Middle-Eastern and North African NGOs' Participation in the United Nations Economic and Social Council: Current Situation, Challenges and Solutions

By

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Disclaimer

The opinions and ideas expressed in this research are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect that of the United Nations or any of subsidiary bodies.

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Note

The Islamic Republic of Iran is included in Arab World solely as a member country of Middle East and North Africa region and for statistical or analytical convenience. We do not necessary express a judgment about the cultural or ethnical nature of the country.

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Besides, the information provided by interviewed NGOs was very useful to complete this paper. The author would like to express his thanks towards the different organizations which have taken times to reply to the questionnaire.

Introduction

The global economic and financial crisis which started at the end of 2008 shows once more the fragility of the world economic system. This situation is worrisome for governments and international institutions. In fact, it may cancel, among others things, the important efforts made by the countries towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The economic performance of a nation determines, in the long run, the standard of living and the social conditions of its population. The efficacy of economic and social development policies requires the merging of governments, the private sector and incontestably the civil society. In this view, the United Nations considers Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) as an essential partner in the resolution of the multiple problems faced by the world today.

This paper aims to identify actions and recommendations required to improve the participation of Developing countries' NGOs to the United Nations activities. The objective is to strengthen both the participation of NGOs which hold consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and also to attract new NGOs in the program. We will focus specially on the Middle-Eastern and North African (MENA[1]) countries (Arab World).

The paper is organized in three parts. Part I describes the situation of NGOs with consultative status in the MENA region and their participation in United Nations activities. The participation is defined at two levels: firstly the participation of NGOs at ECOSOC[2] meetings and conferences and secondly the submission of written statements to the United Nations. In Part II, we use data and information available to hypothesize and subsequently analyze the main factors affecting

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[1] A list of Middle Eastern and North African countries considered in this paper is available in appendix

[2] In the whole of the document, ECOSOC refers to the United Nations Economic and Social Council and all its subsidiary bodies.

NGO participation in the MENA region. Part III formalizes concrete recommendations which respond to the purpose of the paper.

Part I:

Backgrounds and tendencies of MENA' NGOs getting consultative

status and participating in ECOSOC

1. Economic and social context of MENA region

Generally oil exporters from Arab countries benefited these last years from a good global economic context. The rise in oil prices, momentarily stopped by the financial crisis, allowed these countries to have high economic growth. According to the IMF estimates, the economic growth rate of Middle-East and Central Asia is around 6.6% in 2007 and 5.8% in 2008, which is far higher than the world average (Table 1). This performance is very similar to those of emerging countries, as shown in the table. For this reason, MENA's countries are considered as emerging economies. However, this situation contrasts with the presence of oil importers in the region (Lebanon, Morocco, Syria…etc) and the large political instability of some countries (Palestine, Iraq…etc).

Finally, despite the global economic and financial crisis and the recession, especially in the developed countries, the IMF projections predict a positive growth of MENA's economies. The growth rate will be around 2.5 % in 2009 for Middle-East and Central Asia while it will be -1.3 % at the world level.

Table 1 : World and MENA Economic context - Percent change of output

			Projections	
	2007	2008	2009	2010
Word output	**5,2**	**3,2**	**-1,3**	**1,9**
Advanced Economics	2,7	0,9	-3,8	0,0
Which US	2,0	1,1	-2,8	0,0
WhichEuropean Union	3,1	1,1	-4,0	-0,3
Emerging and developping Economics	8,3	6,1	1,6	4,0
Which Middle East and Central Asia	**6,6**	**5,8**	**2,5**	**3,8**

Source : Regional Economic Outlook, Middle East and Central Asia, IMF (May 2009)

Many social challenges persist, despite the good economic performances

Despite their economic performance, the Arab countries face many social challenges. According to UNDP (Human Development Report 2007/2008), the Human Development Index (HDI) of Arab countries is 0.699, lower than that of Mean Income countries which was 0.776 in 2005 (Table 2). The HDI is a composite index which depends on the three elements: the GDP per capita, the education index and the life expectancy index. It is considered to be a good indicator of the situation of social development of a nation. Apart from these elements, the MENA's countries are constantly facing many others challenges regarding the achievement of the MDGs. These challenges require the participation and a good coordination of actions made by different actors, in order to transform economic realizations into real social improvements.
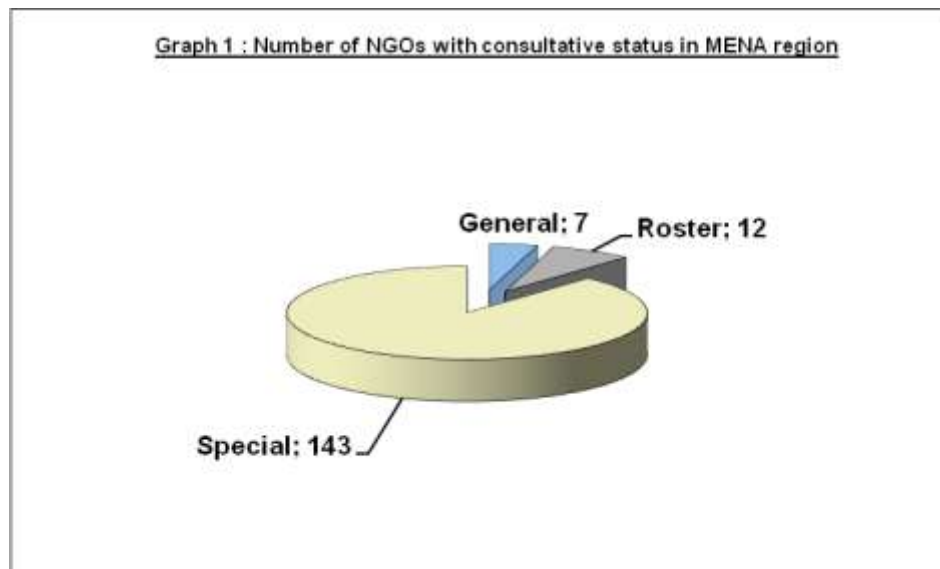
Table 2 : Human Development Index (HDI) - Value 2005

Developing countries	0.691
Least developed countries	0.488
Arab States	**0.699**
East Asia and the pacific	0.771
Latin America and the Caribbean	0.803
South Asia	0.611
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.493
High Income	0.936
Medium Income	0.776
Low Income	0.570
World	**0.743**

Source : Human development report 2007/2008 (UNDP)

