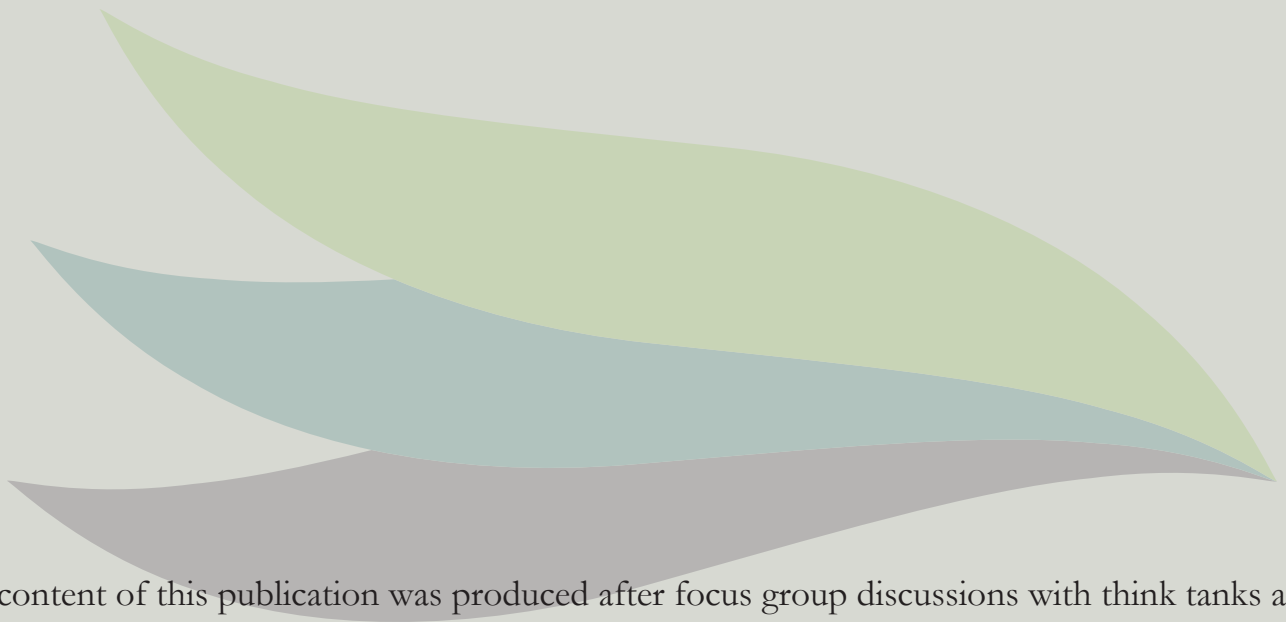


Role of Civil Society Organisations in Promoting Youth Participation in Policy Dialogue: Summary



West Asia-North Africa Institute, August 2018



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Foreword

Since youth are the future of any country, their participation in policy dialogue and political reform is essential. Therefore, civil society organisations (CSOs), universities, political parties, and government institutions should create opportunities for youth to get involved in their work.

The West Asia-North Africa (WANA) Institute held a Discussion Session on 1 April 2018 as part of the project “Strengthening of Think Tanks, Youth Initiatives and Civil Society Organisations,” funded by the Delegation of the European Union to Jordan. The session gathered representatives of think tanks and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Jordan. The discussion resulted in the publication of this paper on CSOs’ role in promoting youth participation in policy dialogue. The paper defines the concept of youth, discusses youth participation opportunities, and covers challenges facing youth participation, CSOs’ role in solving such challenges, and the tools to promote youth participation.

1 The Role of CSOs in Promoting Youth Participation in Policy Dialogue

The following questions were asked during the discussion session:

- What is the definition of youth?
- What is a youth organisation?
- What are the opportunities for youth participation in policy dialogue in Jordan?
- What are the challenges facing youth participation in policy dialogue in Jordan?
- What is the role of CSOs in solving the challenges that hinder youth participation?
- What tools could stimulate youth participation in policy dialogue?

1.1 Definition of Youth

Youth is often defined as a phase between childhood and adulthood, or as a transition from dependency to independency. For statistical reasons, the United Nations places everyone between the ages of 15 and 24 in the category youth, yet the 2016 Arab Human Development Report considers youth to be the age group between 15 and 29. The participants in the Discussion Session agreed to define youth as the age group between 18 and 34, given that independence in Jordan is often delayed because of various factors. According to this definition, youth make up almost 29 per cent of the population in Jordan.

