°93 – 1st trimestre 2013

¹⁹ RUDINGER Andreas, 2013, p.132. (non-official translation)

²⁰ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) website, UNDP in Croatia, Renewable energy cooperatives project

II–ASSESSING THE POTENTIAL OF CSOS AND NGOS AS WELL AS THEIR ROLE IN RE DEPLOYMENT

Nowadays, no one can deny the major role, the richness and diversity of CSOs and NGOs. Whether you are in a developed or in a developing country, or even in a transition economy one, these organizations play a crucial role, trying to shape a better world for the greatest number. Over the last decades, CSOs and NGOS have been given an increasing role in the policy making process. Beyond this advocacy mission, these organizations have been able to develop important expertise in all fields related to development, making them an indispensable partner in the implementation of sustainable and efficient programs. In the case of RE deployment, their role is crucial on many aspects, such as insuring the necessary implication of local populations in the projects implemented.

A –THE INCREASING INFLUENCE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN A CHANGING WORLD CONTEXT

In recent decades, the concept of civil society has grown more and more popular and the role and impact of this particular stakeholder is now unquestionable. Considered as the third part of a State-Market-Society configuration, the evolution of civil society is closely linked to the changes affecting the influence of these two other spheres.

For instance, globalization and its impact on nation states' authority, has been an important factor of the expansion of the civil society sphere. In some cases, civil society grew as a response to an uneven distribution of power: *“One of the factors influencing the growth of CSOs has been the increased challenge to imbalances of power between state and its structures on the one hand and civil society on the other. This has been driven by many forces such as reactions to centralized authority in state structures; dissatisfaction with state performance on public services; and dissatisfaction with policy positions taken by the state in international arenas”*²¹.

The same observation can be made on the relation between the Market and the Society spheres. Since the 1970s, the notion of development has been progressively associated more to human basic needs rather than to economic data. This has been observed with the introduction of notions such as “food security”, “people-centered development” as well as the creation of the Human Development Index (HDI) in 1990, now used by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as one of the measures for a country's level of development. A more recent example is the establishment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) by the United Nations (UN) in 2000. This set of eight priorities and goals to be achieved by 2015 place the focus on the poorest and most vulnerable populations²².

In this redefinition of development, centered on human basic needs, civil society appears not only as the beneficiary of the different programmes implemented but also and mostly as a vector and an indispensable partner to include in the reflexions and the decision making process. *“The growing role of civil society in development processes is not simply a response to political lobbies or to an increased scale of Organization. It also emerges from a shift in the understanding of development processes. When people and human dimensions are defined as the core of development, then social exclusion itself becomes a facet of under-development and social networking a development asset.”*²³

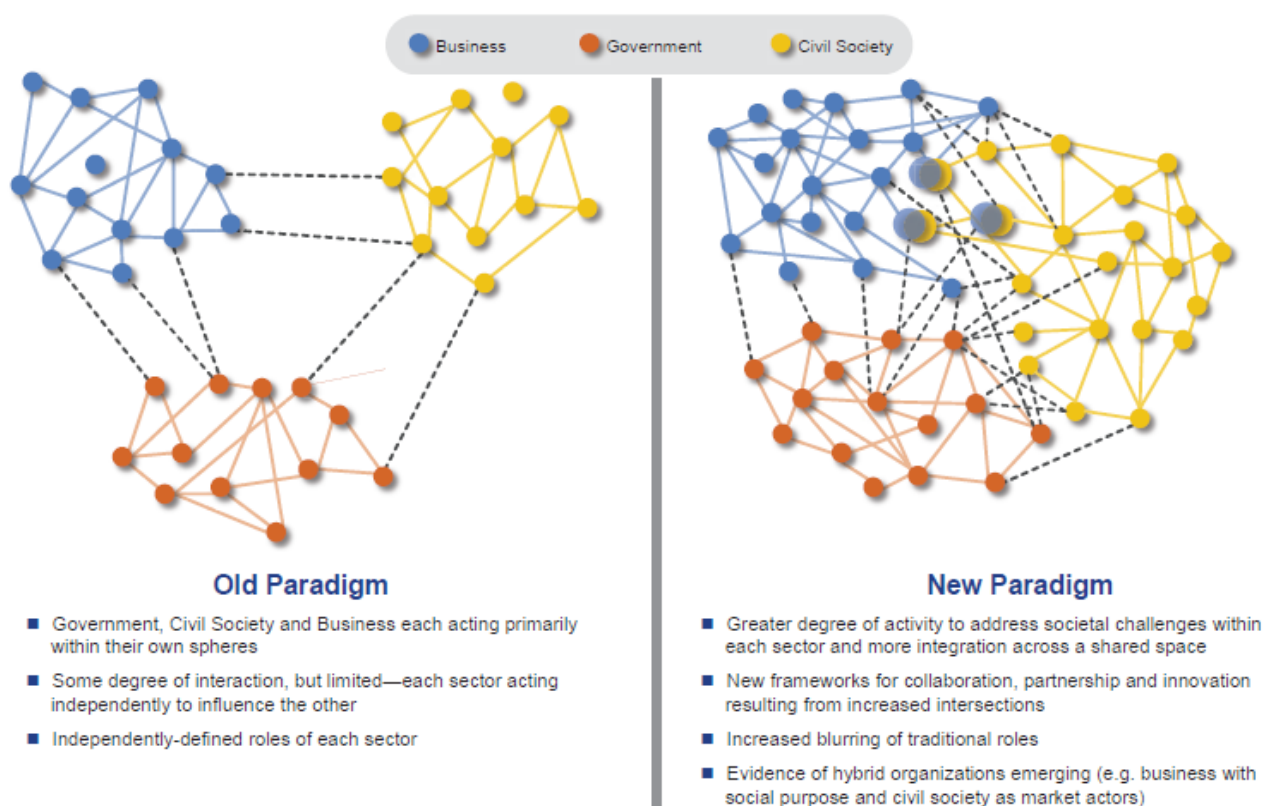
The reconfiguration of the State-Market-Society triangle is not just about the increasing number of NGOs and CSOs, it also implies greater interactions between these three spheres. *“Traditionally-compartmentalized divisions between stakeholder groups are starting to dissolve, and both agenda-setting and the development*