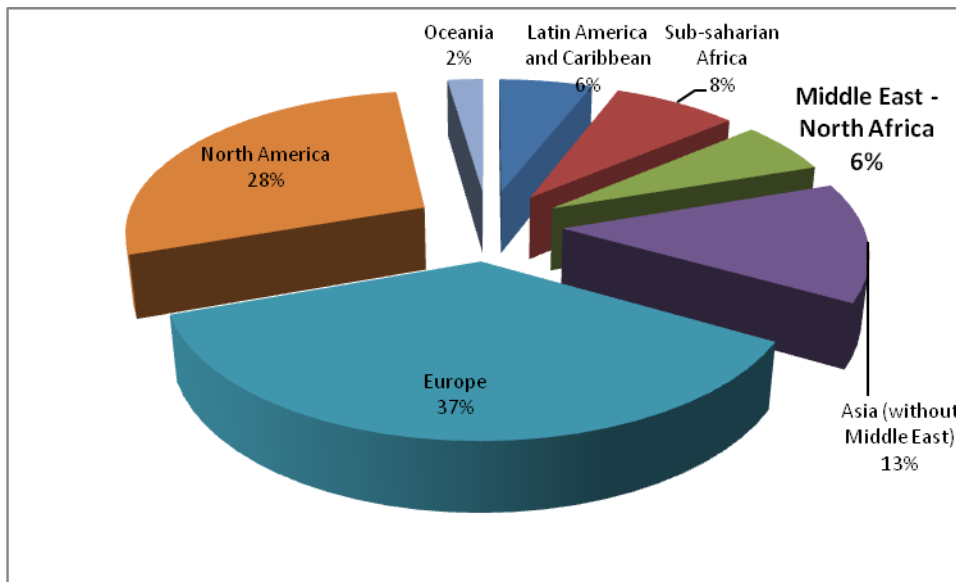# 1. NGOs with consultative status in the MENA region

2.1 General view

Actually, there are 3194 NGOs with consultative status in ECOSOC of which 162 are from the Middle East and North Africa. The MENA region has only 6% shares in the global number of NGOs, coming second from the bottom on world ranking by region. In general, graph 2 shows the under-performance of civil society in developing countries as opposed to those of developed countries. Together, Europe and North America own 65% of NGOs with consultative status around the world (more details in Graph 2). Moreover, at the world level as at the regional one, most of these NGOs have special status. That is to say they work in only a few areas of ECOSOC activities. 88% of MENA's NGOs with consultative status have special status.

Graph 1 : Number of NGOs with consultative status in MENA region

General: 7   Roster: 12

Special: 143

Source : ECOSOC NGO Database (July 2009)

Graph 2 : Share of NGOs with consultative status by region (June 2009)

Oceania 2%
Latin America and Caribbean 6%
Sub-saharian Africa 8%
Middle East - North Africa 6%
North America 28%
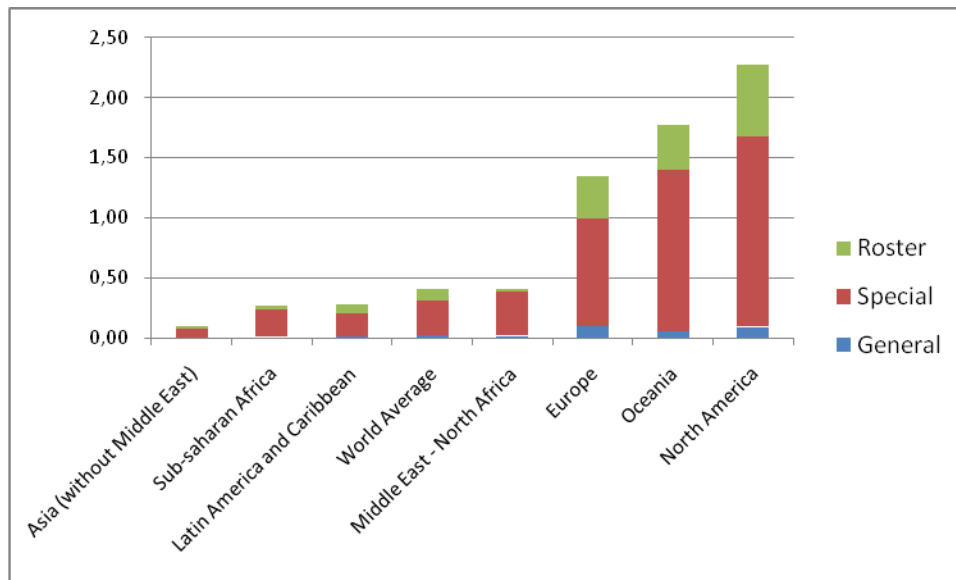Europe 37%
Asia (without Middle East) 13%

Source : ECOSOC NGO Database (July 2009)

Considering the population heterogeneity among the regions, it is necessary to define a relative indicator to compare performance between regions. The under-performance of developing countries, particularly those MENA's countries revealed above, is also confirmed by the Indicator Number of NGOs per million of persons. This index is 0.41 NGOs per million of persons for the MENA region while it is 1.35 NGOs per million of persons for Europe and 2.27 NGOs per million of persons for North America. The world average is 0.41 NGOs per million of persons.

Nevertheless, the MENA region is more competitive for this indicator than Sub-Saharan Africa (0.27 NGOs per million of persons) or Latin America and the Caribbean (0.28 NGOs per million of persons).

Graph 3: Indicator Number of NGOs with consultative status per million of persons for different regions (June 2009)
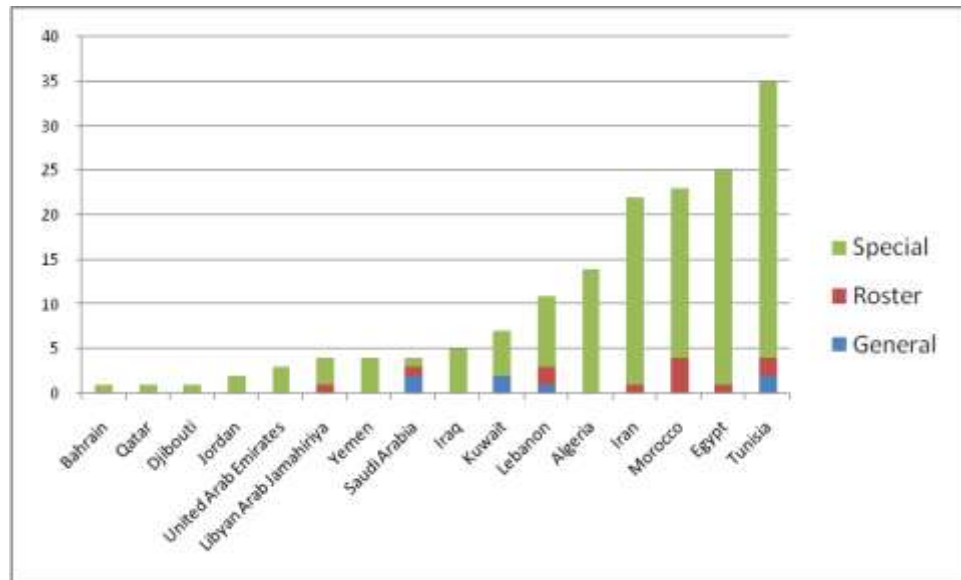

Source : ECOSOC NGO Database (July 2009)

2.2 Quantitative analysis by country

The graph 4 below presents the MENA's NGOs with consultative status by country. Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco, all from North Africa, occupy the first three places of NGOs with consultative status with 35, 25 and 23, respectively. The three countries combined, account for 51% of the total number of MENA's NGOs. This result reflects the predomination of North African NGOs in the Arab world. It could be explained partially by their geographical and cultural proximity with Europe. Particularly in Morocco, the country has undertaken since couples of years many initiatives and actions, which have apparently strengthened the civil society action (the reform of family's law, the National Initiative for Human Development...)

To note is the absence of Palestine, Syria and Oman from the graph. The three countries have no

NGOs with consultative status. We will try in Part II to explain this result further; but ECOSOC

must worry about this type of findings in order to improve civil society action around the world.