The participants further divided the youth segment into two sub-groups:

1. Age group 18 - 25: This group is most in need of empowerment to become active and independent members of their communities. Roughly 16 per cent of Jordan’s population falls under this category.

2. Age group 26 - 34: This segment has already obtained a certain level of independence, yet is often still in need of economic, social, or political empowerment. Roughly 13 per cent of Jordan's population falls under this category.

Two other groups on the margins of the youth segment are of interest as well:

3. Age group 15 - 17: Members of this age group usually do not yet actively participate in public life or in the labour market. They can benefit from empowerment programmes to develop their capacities. This group makes up roughly 6 per cent of the population in Jordan.
4. Age group 35 - 39: Members of this age group have a vast amount of experience, yet are still closely linked to the youth segment, which might make them uniquely placed to help empower youth. Roughly 6.5 per cent of Jordan's population falls under this category.

1.2 What is a Youth Organisation?

There is no global definition of youth organisations. Some consider youth organisations to be organisations whose founders or leaders are youth, whereas others consider any organisation working for the benefit of youth to be a youth organisation. The participants in the Discussion Session defined a youth organisation as a CSO promoting youth interests and targeting youth, whether or not they are led by youth.

1.3 What are the Opportunities for Youth Participation in Jordan?

Youth should be empowered to participate in the decision-making process on political, economic, social, and cultural matters that affect their lives. They should be invited to suggest solutions and interventions for their communities. Participants in the Discussion Session listed the opportunities in Table 1, Table 2, and Table 3 for youth participation in Jordan.

| Table 1: Political and Civil Participation | | |
|--|--------------------------|--|
| Participation Opportunities | Benefits to Youth | Notes |
| Voting in parliamentary, municipal, and decentralisation elections | Medium | Youth tend to distrust the electoral processes, parties, and candidates. |
| Candidacy in municipal and decentralisation elections (from the age of 25), and parliamentary elections (from the age of 30) | Weak | Lack of community and political support |
| Voting and candidacy for student unions elections at universities | Medium | Youth tend to participate according to ideologies, political and tribal affiliations of the universities and candidates' communities. |
| Founding CSOs and/or participating in CSO activities, especially in those related to political and civil participation | Medium | Youth participation in CSO activities has increased, as well as the number of youth founders of CSOs. |
| Establishing a political party or participating in party activities | Weak | Due to a fear of potential security measures, a lack of awareness of different parties' programmes, and a lack of trust in parties, youth participation remains limited. |
| Enrolment in professional unions | Weak | Lack of sufficient awareness of the importance of unions/syndicates. |
| Participating in public meetings and advocating for legislative reform | Medium | Youth see the importance of advocacy campaigns and tend to participate in such activities. |
| Participating in special committees entrusted to draft national strategies, particularly those related to youth | Weak | Youth are not aware of such opportunities; most probably they are not invited (exclusive invitations). |

| Table 2: Community Participation | | |
|---|--------------------------|---|
| Participation Opportunities | Benefits to Youth | Notes |
| Initiating or participating in volunteering and social campaigns | Medium | Youth find acknowledgement of their identities through such activities, and a chance to meet peers. |
| Participating in neighbourhood committees managed by the municipalities | Weak | Most youth are not aware of such opportunities. |
| Participating in community health committees managed by the Ministry of Health (MoH) | Weak | Most youth are not aware of such opportunities. |
| Participating in local security councils in governorates managed by the Public Security Directorate (PSD) | Weak | Most youth are not aware of such opportunities. |
| Participating in governmental youth commissions managed by the Ministry of Youth (MoY) or other organisations | Medium | Youth find acknowledgement of their identities through such activities, and a chance to meet peers. |
| Participating in educational development councils managed by the Ministry of Education (MoE) | Weak | Most youth are not aware of such opportunities. |

| Table 3: Economic Participation | | |
|--|--------------------------|---|
| Participation Opportunities | Benefits to Youth | Notes |
| Participating in the labour market | Weak to Medium | Over 30 per cent of all youth, particularly those below the age of 25, are unemployed. |
| Participating in domestic work | Weak | Youth seek stable work and salaries, and do not prefer to work in the house. |
| Participating in entrepreneurship programmes and proposing business projects | Weak | Insufficient programmes for youth entrepreneurship. Youth hesitate to participate because they do not earn the aspired income at the start. |
| Applying for loans to carry out income-generating projects | Weak | Youth fear potential negative consequences of applying for loans to experiment with new projects. |