²¹ World Health Organization, 2001, p. 4.

²² UN Millennium Development Goals website.

²³ World Health Organization, 2001, p. 4.

of new solutions to global challenges are characterized increasingly by a matrix of representatives with overlapping roles and responsibilities.”²⁴ The following representation gives a good illustration of the increased interactions between Business, Government and Civil Society.



Source: World Economy Forum. *The Future Role of Civil Society* (2013)

The increasing consideration of civil society has resulted in a progressive implication of this group in the discussions and reasoning on world issues, in decision-making and in the implementation of programmes to address these issues. They have become a privileged partner of governments and businesses and are an active actor within international organizations. For instance, the United Nations declares on its website that “*more and more, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other civil society organizations (CSOs) are UN system partners and valuable UN links to civil society. CSOs play a key role at major United Nations Conferences and are indispensable partners for UN efforts at the country level. NGOs are consulted on UN policy and programme matters.*”²⁵

As focus is being made on sustainable development as a new model to tackle the many challenges our societies are facing, civil society and NGO networks appear as a central piece to include in international discussions on the matter.

²⁴ World Economy Forum, 2013, p.10.

²⁵ United Nations website, UN and Civil society

The role of civil society recognized by the UN conferences on sustainable development

“From the very beginning of the first Earth Summit in 1992, people realized that sustainable development could not be achieved by governments alone. It would require the active participation of all sectors of society and all types of people - consumers, workers, business persons, farmers, students, teachers, researchers, activists, indigenous communities, and other communities of interest.”²⁶

To achieve the participation of all citizens on the environmental and sustainable development issues, the Agenda 21 – established during the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 - created nine categories called ‘Major Groups’ among which are Non-governmental Organizations. *“The NGOs Major Group has the highest number of accredited organisations with UNEP and with the UN system in general.”²⁷*

In June 2012, the participants of the Earth Summit, Rio+20, once again asserted the role of civil society on sustainable development, and inscribed it in stone in its final declaration. In its article 44, “The future we want” outcome document declares: *“We acknowledge the role of civil society and the importance of enabling all members of civil society to be actively engaged in sustainable development. We recognize that improved participation of civil society depends upon, inter alia, strengthening access to information and building civil society capacity and an enabling environment”²⁸.*

References :

United Nations website, UN and Civil society

United Nations conference on sustainable development website

As an illustration of the important development of civil society, we can take the particular case of international NGOs. According to the World Economic Forum (WEF) document on “The Future Role of Civil Society” (January 2013), their number evolved from 6,000 to more than 50,000 between 1990 and 2006 and has now over passed 65,000²⁹. To this estimation must be added the numerous other CSOs that are active on the local, national as well as international levels.

B –AN INDISPENSABLE PARTNER COVERING A WIDE RANGE OF ISSUES

The increasing role of civil society has been accompanied by an evolution in the issues and topics addressed by this particular group of stakeholders. If CSOs and NGOs emerged as a palliation to the states’ deficiencies and to rebalance a configuration centered on economy, they have progressively taken up new causes, reflecting the numerous societal issues that need to be addressed.

For instance, CSOs and NGOs were first very active on social issues and solidarity activities such as humanitarian aid, poverty, hunger, health and education. Thanks to an increased consideration by international organizations, accompanied by consequent financial resources, they have been able to widen their range and increase their expertise in all areas related to sustainable development as well as on issues requiring precise technical capacity such as water management or the deployment of RE. This professionalization of CSOs and NGOs make them an essential partner in development processes.