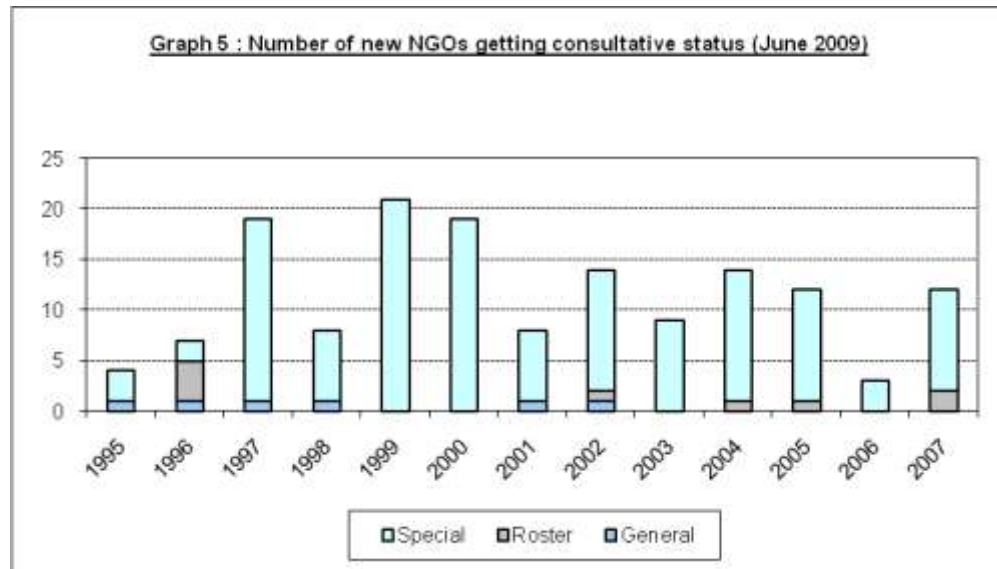**Graph 4: Number of MENA's NGOs with consultative status by county (June 2009)**

<u>Source</u> : ECOSOC NGO Database (July 2009)

2.3 Tendencies and expectations

Generally speaking, we have no regular tendency regarding the annual evolution of number of

new NGOs from MENA region getting consultative status. This number is fluctuating from one

year to the next, as shown in graph 2 below. It moved from four NGOs in 1995 to 12 NGOs in

2007, with the average of 11.5 new NGOs per year in the period. Due to the resolution adopted

in 1996 clarifying the relationship between United Nations and NGOs, the number of new NGOs

getting consultative status has significantly increased in 1997; it is one of the largest numbers

during the period 1995-2007. Also, the new getting of consultative status observed since 2003

concern only Special and Roster status. The last getting of General Status was in 2002. For that

purpose, ECOSOC would target a positive annual growth rate regarding the new NGOs getting consultative status. In addition, it would be necessary for NGOs to enlarge their area of activities in order to allow the reclassification of existing NGOs and the new entries in general status.
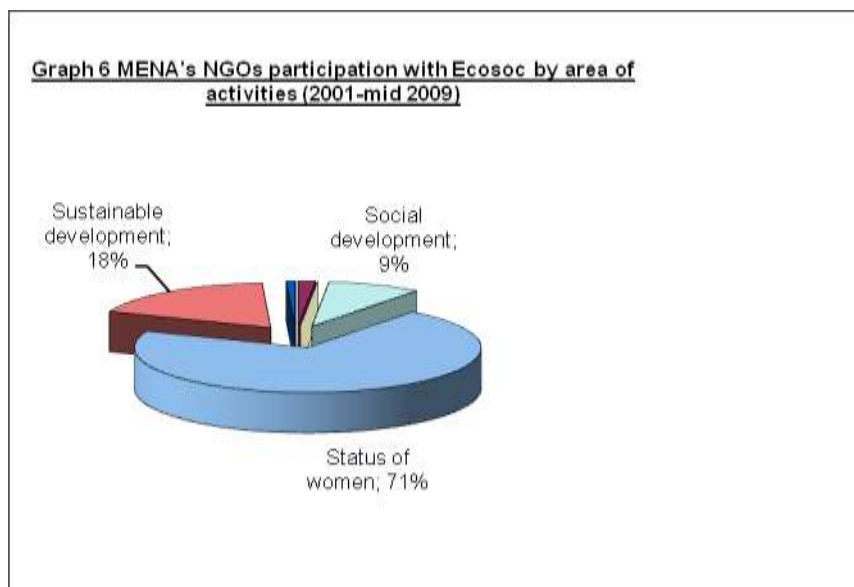

Source : ECOSOC NGO Database (July 2009)

2. MENA's NGOs contribution to the work of the United Nations
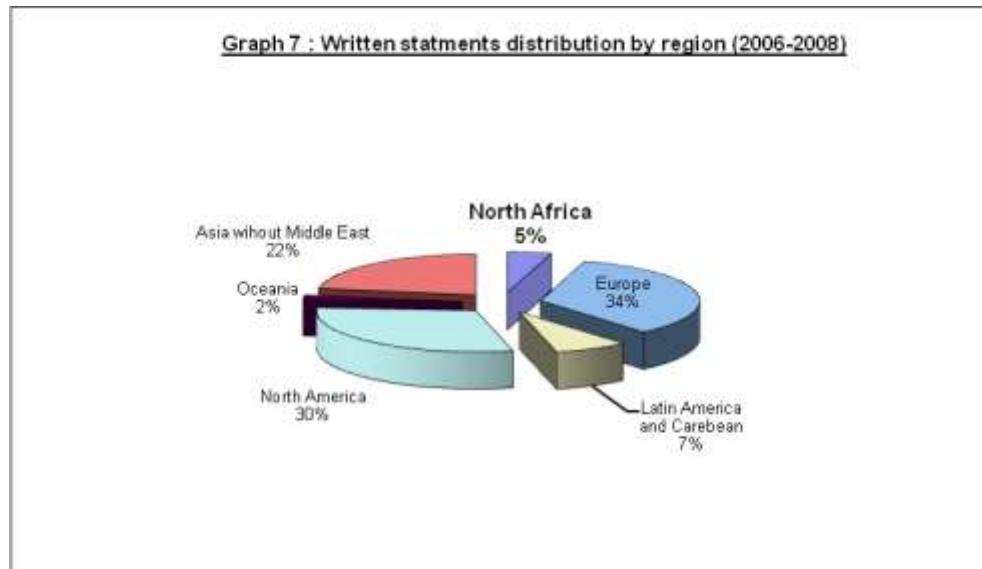
3.1 General view

After a general overview of the situation of NGOs in consultative status described in the paragraphs above, this section aims to quantitatively assess NGOs' contributions to the United Nations activities. The two indicators chosen for that purpose are firstly the contribution of NGOs in ECOSOC meetings and conferences and secondly the submission of written statements to the United Nations. Unfortunately, there is no global data to compare the different regions for the first indicator. Therefore, we will only describe the situation in the Middle-East and North Africa. The NGOs from the Arab region participated in 116 ECOSOC

meetings and conferences from 2001 to 2008. These conferences essentially concerned the status of women (71%), sustainable development (18%) and social development (9%). This statistic matches the increasing interest regarding women rights which has been observed these last years in Arab countries.

Concerning the second indicator, the Arab NGOs, more precisely North African NGOs own 5% of written statements submitted to the United Nations during 2006 and 2008. The Middle-Eastern NGOs did not submit any written statements to the United Nations during this period. The regional share of submitted written statements is fully shown in graph 7. The developed countries (in Europe and North America) together own the largest part of the submitted written statements (64% of the world total).