1.4 Challenges Facing Youth Participation in Policy Dialogue

Despite the numerous opportunities for youth to participate in policy dialogue, youth participation remains weak. This is attributed to many factors, such as:

Lack of genuine partnerships with youth

While youth are often the beneficiaries of government and civil society programmes, they are hardly ever engaged as partners in producing activities for youth. Even when they are engaged, their role is often limited to logistics support. This gives the impression that many youth engagement programmes carried out by government institutions, private organisations, international organisations, and CSOs are only nominally trying to empower youth to obtain funding, but do not include them as real partners in development.

Repetitive activities

CSOs and government agencies working with youth tend to repeat the same activities, which demotivates youth and causes youth to abstain from participating in empowerment and participation programmes.

Lack of funding

Youth organisations tend to have little financial resources provided to them by the government. Oftentimes, they end up relying on foreign funding and donations, which impacts the sustainability of their projects.

Lack of incentives

Youth in Jordan seem to lack motivation to participate in empowerment projects due to a lack of incentives given to them (financial, material, or other).

Lack of awareness of the importance of and types of participation

Some participants believed that youth are not aware of the opportunities available to them, and do not understand the impact their participation can have on themselves and their communities.

Misconceptions about volunteerism

Some participants believed there is a limited understanding of the concept of volunteerism among youth and youth organisations. Volunteer work is often restricted to waste collection, painting pavements, or other community service efforts.

Lack of spaces to conduct activities

There is a lack of spaces in Jordan where youth can freely express their opinions, and use their energy and creativity.

Lack of transparent selection processes

Some participants believed youth organisations do not apply a fair selection process when selecting participants for their programmes. Certain organisations tend to offer new opportunities to youth that already attended previous activities, limiting the amount of beneficiaries. Others lack fair and transparent selection criteria, or have an unclear selection process that does not take equal participation of men and women, or of youth from different governorates into consideration.

1.5 Role of CSOs in Facilitating Youth Participation in Policy Dialogue

Participants in the Discussion Session believed that civil society must increase its efforts to facilitate youth participation in policy dialogue through:

- Reassessing all national efforts targeting youth, evaluating their impacts, and ensuring a variation in the activities offered and that different youth are given a chance to participate.
- Defining concepts related to youth participation and policy dialogue.
- Engaging youth by allowing them to suggest project ideas and manage projects themselves.
- Establishing free youth centres across all governorates where youth can carry out activities and debates regarding public policies with decision-makers.
- Improving the level of transparency of youth organisations to build trust.
- Incentivising youth participation in different activities.
- Establishing a “support fund” through an alliance of CSOs that is able to fund youth organisations and guarantee sustainability. This fund could also help youth entrepreneurs access funding.
- Building bridges between CSOs and the government to overcome a lack of trust.

1.6 Tools Needed for Youth Participation in Policy Dialogue

Interactive youth platform(s)

Jordanian youth are actively participating on various social media platforms. By using these platforms or developing a separate app for youth participation in policy dialogue, a large number of youth can be reached and engaged.

University and student clubs

Student unions and clubs at universities create opportunities for regular student meetings with thought leaders and decision-makers.

Consultation entity for youth

A national commission should be established that engages a selection of youth as consultants to benefit from their creative ideas and solutions for community problems.

Advocacy campaigns

Youth from all governorates should be empowered with the skills to advocate and lobby for legislative reform.

2 Recommendations

Participants in the Discussion Session agreed on the following recommendations:

1. It is important to make participation opportunities widely available to youth, while guaranteeing that a large number of youth benefit from them.
2. The impact of all youth programmes and projects should be assessed, and youth should be allowed to contribute to the assessment.
3. It is important to have an obligatory course at universities on how to draft laws, legislations, and policies so that youth are able to understand the process and how to impact it through policy dialogue.
4. Media campaigns should be designed for all social media channels to acquaint youth with opportunities for participation in policy dialogue.
5. The role of student unions and clubs at universities should be supported.
6. Awareness needs to be spread among youth of the importance of enrolling in unions, syndicates, parties, and associations.



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