²⁶ United Nations conference on sustainable development website

²⁷ United Nations Environment Programme website

²⁸ United Nations, 2012, p. 8-9

²⁹ World Economy Forum, 2013, p. 6.

CSOs and NGOs show great diversity, may it be by their structure or the issues they address, but it is also an actor in constant evolution, changing and adapting to address the numerous challenges our societies are facing. The nature of these organizations give them flexibility and therefore the possibility to reflect the real needs of local populations. CSOs and NGOs have the ability to identify the major challenges and solutions to the burdens affecting all social categories as well as the capacity of regrouping and representing groups of populations. Moreover, by being traditionally focused on providing services and addressing social and solidarity issues, CSOs and NGOs have developed a true capacity in reaching out to populations that are marginalized and usually far away from the decision making process.

The role of CSOs and NGOs does not stop at policymaking; this group of stakeholders is also an essential partner in the application of these policies. Their implication can facilitate the support and the contribution of all social categories of the population – from the poorest to the richest - to the implementation of public policy development. Indeed, these organizations benefit from an image of independence from states and local governments - even if it is not always the case - therefore making them trustworthy in the eyes of locals. “*Civil society is consistently trusted far more than government, business and the media at a time when trust is by far the most valuable currency*”³⁰ says Ingrid Srinath, Former Secretary General of CIVICUS³¹, in the WEF document on “The Future Role of Civil Society”.

Besides, their presence on the field in constant contact with local populations give CSOs and NGOs an unvalued expertise in the implementation of sustainable policies. For example, their ability in raising awareness is essential in order to generate understanding and acceptance of the policies deployed. The same can be said about their experience in training and capacity building.

The WEF, in its 2013 document on “The Future Role of Civil Society” has listed the different roles that have been taken up by civil society:

“Watchdog: holding institutions to account, promoting transparency and accountability

Advocate: raising awareness of societal issues and challenges and advocating for change

Service provider: delivering services to meet societal needs such as education, health, food and security; implementing disaster management, preparedness and emergency response

Expert: bringing unique knowledge and experience to shape policy and strategy, and identifying and building solutions

Capacity builder: providing education, training and other capacity building

Incubator: developing solutions that may require a long gestation or payback period

Representative: giving power to the voice of the marginalized or under-represented

Citizenship champion: encouraging citizen engagement and supporting the rights of citizens

Solidarity supporter: promoting fundamental and universal values

Definer of standards: creating norms that shape market and state activity”³²

This list gives a good representation of the diversity of the activities undertaken by CSOs and NGOs and emphasizes the importance of this actor in the implementation of long-term development programs, based on a systemic approach.

³⁰ World Economy Forum, 2013, p. 16.

³¹ CIVICUS World Alliance for Citizen Participation

³² World Economy Forum, 2013, p. 9.

C – THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF CSOS AND NGOS IN ALL STAGES OF RE DEPLOYMENT IN RURAL AND REMOTE AREAS

CSOs and NGOs have a crucial role to play in the deployment of RE in rural and remote areas, may it be in the stage of conception of the policies, programs and associated projects or during the implementation phase. Their expertise and capacity in development-related fields as well as their closeness with the local populations make them an indispensable partner to involve in RE deployment projects.

The first part of the article has emphasized the importance of involving beneficiaries in RE deployment programmes. In the case of rural and remote areas, this aspect is particularly important as a mean to gather scattered or isolated populations around an overall community service which will benefit various activities and contribute in improving the general living conditions of these people. On this matter, the implication of CSOs and NGOs is crucial as they have close links with the field and the local populations and as they are usually trusted more than governments or private companies.

Their closeness with the field gives CSOs and NGOs an unvalued and accurate insight on the population's needs and on the measures that must be taken in order to meet these needs. They can help identifying the most appropriate and sustainable technology that the people will be able to use, considering their consumption, needs as well as their technical knowledge or level of education. The expertise of CSOs and NGOs is precious to suggest which energy service is adapted for which rural services, considering the RE systems to be implemented are not the same whether you are in isolated villages or in a very remote area with only one family, keeping in mind that this also depends on the local resources available. Involving these organizations in the conception of the programmes is therefore essential to benefit from their observations and to insure the projects implemented are adapted to the realities of the field and well anchored in the local context.

Beyond the conception phase, CSOs and NGOs also have a major role to fulfil during the implementation stage of RE programmes. As was previously outlined, the acceptance and ownership of the projects by the beneficiaries is essential, notably to insure the use of the new energy service provided. The organization of information and sensitization campaigns needs to be an integral part of the RE deployment process. The privileged relationship that CSOs and NGOs have with the local populations and their expertise in the implementation of outreach programmes make them an indispensable partner on this aspect.