Graph 7 : Written statments distribution by region (2006-2008)
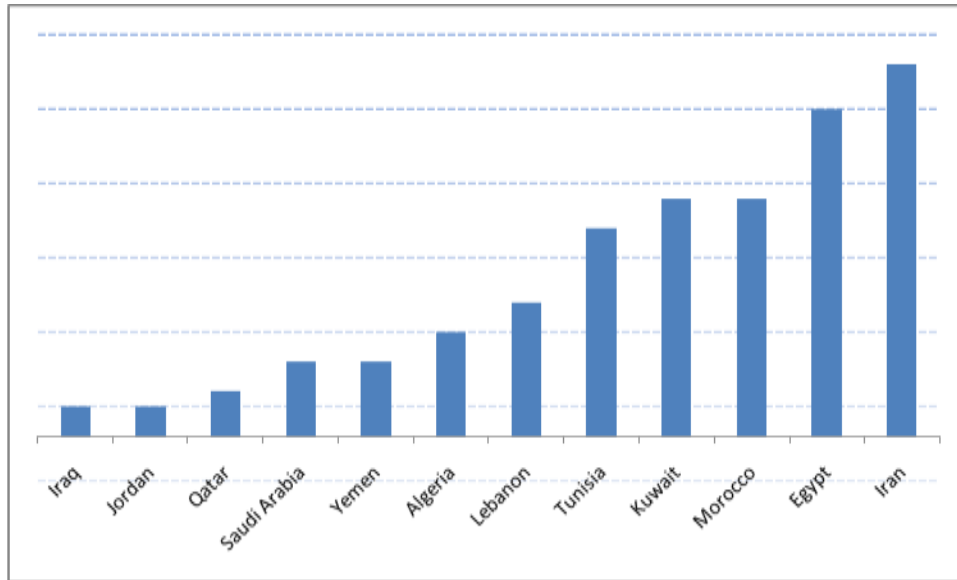
Source : ECOSOC NGO Database (July 2009)

3.2 Quantitative analysis by country

The share, by country, regarding the contribution in ECOSOC meetings and conferences is presented in the graph 8 below. The results are quite similar to those concerning the share by country of NGOs with consultative status. The countries with a high number of NGOs holding consultative status (Morocco, Egypt and Iran), are the same ones which participated in more ECOSOC meetings and conferences from 2001 to 2008. Similarly, the countries which have the least number of NGOs did not contribute to the United Nations activities during this period. This evidence indicates that ECOSOC actions should be aimed directly at improving the number of NGOs with consultative status. As a result, the quality of participation will follow.

Furthermore, Iraq is the last country regarding their participation in ECOSOC meetings and conferences, despite their ranking at the middle of the table in terms of number of NGOs in

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consultative status. This fact can be more or less explained by the instability of the country and perturbations ensuing from the political conflict which the country has been facing since 2003.

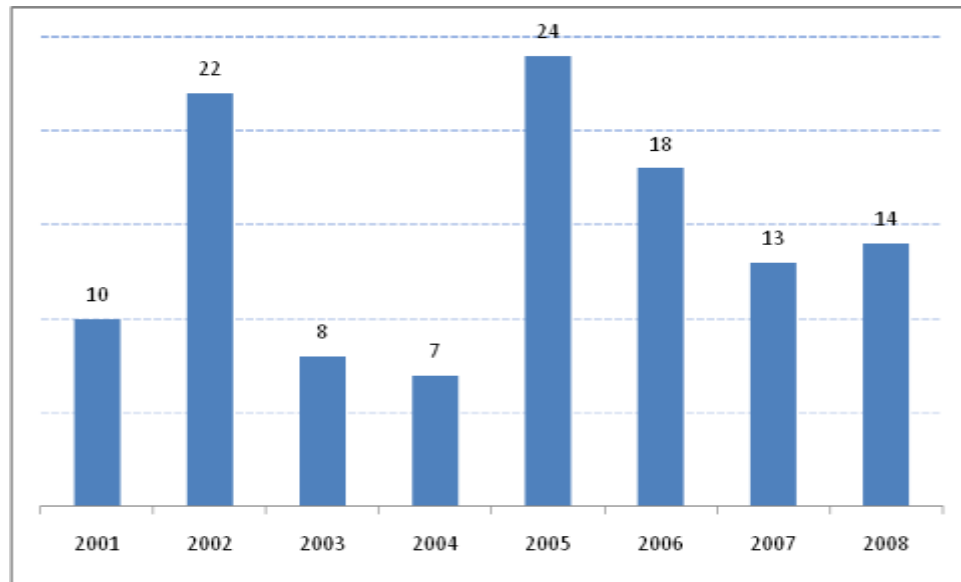**Graph 8: Number of ECOSOC Meeting participation by country (2001-2008)**

Source : ECOSOC NGO Database (July 2009)

3.3 Tendencies and expectations

As with the previous results concerning the new NGOs getting consultative status, the annual evolution of the number of ECOSOC meeting and conferences did not match any regular trend. The participation in ECOSOC meetings and conferences saw fluctuations from 2001 to 2008. It changed from 10 meetings and conferences in 2001 to 14 in 2008, with 14.5 participations observed per year during this period for the whole MENA's NGOs. Moreover, we observed a decreasing trend of the participation in ECOSOC meetings and conferences during the last four years (2005, 2006, 2007). Without pointing out formally the decreasing number of actions by NGOs in the region, this result calls ECOSOC to seriously consider the improvement of NGOs participation in this region.

Graph 9: ECOSOC Meeting participation of MENA's NGOs with consultative status by year

Source : ECOSOC NGO Database (July 2009)

3.0 Conclusions

After this descriptive part, it is important to state the main facts regarding civil society action in the Arab countries and to identify focal points for the second part. For that purpose, the situation concerning MENA's NGOs with consultative status can be concluded as follows:

▪ Despite the high economic growth of the region these last years, the social situation of populations remains deficient and requires the real involvement of civil society;

▪ The performance of MENA'S NGOs is very low, with only 6% of shares in the total number of NGOs with consultative status around the world ;

▪ Civil society action in Arab countries is characterized by a high specialization in the area of status of women, social development and sustainable development;

▪ North African NGOs are the most active from the Arab region regarding the civil society participation;

▪ No regular trend is observed from the annual evolution in the number of new NGOs getting consultative status.

In order to identify the obstacles in the expansion of civil society action in the MENA region, the next section will focus on these followings points:

▪ the incidence of the political and legal environment ;

▪ the resources constraints faced by NGOs, particularly their financing;

▪ the interests of civil society regarding cooperation with international institutions;

▪ the role of information and communication.

Part II:

Analysis and prospect of determinant factors on MENA' NGOs getting consultative status and participating in ECOSOC

This part aims to explain the different facts and evidences described in part I. The point is to identify challenges and obstacles related to the low participation of MENA NGOs to the United Nations activities. For that purpose, we adopt a methodology defined in two steps. The first step is a literature review on the action taken by the civil society[5] in the Arab world. Hypotheses regarding the different challenges faced by MENA NGOs are developed from the literature and from evidences established in part I. The second step is then to test these hypotheses through a survey of MENA NGOs in consultative status. Conclusions on the determing factors of the Arab World NGOs participation to the work of United Nations are drawn from this two-step process.

1. Literature review:

Challenges faced by the civil society in Arab world concerning their participation in ECOSOC activities

Of the many studies carried out in the past years on NGOs' relationship with international institutions, few have addressed the problems faced by civil society's participation in international activities in the Arab world. From the literature, the main challenges faced by MENA NGOs can be summarized in the following points:

- the rigidity of legal and political system
- the lack of comprehensive vision and strategies defining NGOs' activities
- the constraints related to human and financial resources
- the deficit regarding information and communication

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[5] The term civil society in this document refers to the third sector including associations and non-profit organizations others than private firms and governments.

- some facts concerning the process of getting consultative status and the implementation of the consultative status relationship.

1.1 The rigidity of legal and political system

Democracy is considered in several ways to be an important requirement for a strong and efficient civil society. It allows an effective separation of roles held by different entities (government, private sector and civil society) and provides to civil society actors the liberty needed to act and express themselves without any troubles. According to several authors, the opacity of political regimes and legal system governing the civil society in certain Arab countries would explain their under performance. In this view, Abdel Samad (2007) classifies Arab countries in three categories depending on their legal system toward civil society action, as following:

- Countries with highly restriction of civil society action, where there is no law governing NGOs ;

- Countries with such law but where organizations are used by public authorities as a tool to pressure and to control the civil society action;

- Countries with relatively liberal law useful to the civil society action, but where the implementation of these laws faces many technical obstacles.

Ali-Ahmad (2006) provides a more complete analysis by illustrating with examples these different categories of countries. Thus, we find countries like Libya or Syria in the first category, while Morocco, Lebanon, Algeria and Palestine are classified in the third category.

These limits are also mentioned in the Arab Human Development Report (2003 and 2004) issued by UNDP, and in others publications from international institutions , as Arab NGO Network for Development (*The Ethical Criteria for Eligible and Responsible Civil Society Involvement in Response to the needs and challenges of Human Security in the region,* 2005).

In fact, the activities of the civil society in certain Arab countries would be subjected to a restriction from public authorities. The organization of any activity by associations requests a prior approval of governmental authorities. In certain cases even getting funds from foreign donors requires an approval of public authorities. However, it must be stated out that several initiatives and efforts have been made by Arab countries these last years in order to improve the civil society action. We can cite among other things: *The Sana'a Declaration* (January 2004) on democracy, human rights and the role of international criminal court formed by Governmental and Parliamentary Delegations from all the Arab and neighboring African and Asian countries; *The Alexandria Charter* (March 2004) issued at the conference on Arab reforms issues organized by Bibliotheca Alexandrina in Egypt in collaboration with civil society organizations in the Arab world and *The Arab Vision for the Future* (June 2004) issued at the Regional Conference on Education For All held by the Arab Ministers of Education in Cairo (Egypt).

Actually, the main challenge concerns measures and actions to be made in order to support these initiatives, specifically the implementation of appropriate legal system, which is required for the efficacy of civil society action.

1.2 The lack of comprehensive vision and strategies defining NGOs activities

It is well known in private sector and public service that the performance is directly related to the clarity and the pertinence of vision and strategies followed by the organization. This principle is also applicable for an efficient management of civil society organizations.

In its report mentioned above, *Arab NGO Network for Development* distinguishes three types of civil society organizations, as following:

- *NGOs oriented to the Provision of service:* this type of organizations includes associations and charitable structures which the only vocation is to provide supports and essential services to populations. In general, the beneficiaries of these services are the members of the organization;

- *NGOs oriented to the Raising awareness and the capacity building:* this category includes for example micro-credit or training organisms which vocation is to strengthen the development capacities of population;

- *NGOs oriented to Lobby and Advocacy:* this kind of organization are those which participate more actively to the process of decision and policies making at national as well as at international level, according to visions and interests that they defends.

In this view, the Arab world NGOs face two main challenges. Firstly, most of organizations from MENA countries are associations of limited sizes, and oriented to the provision of services. They would not have vocation, and even skills and resources needed to participate in international activities. We can point that out just by analyzing names used by NGOs in this region. For

instance, the word "association" appears 52 times among NGOs names in Arab world, which means for 32% NGOs in the MENA region.

As a second problem, while talking about the civil society action in Arab world Abdel Samad (2007) argue that: *« many CSOs have weak visions and missions, along with inadequate strategies for accomplishing them ».* The author justifies this limit by the ambiguity of visions and policies which characterize good number of Arab countries. In this context, it is difficult for NGOs to be able to define and to follow a clear vision and strategic plan, consequently to be efficient.

1.3 Constraints related to human and financial resources

The socioeconomic facts revealed in the part I by the UNDP- HDI analysis in Arab countries could be one of the main factors explaining the low participation of MENA NGOs in ECOSOC Activities. The lack of human and financial resources largely influences the participation of MENA NGOs to United Nations activities. Taking into account the low contribution of local members and actors, the financing of NGOs depends entirely on international donors. This situation restricts the availability of financial resources for NGOs, while knowing in addition all the requirements to satisfy before getting such funds. In fact, NGOs which have to participate in international events must entirely bear various costs related to travels and accommodations in the destination countries. Such expenses represent an inaccessible luxury in general for these associations, which manage hardly to satisfy primary needs regarding their local activities.
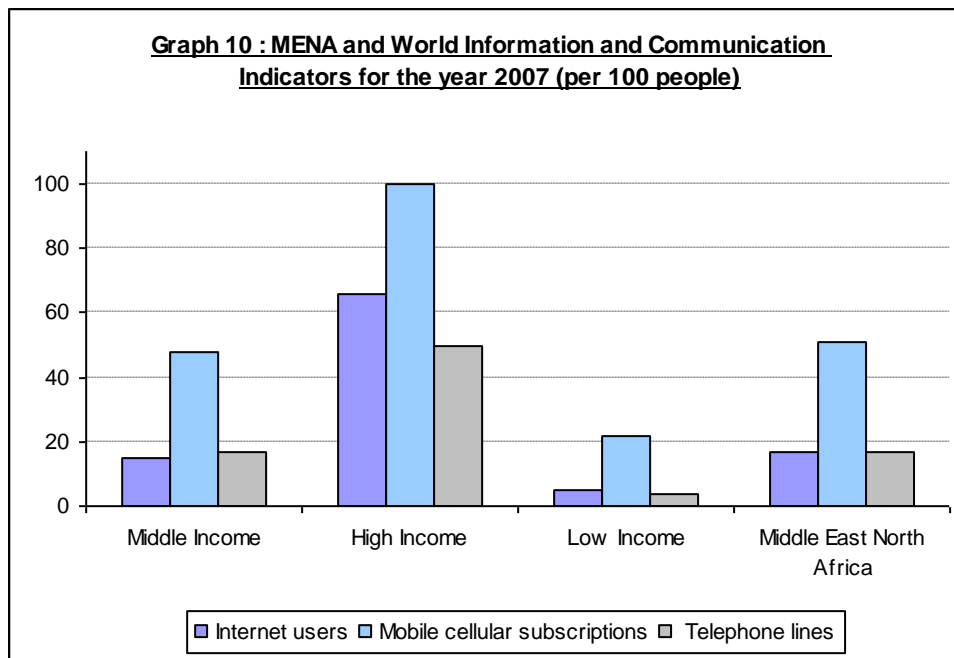
In addition to this financial constraint, most of NGOs endure also the lack of human resources, in quantitative as well as in qualitative view. The absence of vision, clearly followed by NGOs

stated out in the paragraphs above is also reflected in their human resources organization. The "associative" and "voluntary" character of NGOs in the region does not attract skilled and competent persons. Although officers in charge of organizations are in general sufficiently skilled, it is not always the case for the rest of staff. This situation affects in certain way the participation of Arab world NGOs to international events where one requires a high-quality of interventions.