The active implication of beneficiaries has been identified as a mean to insure social acceptance as well as a guarantee of the sustainability of implemented RE programmes. Thanks to their closeness with the field, CSOs and NGOs have the ability to identify the right interlocutors and influential personalities which need to be involved. Their expertise in training and implementing empowerment programmes make these organizations essential for the organization of training sessions on the use, the maintenance and the repair of the RE technologies introduced.

These numerous roles that CSOs and NGOs have in the deployment of RE in rural and remote areas make them an indispensable partner for the implementation of efficient, adapted and sustainable programmes. *“NGO intervention are known for involving local stakeholders, for being adapted to the local context, for providing education and for developing capacity, all of which are aimed at community empowerment.”*³³

In addition to their essential contribution for the quality of RE deployment projects, CSOs and NGOs can facilitate access to funding in certain cases. For instance, some international organizations have privileged investments in programmes involving CSOs and NGOs. On its website, the World Bank announces that it *“has greatly increased its cooperation with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) over the past 30 years, and today it is estimated that CSOs are involved in 82 percent of new Bank-financed projects”*.³⁴

³³ UNESCO, 2009, p. 17.

³⁴ World Bank website

**The implication of CSOs and NGOs in RE deployment; an insurance for sustainability :
The Talamanca solar home lighting project**

Light Up The World (LUTW) is a Canadian non-profit organization that implements projects in communities that don't have access to electricity. This NGO gives particular importance on training local technicians and developing the capacity of local services providers.

In the case of the Talamanca canton (Costa Rica), LUTW works with a local partner: ACEM (Asociación para la Ciencia y la Educación Moral). This Costa Rican-based non-governmental organization was in charge of creating awareness on the benefits of solar energy and on the possible applications in a local context, as well as organizing training workshops.

“A group of carefully chosen individuals who are recognized as leaders in their community and live in the project areas have been the focus of training workshops. These individual shave been trained to become solar technicians, understanding electricity basics and possessing the skills necessary to install a solar home lighting system, perform basic troubleshooting, and replace damaged components. Follow-up training courses have exposed these technicians to solar system design concepts as well as core solar and electricity concepts. Households that have received solar home lighting systems are also provided with basic training on how to operate the solar home lighting system and perform very basic troubleshooting.”³⁵

This training as helped contribute in the sustainability of the project as well as improve the auto-sufficiency of the communities.

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DOLUWEERA Ganesh, SCHULTZ Christoph, *Best Practices for Developing a Solar Home Lighting System Market* (2011)
The LUTW website, Costa-Rica

³⁵ DOLUWEERA Ganesh, SCHULTZ Christoph, 2011, p. 336.

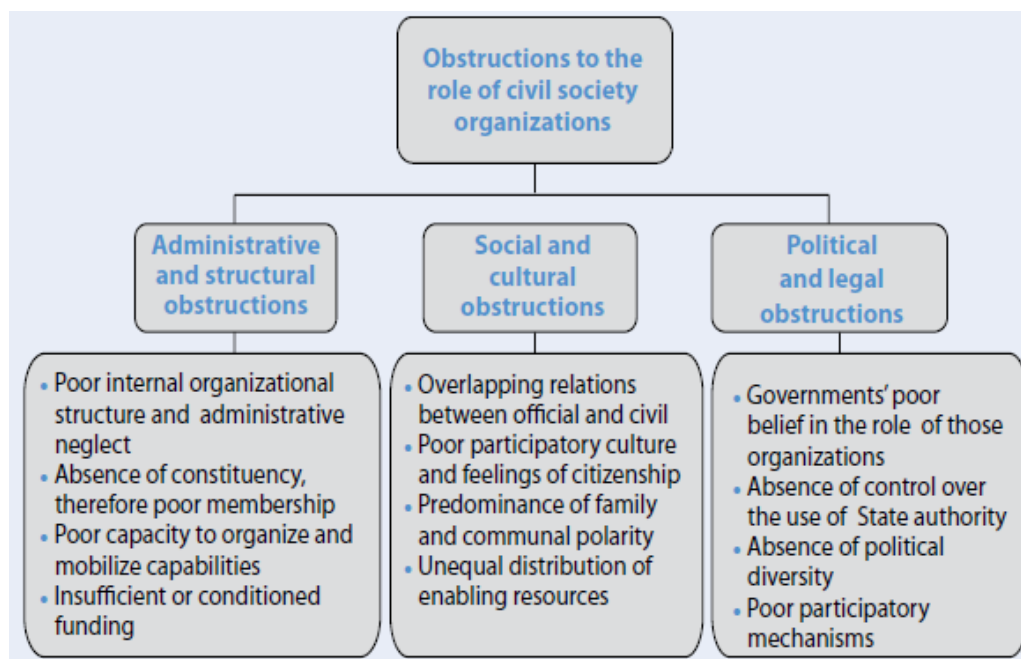
III – ENHANCING THE ROLE OF CSOS AND NGOS IN RE DEPLOYMENT IN THE RURAL AND REMOTE AREAS OF THE ESCWA REGION

As CSOs and NGOs gained an increasing influence worldwide, the ESCWA member countries have also seen the development of their own civil society. However, these organizations are facing several barriers and their activities concerning issues related to energy and environment remain modest. The ESCWA member countries have an important role to play in assisting CSOs and NGOs to expand their contributions.

A – CSOS AND NGOS IN THE ESCWA REGION: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

In Arab countries, civil society first developed in the 19th century with the increasing presence of organizations structured around charity and humanitarian assistance, religious beliefs or more specialized topics such as education. Nevertheless, the activity of these organizations remained modest due to the specific historical and political context of some countries, even if there are examples of active NGOs that have been created in the 1930s. In the late 1980s, with globalization and the ideas of liberalism that spread worldwide, the importance and influence of the private sector greatly increased. As a necessary counterbalance, the civil society sphere also expanded, gaining legitimacy and becoming a major stakeholder on the international level. The ESCWA region, as part of the world, was also impacted by these evolutions and its civil society followed the same dynamic.

If the increasing consideration and influence that CSOs and NGOs have gained worldwide has enabled organizations of the ESCWA region to develop and expand, they remain confronted with several barriers keeping them from taking up their essential role. An important challenge is the unclear role and tasks they are accredited as well as, in some cases, their unsettled relation with governments. If this observation is true in many countries of the world, it is particularly significant in the ESCWA region where an important part of CSOs and NGOs' activities consists in providing social services. Indeed, their actions can be seen as overlapping those of the public sector and their legitimacy on these matters lack of recognition from both governments and citizens. CSOs and NGOs also face internal barriers, such as the lack of capacity in structuration and organization, lack of information, difficulties in accessing funds... The following graphic draws a good picture of the different challenges which CSOs and NGOs of the ESCWA region are facing:



Source: UN-ESCWA. *Enhancing Civil Society Participation in Public Policy Processes* (2009)

CSOs and NGOs worldwide have been able to widen the range of their activities, take up issues requiring technical capacities and great professionalism and become major actors in the implementation of internal development programmes and projects. As stated by ESCWA in 2010, in the Arab countries, since these organizations have mainly focused on social services and solidarity actions, they have rarely been able to develop capacity in tackling the core issues of development. *“In the Arab region, most activities of civil society organizations are limited to services, while entrepreneurship is still weak. As a result, the culture of volunteering and individual commitment declines and civil society loses an important pillar of its growth and maturity.”*³⁶

Moreover, some CSOs and NGOs of the ESCWA region depend on funds from international organizations, which represents the risk of implementing activities closer to the values of donors than to the actual needs of the populations. In 2010, a UN-ESCWA report -based on four case studies in Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Yemen- underlined the fact that supportive funding from international organizations had helped increase the number of CSOs but not necessarily improve the quality of their activities. *“As a result, the number of civil society organizations increased but the quality of their activities, particularly their direct impact on policy and Governments for the sake of change, did not necessarily improve. Besides, their activities were focused on women empowerment, citizenship, and social movements calling for the respect of rights and good governance, without attaching equal importance to development-related activities or organizations and to educational policies outside the framework of education.”*³⁷

The objective here is not to paint a grim picture of the situation, mostly since some efforts are being made to give civil society the place it deserves in Arab countries. An illustration of this is the recent “Arab Regional Consultation on the Post-2015 Development Agenda” which took place in Beirut in March 2013. This meeting aimed to, inter alia, *“gather the views of civil society coalitions”*³⁸.

Far from being exhaustive, the following examples aim to point out a few showcases of CSOs and NGOs working in the fields of energy and environment, some of which have gained official recognition and legitimacy:

The ESCWA area is already hosting active CSOs and NGOs in the field of environment and energy

The Lebanese Solar Energy Society (LSES), established in 1980, works to *“promote the use of solar and renewable energy with consideration for the protection of the environment, energy saving, and the quality of life.”*³⁹

The Palestinian Solar and Sustainable Energy Society (PSSSES) is an NGO working for the development of renewable energy in Palestine. Founded in 2008, PSSSES regroups *“researchers, experts, producers, community leaders and former ministers and directors in various institutions”*.⁴⁰

The Friends of Environment and Development Association (FEDA) in Egypt aims *“to achieve Sustainable Development for Egypt through implementation of projects leading to the upgrading of selected fragile ecosystems with the goal of improving the quality of life of its residents.”*⁴¹

³⁶ UN-ESCWA, 2010, p. 3.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 4.