1.4 The deficit regarding information and communication

The level of development of a society, and particularly the efficiency of its civil society is intimately related to the quality of information and communication within individuals and organizations. According to Abdel Samad (2007), one of the challenges faced by civil society organizations from Arab world is the deficit they have regarding communication and information, relatively to the rest of the world. The author justifies this situation firstly by the underdeveloped infrastructures of communication in most of Arab countries and secondly by the restricted access and individual freedoms imposed by legal system in certain countries.

The graph 10 below illustrates perfectly this gap of development between Arab countries and the rest of the world. Generally, the performance of Arab countries is similar to those of Mean Income countries for the three indicators (Internet users, mobile cellular subscriptions, telephone lines, all by million of persons). Thus, the World Bank estimates for MENA countries in 2007, 15 Internet users for 100 persons, 48 mobile cellular subscriptions for 100 persons and 17 telephone lines for 100 persons.

Graph 10 : MENA and World Information and Communication Indicators for the year 2007 (per 100 people)

Source : World Bank Database (August 2009)

In this context, the high-quality coordination of activities between ECOSOC and NGOs from the Arab world requests a particular attention toward the management of the information and the communication; in several levels regarding: the availability and the quality of information on websites and the follow up of different correspondences (e-mails, phone, postal mails…).

1.5 Some facts concerning the process of getting consultative status, the functioning of the relationship and its impacts on Arab NGOs participation in ECOSOC

Despite multiple efforts constantly made by United Nations in order to improve its relationship with NGOs, we must state out therefore some facts regarding the process of getting consultative status and the modalities of implementation of this relationship. First at all, the consultative status program has merits to be: i) a good agenda of partnership clearly defined, ii) a program which provides a more large access to international activities for NGOs from developing

countries and Arab world, iii) a project with high mechanisms of support to civil society organizations: Specific offices (NGO Branch/DESA, NGO Section/DPI), several liaison services (NGLS), and several others NGO focal points in United Nations system, (Kamiya, 2007).

However, this ambition should be strengthened by improving the process of getting consultative status in force and the functioning mechanisms of the relationship. For that purpose, Kamiya (2007) point out two main points to improve. First the process of getting consultative status is heavily bureaucratic, that means there are too many administrative requirements to satisfy and a lot of steps before completing the process. He particularly states out the inflexibility of criteria defining the program (which are not always in convenience for primary NGOs, like those from developing countries and Arab world) and the long duration of the process which final decision is due to different members of committee. As a second problem, the author mentions the excessive focusing of NGOs to international conferences and meetings rather than to develop a permanent consultation with United Nations.

Moreover, the increasing number of applications and NGOs with consultative status requires an adjustment of resources (human and materials) for the United Nations services which are directly involved, specifically the NGO Branch of DESA. Actually, the office is relatively suffering of insufficiency of resources needed to face the situation.

2. Survey aimed to MENA NGOs with consultative status

2.1 Methodology and execution of the survey

In order to confirm or to reject the various challenges identified in the previous section and to complete our analysis, we have made a survey aimed to MENA NGOs in consultative status. The survey plan includes 162 MENA NGOs in General, Special and Roster status with ECOSOC. A questionnaire[6] has been sent to the whole of these organizations and few responses have been collected, after some phone calls. It is typically a qualitative survey which aims to identify some focus points for the issue. The purpose is not to build a complete database regarding the problem. The short duration of the project has not allowed to lead a formal statistical study with all details. For that reason, the questionnaire contains only general questions with no prior responses to chose and no indication to follow. Although this method be more difficult for data analysis, it has therefore the advantage to provide more valid results of the survey.

2.2 Results of the survey

Among more than hundred of questionnaires sent to NGOs, we have received 13 responses from NGOs of five different countries (Lebanon, Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia). Summarily, the results of survey are more or less in conformity with those of literature review. Almost the totality of challenges mentioned in previous section are confirmed by NGOs representatives. We have also identified by the survey additional challenges faced by Arab world NGOs. The questionnaire has tackled several themes all related to the purpose of the paper. The following section presents the main findings by theme.

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[6] This questionnaire is available in appendix

i) Interests of civil society in Arab world toward cooperation with United Nations

All the NGOs having replied to the survey have demonstrated a great interest in ECOSOC activities and a large willingness to develop an efficient and solid partnership relation with United Nations. To illustrate advantages of getting consultative status, Officers from the Iranian NGO Charity Foundation For Special Diseases said: *"Having this status connects us to the key policy makers of global social development - ECOSOC - through which we could also be connected to global NGO networks active in this field…Getting access to newest information and benefiting from experience of other partners in this field is another advantage of our status with ECOSOC"*.

More exhaustively, holding a consultative status is viewed by NGOs representatives as a way to:

- develop networking with international institutions and others NGOs in order to share ideas, experiences, innovations, and various others informations, and consequently to be more efficient ;

- be involved in decision making process at national, regional and international levels;

- be able to submit statements about local issues to international institutions;

- get the credibility useful to the effective functioning of the organization.

Quantitatively, table 3 below provides a synthesis of Reponses regarding interests and advantages for NGOs to get consultative status. Concerning their participation in ECOSOC, interviewed NGOs are seeking most to develop networks with other NGOs and ECOSOC (77%)

and to be involved in decision making process at national, regional and international levels (46%).

Table 3 : Synthesis of interests and advantages to work with ECOSOC enumerated by interviewed NGOs (13 in total)

	Number of responses (on 13)	In percentage of NGOs
Developing Networks with others NGO and ECOSOC	10	77%
Being involved in national, regional and international decision making	6	46%
Getting more credibility for the NGO	4	31%
Being a canal for relating local situation to international instances	2	15%

ii) Obstacles and challenges faced by NGOs concerning their participation in ECOSOC

As shown in table 4 below, financial constraints and restrictions of legal system seem to be the two main obstacles concerning the participation of MENA NGOs to United Nations activities. 85% of NGOs having answered to our questions affirm that they are most of the time unable to bear the various costs regarding the participation at international conferences and meetings. According to the General secretariat of the NGO Organization of Islamic Capitals and Cities (Saudi Arabia) : *"The relatively low participation of Arab countries in the works of ECOSOC may stem from the weakness of financial resources or as a result of logistic matters as well as the imposed restrictions on the procedures of applying for getting visas"*.

NGOs representatives also state the interference of public authorities in the activities of NGOs, influencing then the nature and contents of their participation to international events. More precisely, 38% of interviewed NGOs mention the restriction of legal and political system as one of the main challenges for their participation in ECOSOC. The others obstacles mentioned by NGOS representatives are listed below:

- The lack of qualified human resources of a lot of NGOs from Arab countries ;

- The presence of political conflicts and contradictions between certain countries;

- Some difficulties to work in foreign language (English and French);

- Some administrative obstacles concerning procedures of getting visa and others requirements for international trip.

Table 4 : Synthesis of Obstacles and challenges for participating in ECOSOC enumerated by interviewed NGOs (13 in total)

	Number of responses (on 13)	in percentage of NGOs
Lack of financial resources	11	85%
Restriction of legal and political system	5	38%
Administrative obstacles concerning essentially procedures of getting visa	3	23%
Deficit in communication and information	3	23%
Lack of skilled human resources	2	15%

iii) Quality of communication and information between ECOSOC and NGOs from Arab world

The responses provided by MENA NGOs regarding the quality of communication and information with ECOSOC present a lot of contrasts. Points of view change from one NGO to another. For 38% of NGOs representatives interviewed, the quality of communication is good, trough mailings and permanently updated websites. While for the other 38% of NGOs, the information system is deficient and need to be improved, specifically regarding the follow up of e-mails and feedbacks to be given. The remaining 23% of NGOs have no opinion about the issue of communication and information with ECOSOC.

Table 5 : Quality of information and communication between ECOSOC and NGOs according to interviewed NGOs (13 in total)

	Number of responses (on 13)	in percentage of NGOs
Good	5	38%
Bad or to be improved	5	38%
No opinion	3	23%
Total	13	100%

However, we must take into account the bias of this result due to the fact that NGOs which has replied are those which would be more connected to Internet and more comfortable in communication. Thus, they are predisposed to do not find any deficiencies to communication and information system. Besides, the low number of responses reveals also the inefficiency of this communication system, which is broadly used.

3. Main lessons and conclusions

At the end of this part of analysis and prospects of determinant factors of the participation of MENA NGOs in ECOSOC activities, it must be convenient to combine the two approach used (literature review and survey) for addressing the main challenges and obstacles faced by civil society organizations in the region. As a result, we retain the following list of challenges that the next part will try to address some solutions and recommendations:

- The rigidity of legal and political system ;
- The lack of comprehensive vision and strategies defining NGOs activities ;
- The constraints related to human and financial resources ;
- The presence of political conflicts and contradictions between certain countries;
- The deficit regarding information and communication ;

- Some facts concerning the process of getting consultative status and the implementation of the relationship.

Part III:

Recommendations for an outreach plan

The purpose of this part is to identify a set of recommendations to implement in order to improve the qualitative and quantitative participation of MENA NGOs in ECOSOC activities. In this view, the diagnostic made in the previous part suggests an outreach plan which involves simultaneously the different actors: countries' governments, NGOs and ECOSOC. The followings sections develop actions to be made by each of these entities.

1. Actions to be made at the Arab countries' government level

As shown previously, the political, economic and social context of a nation has a key role in the efficiency of its civil society. For that purpose, in order to improve the participation of MENA NGOs, Arab countries' governments should strengthen the various actions initiated these last years toward the good governance and the socioeconomic development. They should particularly target the following actions.

1.1 Promote an appropriate legal and political system

The legal framework seems to be the most important factor determining the participation of Arab NGOs in ECOSOC Activities. For that reason, the improvement of MENA' NGOs participation requires a clarification of the legal system governing the civil society action in Arab world. A set of laws must be defined in order to protect civil society actors and to clarify roles and involvements held by different entities (government, private sector and civil society) and links existing between them. This specification of legal system could avoid interferences observed today in certain Arab countries between governments and civil society, improving consequently their qualitative and quantitative participation to United Nations activities.

Furthermore, according to Abdel Samad (2007), the legal system should be developed in accordance with international declarations of human rights and in dialogue with local civil society. The author mentions also the necessity to take into account the existence of different varieties of NGOs for the definition of these laws.

Besides, Arab countries' governments are also urged to support the *"Arab Initiative for the Freedom of Association"* launched in 1998 by a group of NGOs leaders from various Arab countries (Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Palestine, and Syria), and which membership has progressively grown including actually the support of World Bank and many others NGOs from Arab countries. The initiative aims to promote an adequate legal system governing NGOs activities in Arab world.

1.2 Ensure peace and political stability in the Arab region

Political insecurity existing in Arab world weakens enormously the civil society action in the region. This situation deteriorates human and material resources of NGOs, making them vulnerable and restraining their participation in ECOSOC activities. For that purpose, the efficiency of civil society action in the region requires a reinforcement of different initiatives undertaken in order to ensure peace and stability in the region. Countries should particularly:

- Multiply and reinforce initiatives to solve definitively the Israeli- Palestinian conflict;

- Appease the growing political tensions between certain countries (Lebanon, Syria, Iran...);

- Support Iraq in its political, economic and social reconstruction following the planned retreat of US army from the country;

- Prevent eventual conflict situations in the region by developing a continuous dialogue between different protagonists.

1.3 Strengthen economic and social reforms undertaken by countries

A lot of Arab countries have adopted these last years several economic and social reforms (economic liberalization, privatization of public companies, banking reforms…) which objectives are essentially to achieve high economic growth and improvements in the standards of live. Specifically several economic programs have been set in North African countries like Morocco and Tunisia. In order to get full profit from these economic reforms, henceforth every Arab state should develop a more adequate and clearly followed vision and strategies of social development.

For most of the Arab countries, those that are oil exporters with high economic growth as well as those that are oil importers with however adequate economic programs, the main challenge is actually to transform economic performances into social achievements. For that reason, social developments policies should be defined and set jointly with NGOs, and followed by communication and awareness raising actions toward populations. Such macroeconomic and social context would allow NGOs to be able then to clarify their vision and strategies, and to get benefits from populations more equipped economically (income, contribution to NGOs financing…) and socially (education, health, individual freedoms…).

1.4 Disseminate modern tools of information and communication

Despite considerable investments and the progressive privatization of the communication sector, Arab countries are still challenging an important gap in term of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) relatively to other regions of the world, affecting therefore their civil society action. Although significant progress have been achieved regarding mobile phones use, Internet

access is still very limited at micro level (households, small associations…). As a result, Countries should:

- Multiply investments in communication infrastructures trough more public-private partnerships;
- Continue the liberalization of communication sector in order to obtain more concurrence, lower prices and to improve information access for populations;
- Adopt micro level initiatives to disseminate modern tools of communication; households and civil society organizations should be encouraged to use computers and Internet by adopting for example adequate subventions policies.

2. Actions to be made at the NGOs level

The improvement of Arab NGOs participation in ECOSOC requires a set of actions concerning specifically internal conditions of NGOs. As revealed previously, MENA NGOs countries are facing several internal obstacles regarding essentially the lack of clear vision and strategies, constraints related to human and financial resources and the deficit in communication and information. For each of these obstacles, we address a set of recommendations to be adopted by Arab NGOs in order to be more efficient.

2.1 Set an adequate NGOs governance model

Arab NGOs should leave their actual governance system, which is ambiguous for most of them for an appropriate management model, clearly followed as observed in private firms sector. Firstly, they should clarify their purpose, the reason of their existence, an then specify an self-defining vision matching with this mission, and defined in qualitative and quantitative objectives

to achieve in short and long run. They could then figure out a strategic actions plan required to achieve these objectives. This specification should take into account opportunities and constraints offered by national, regional and international policies.

The NGO strategic plan should include the general strategy followed by the organization, the human resource policy, the financial policy as well the communication policy. Finally, NGOs should assess their achievement on a regular basis (3 years for example) and make eventually necessary amendments. These adjustments may allow them to be continuously in line with political, economic and social conditions of a population in perpetual movement.