³⁸ The Arab NGO Network for Development website, Arab Regional Consultation on Post-2015

³⁹ The Lebanese Solar Energy Society website

⁴⁰ The Palestinian Solar and Sustainable Energy Society website

⁴¹ The Friends of Environment and Development Association website

We can also cite the example of two important transnational organizations working on the topic of the environment, an important and common issue to all ESCWA countries. The Arab Forum for Environment and Development (AFED) and the Arab Network for Environment and Development (RAED) are not-for-profit NGOs which both have an observer status in the League of Arab States.

References:

The Lebanese Solar Energy Society website

The Palestinian Solar and Sustainable Energy Society website

The Friends of Environment and Development Association website

UN-ESCWA, *Regional review of institutions for sustainable development in the Arab region* (2011)

Despite these important milestones towards a greater role of CSOs and NGOs in the ESCWA region, it appears as crucial for governments to strengthen their support towards these organizations and most specifically in the field of development related activities such as energy access. We have previously emphasized the opportunity of involving CSOs and NGOs in the deployment of RE in rural and remote areas; reinforcing the role and capacity of these organizations on such topics is an indispensable prerequisite. In the context of the ESCWA region, conceiving and implementing programmes based on a systemic approach and aiming for long-term outcomes is particularly important. *“Many countries in the region are facing the profound environmental, social, and economic impacts of rapid population growth, development, and natural resource constraints. Having a strong NGO community with a clear mandate to engage civil society, businesses, and the public sector can help countries to tackle these issues more successfully.”*⁴²

B – REINFORCING THE ROLE OF CSOS AND NGOS IN THE ESCWA REGION

It is unquestionable that CSOs and NGOs have an important role to play in the development of the ESCWA region and more specifically in the deployment of RE in rural and remote areas. In order to meet the ambitions, member countries need to strengthen their support towards these organizations and take measures to legitimize and empower them.

Creating an enabling environment:

In order for CSOs and NGOs to fulfill their major roles in the ESCWA region, an indispensable prerequisite is for them to be able to work freely and transparently. *“Strengthening the role of civil society or individuals in society requires an inducing political environment that provides the basic requirements of legislative stability, ensures freedom of individuals and communities, and consolidates the principles of good governance, particularly rule of law and social justice.”*⁴³ It is crucial that CSOs and NGOs gain official recognition and legitimacy to overcome current barriers to be in position to implement their social objective.

Creating an appropriate legal framework : the case of the Iraq Law on NGOs

On March 2, 2010 the Law 12 of 2010 on Non-Governmental Organizations was ratified by the Presidency Council of Iraq. This law is the product of work achieved by Iraq civil society leaders and Iraqi government officials as well as domestic and international NGOs. *“The new law is a significant improvement upon previous laws and regulations as well as the draft law first prepared by the Iraqi government in March 2009.”*⁴⁴

⁴² AL MUBARAK Razan, 2012

⁴³ UN-ESCWA, 2010, p. 2.

⁴⁴ The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law website

Among others changes, this new law enables Iraqi NGOs to collaborate with the international community and receive foreign funding. Some criminal penalties have also been removed “including imprisonment for up to three years for being a member of an improperly registered NGO.”⁴⁵ Moreover, the registration of an NGO cannot be rejected unless it is related to a specific provision of law.

The elaboration of this law has been achieved with the participation of Iraq’s civil society and is considered “among the most democratic laws in the Arab region as it complied with international standards of good practice”⁴⁶ : an example to follow.

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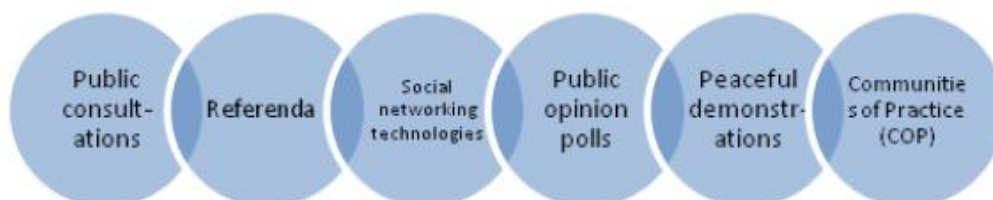
The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law website

UN-ESCWA. *Comparative analysis of civil society participation in public policy formulation in selected Arab countries*. (2010)

Promoting civil society participation:

By promoting civil society participation, ESCWA member countries can contribute in enhancing the role of CSOs and NGOs as a representative of the people and as a major stakeholder in the policy-making process. In the case of RE deployment, we have previously emphasized the importance of these organizations’ contribution in the conception of policies and programmes, in order for them to be efficient and adapted to the needs of the local populations. Promoting civil society participation in the case of RE deployment is also a mean to raise awareness among the beneficiaries on the energetic issue and on the opportunity of RE sources. Therefore, this can favor social acceptance of the projects implemented and have a direct impact on the energy demand.

In its document on “Enhancing Civil Society Participation in Public Policy Processes”, the UN-ESCWA lists different participatory tools (see following figure). Even if these tools do not specifically aim participatory processes for RE deployment, they give an idea of the type of mechanisms that can be implemented.



Source: ESCWA. *Enhancing Civil Society Participation in Public Policy Processes* (2009).

Strengthening the capacity of CSOs and NGOs:

The analysis of the different barriers that CSOs and NGOs of the ESCWA region are facing shows certain deficiencies in terms of structural and organizational capacities. Among other things, these affect their ability to access funds and hamper the continuity of their actions. It is essential that ESCWA member countries take measures to strengthen the capacity of CSOs and NGOs in order for them to fulfil their important missions, notably in the field of RE deployment.

Funding CSOs and NGOs can help them consolidate their activities and expand their range. In order to be adapted to the diversity of these organizations, their size and organizational capacity, various funding mechanisms can be used. In a document on “Europe’s engagement with Civil Society in external relations”,

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ UN-ESCWA, 2010, p. 9.

the European Commission emphasizes the need to propose funding adapted to local needs. *“Tailored funding constitutes an important component of the EU’s engagement with CSOs and should allow better access for local organisations. The Commission will use an appropriate mix of funding modalities so as to best respond to the widest possible range of actors, needs and country contexts in a flexible, transparent, cost-effective and result focused manner.”*⁴⁷ The different funding modalities and approaches include *“projects, programme funding, direct award of grants, pool funding, follow-up grants, core-funding, co-financing, ring fencing, simplified calls and re-granting.”*⁴⁸ As was pointed out by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in its document on “Partnering with civil society”, the funding can also be enabling *“for example by being long-term, results-oriented and supporting core institutional support”*⁴⁹.

Facilitating access to information is another important aspect of CSOs and NGOs empowerment. This can help increase their legitimacy, enhance their role as an advocate as well as facilitate their missions in raising awareness. Information and communication technologies are indispensable tools on this matter, as was pointed out by the United Nations in the Rio+20 outcome document “The Future We Want”: *“We recognize that information and communications technology is facilitating the flow of information between governments and the public. In this regard, it is essential to work towards improved access to information and communications technology, especially broadband networks and services, and bridge the digital divide, recognizing the contribution of international cooperation in this regard.”*⁵⁰

An interesting initiative: strengthening the capacity of Lebanese NGOs, the TAG Program

The Transparency and Accountability Grants (TAG) Program, funded by the USAID and administered by the AMIDEAST, was launched in 2001 with the objective of enabling Lebanese NGOs *“to engage in short-term, high-impact activities that promote transparency, accountability, and good governance. Grants funded by this program also contributed to strengthening the capacity of Lebanon’s vibrant civil society sector to address important issues in diverse areas, including environmental protection, citizen and women’s rights, government transactions, democratic practice, rule of law, citizen participation, lobbying, and capacity building of nongovernmental organizations.”*⁵¹

Among other activities, this program contributed to strengthen NGO Finances by creating a specific tool. *“A customized software application was designed and developed to address the financial and accounting requirement of Lebanese NGOs. This Program for Enhancement of Transparency and Accountability (PENTA) software and training was provided to over 250 Lebanese civic organizations.”*⁵²

AMIDEAST is an American non-profit organization which implements actions in the Middle East and North Africa in the fields of international education, training and development.

Reference :
AMIDEAST website

⁴⁷ European Commission, 2012, p.10-11.

⁴⁸ European Commission, 2012, p. 11.

⁴⁹ OECD, 2012, p. 13.

⁵⁰ United Nations, 2012

⁵¹ AMIDEAST website, TAG Project

⁵² Ibid.

Promoting cooperation and the constitution of networks:

Cooperation and networking are crucial factors in reinforcing the role of CSOs and NGOs. Whether it involves North/South cooperation or South/South cooperation, sharing information and knowledge as well exchanging on practices and experiences can greatly contribute in improving the capacity of CSOs and NGOs of the ESCWA region. In the case of North/South cooperation, this can also facilitate access to funding, from international organizations notably. The constitution of networks on the local, national or regional levels can increase the legitimacy of CSOs and NGOs and help consolidate their action.

RE deployment is a unique opportunity to gather CSOs and NGOs from various fields since it is a common issue to all sectors of activity and services as well as an important factor of socio-economic development. As was previously pointed out, an important part of the activities of CSOs and NGOs of the ESCWA region is focused on social services and solidarity issues. In the rural and remotes areas, such services could greatly benefit from an improved energy access, making RE deployment a potential common objective to all organizations working in these areas.

Beyond the opportunity of structuring CSO and NGO networks on a local level, energy access can also be the link for gathering organizations on a regional level. There again, the energy issue is common to all of the ESCWA member countries, even though the situation is very heterogeneous in this region. The constitution of regional civil society networks can lead to strengthened CSOs and NGOs thanks to the circulation of knowledge and information, mutual training as well as pooling of resources. In a context of difficult financial situations at every level, this last aspect is crucial.

The ESCWA member countries have an important role to play in promoting cooperation and networking. Creating spaces for dialogue, encounters and exchange is one of the means to achieve this, for example by organizing conferences, roundtables or other meetings. Cooperation and networking can also be favoured by making mutualisation a condition for accessing funds.

One day before the opening of the 4th Dii Desert Energy Conference that took place in Rabat in October 2013, representatives from CSOs of the MENA region gathered to discuss the role of civil society in issues such as the promotion of renewable energy. Wael Hmaidan, Director of the Climate Action Network (CAN) noted that *“The discussions during this meeting have clearly showed that there is an urgent need to support the networking among MENA NGOs to collaborate on environmental and energy related issues, build capacities to enable civil society engagement in the context of developing and implementing national energy plans and increase awareness on the needed shift towards a sustainable energy future”*.⁵³

Some CSO and NGO networks in the ESCWA region

Among others, we can quote the Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND) works in 12 Arab countries and gathers 7 national networks (which include 200 CSOs) as well as 23 NGOs. *“ANND aims at strengthening the role of civil society, enhancing the values of democracy, respect of human rights and sustainable development in the region.”*⁵⁴ The ANND publishes documents intended to reinforce the capacity of CSOs as well as reports on the situation in the Arab region, statements and position papers for international conferences and dialogues.

“The Arab Forum for Environment and Development (AFED) is a not-for-profit regional non-governmental organization, grouping experts together with the civil society, business community and media, to promote prudent environmental policies and programmes across the Arab region. While it maintains its character as a non-governmental organization, AFED admits, in the capacity of observers, national, regional and

⁵³ Dii website, Latest news, Civil society representatives claim participation

⁵⁴ The Arab NGO Network for Development website

*international bodies working in the fields of environment and sustainable development.”*⁵⁵ Among other activities, AFED supports the networking of NGOS that are active in the fields of development and environment.

We can quote also the recent Arab Renewable Energy and Sustainability Society (ARESS) network.

References:

The Arab NGO Network for Development website

The Arab Forum for Environment and Development website

⁵⁵ The Arab Forum for Environment and Development website

IV – CONCLUSION: THE WAY FORWARD

The article has reminded the importance of deploying RE in the rural and remote areas of the ESCWA region. It has also emphasized the opportunity to involve CSOs and NGOs in such programs, as a way to optimize investments but also, to insure the efficiency as well as the sustainability of the actions implemented.

The following non-exhaustive list of recommendations underline key ideas and different levers of action to enhance the role of civil society and NGOs networks and to better involve them in the deployment of RE.

- 1) Create an enabling environment
 - Adopt a legal framework that recognizes CSOs and NGOs and enables them to work freely and transparently
 - Promote and facilitate the constitution of networks on the local, national and regional levels
- 2) Strengthen capacity of CSOs and NGOs
 - Promote North/South and South/South cooperation in order to favour the transfer/exchange of knowledge and practices:
 - By creating special occasions for exchange (dedicated programmes, roundtables, workshops, meetings...)
 - By requesting mutualisation or constitution of consortiums in call for proposals
 - Increase the access to information and knowledge
 - Facilitate access to funding:
 - By proposing diverse funding mechanisms
 - By informing CSOs and NGOS on the national, regional or international funding programmes and by assisting them in responding to call for proposals
- 3) Involve CSOs and NGOs in the decision making process, in order for them to attest of the realities and needs of rural populations concerning energy access
 - Make sure of the representativeness and competence of the CSOs and NGOs involved (in order to avoid pseudo NGOs hiding corporate interests for example)
 - Organize consultation processes and national debates involving all stakeholders concerned by the RE and rural issues
 - Decide collectively on the indicators that will help evaluate policies implemented
- 4) Implicate CSOs and NGOs in the rural RE deployment programmes and projects to insure their sustainability
 - The role of each party needs to be clearly defined beforehand so that each recognizes the place of the other and to avoid overlapping actions
 - CSOs and NGOS must implement information and sensitization campaigns to insure the acceptance of local populations
 - CSOs and NGOS can contribute in training local populations, on the use of the energy (efficiency) as well as on the maintenance of the RE technologies

It is important to note that these different levers are closely interrelated and can mutually serve one another. For example, strengthening the capacity of CSOs and NGOs will increase their professionalism and therefore improve their legitimacy and their recognition. On the other hand, creating an enabling environment will help these organizations widen and consolidate their activities and will consequently contribute in increasing their expertise and capacities.

The energy access in rural areas, thanks to its transversal aspect, is a real opportunity to reinforce ongoing initiatives for isolated communities. Civil society in that challenge can be a pillar to transform constraints into opportunities.

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