2.2 Enlarge human and financial resources

Financial and human resources determine broadly the participation of Arab NGOs to the work of ECOSOC. The main challenge consists to provide NGOs sufficient funds and skilled staff, required for their participation in international activities. In human terms, as announced previously, NGOs should set a written human resources policy to be followed rigorously. This plan should primarily describe the typical organization (organizational chart and bodies) in conformity with the vision of the NGO. Each NGO should then have a written document about competencies, a clearly defined salary policy for non volunteer staff and also a training and plan for their staff. All these specifications should be gathered in a general human resources kit including also ethic and behavioral code of staff. With such high level of professionalism and transparency, Arab NGOs could then attract more skilled workers, and might be able to achieve their various goals and to participate in ECOSOC activities.

The implementation of these reforms and generally the resolution of financial challenges faced by Arab NGOs requires also an adequate financing plan. Arab NGOs should develop financing

policies centered on a diversification of financing sources (individual donors, private companies, local and international donors). The financing plan requires important actions related to information research, communication and lobbying, and solicitation toward all potential donors. The private sector constitutes a great potential source of NGOs financing knowing that the growing interest of firms regarding charitable and social activities for advertising purposes. NGOs should also target international donors with whom they have same vision and defend common interests.

2.3 Improve information access and communication

Arab NGOs are urged to take appropriate measures to get more access to information and to improve their communication with ECOSOC. Every civil society organization should have a specific communication plan declined in several aspects: getting information, general schema of information management and materials acquirement policy. All the staff should be trained to use modern tools of information and in expression and communication techniques. This upgrading would allow to solve challenges in terms of communication existing between Arab NGOs and ECOSOC.

3. Actions to be made at the ECOSOC level

The main purpose of this paper was to identify actions to be made at ECOSOC level in order to improve MENA NGOs participation to its activities. However, the structural nature of the issue have led us to identify firstly actions to be made at countries and NGOs level for improving local context and conditions in which MENA NGOs work. ECOSOC could then play a role of supervision and support for implementing these reforms. The whole recommendations addressed to ECOSOC concern the following points.

3.1 Initiate, supervise and monitor the implementation of necessary reforms

The implementation of various actions identified previously concerning recommendations aimed to NGOs and countries includes several steps and needs a real involvement of ECOSOC. The proposed actions must be viewed as reflection points on which ECOSOC, NGOs and Arab countries' missions to United Nations will work together in order to find solutions. The purpose of these consultations would be to enhance the proposed actions, study their achievability and to define a final outreach plan as a common declaration. . In this view, ECOSOC is urged to proceed as following:

- diffusion of this present draft of recommendations to different Arab NGOs and Arab countries' missions to United Nations;
- awareness raising on the issue of Arab NGOs participation to United Nations activities;
- organization and supervision of workshops and seminars between ECOSOC, MENA NGOs and Arab countries' Missions to United Nations in order to specify and validate actions to be made by each actor.

3.2 Help NGOs to face financial and human resources constraints

ECOSOC Conferences and meeting at national and regional levels

ECOSOC can adopt two main solutions to limit financial constraints faced by NGOs. According to several interviewed NGOs, the organization of meeting and conferences should be decentralized to regional and national levels. Answering to the question concerning the ways to improve Arab NGOs participation, the Direction of Organization for Defending Victims of Violence (Iran) argued that: *"Holding regular regional conferences in regional Arab capitals*

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with governmental and nongovernmental organizations would help in removing a lot of the ambiguities with regards to ECOSOC and UN agencies in general. These regional conferences would in turn encourage further participation and cooperation with ECOSOC".

In fact, actually all the ECOSOC activities are concentrated in New York or Geneva and a lot of Arab NGOs do not have access to these events due to their financial constraints, as stated out previously. Regional conferences would enable also to develop more networking between Arab NGOs. Methods, ideas and experiences could therefore be shared, encouraging in the same time a general upgrading of MENA NGOs. ECOSOC can be helped by regional economic commissions to meet these goals.

Financial support regarding the NGOs' participation in international events

Besides, ECOSOC have to reflect about the way to subsidize NGOs expenses related to their participation to United Nations activities. A solution could be to create a common fund with another United Nations agencies working in development issue, especially dedicated to support NGOs in developing countries. Actions of awareness raising should be also addressed to international donors, requesting them to support the participation of developing countries NGOs to United Nations activities.

Specific training for NGOs staff regarding socioeconomic development issues and the cooperation between NGOs and international institutions could be also organized often by ECOSOC.

3.3 Improve the communication between NGOs and ECOSOC

We stated out before that the cooperation between ECOSOC and NGOs is challenging the deficit in communication at two levels: i) the regular information management between ECOSOC and NGOS and ii) the advertising communication regarding the consultative status program.

Regular information management between ECOSOC and NGOs

The main challenges to be achieved regarding this issue concern among other things the technologic gap of NGOs from Arab World, difficulties related to foreign languages and internal adjustment to be made in ECOSOC support office (NGO Branch/DESA) in order to face the increasing number of NGOs with consultative status.

In its communication with Arab NGOs, ECOSOC should take into account this technologic gap by avoiding to refer always NGOs to websites for getting information. Training sessions on the use of modern tools of communication and expression techniques, aimed to NGOs staff, could be also organized at the countries' level.

In order to solve language challenges, two solutions can be considered: the decentralization of ECOSOC activities at regional level as argued previously and the translation in Arabic of certain usual documents: guidelines, forms, meeting and conferences announcement…etc.

Advertising communication regarding the consultative status program

ECOSOC should take measures to disseminate information about the existence and the functioning of consultative status program. Most of interviewed NGOs affirm that they heard about consultative status from their attendance to activities organized by other United Nations

agencies. Therefore, ECOSOC could develop and distribute tracks during certain United Nations events gathering NGOs and to communicate about consultative status program.

These different actions require a re-organization of NGOs Branch by providing the office sufficient resources matching with the increasing interest of NGOs to United Nations work. After 10 years of existence, the number of NGOs with consultative status has increased significantly; ambitions and needs of the office have significantly grown while the organization and its human resources have remained unchanged.

Conclusion

This paper provides an assessment of the MENA NGOs participation in ECOSOC activities and addresses a set of recommendations in order to improve the relation between Arab NGOs and ECOSOC. The participation is essentially measured by three indicators : i) the number of Arab NGOs with consultative status, ii) the number of written statements submitted to United Nations by NGOs from Arab world and iii) the number of United Nations conferences and meeting attended by Arab NGOs. The analysis reveals for the three indicators a weak participation of Arab NGOs in ECOSOC activities comparatively to NGOs from other regions of the world.

Among different factors explaining this low performance, Arab NGOs are particularly challenging restrictions of legal and political system observed in certain countries and constraints related to financial resources. The solution to these obstacles requires various actions involving simultaneously countries governments, NGOs and ECOSOC. Thus, the paper provides a reflection frame to the issue and makes a set of recommendations which certain actions can be realized directly by ECOSOC and other ones engage countries and NGOs.

The paper reveals several research interests regarding generally the issue of the participation of developing countries to United Nations Activities. It would be particularly interesting to study i) the specification of a management model appropriate to NGOs from developing countries and ii) perspectives to improve NGOs financing in developing countries.

Appendix:

1. List of Middle Eastern and North African countries considered in the paper:

1. Algeria

2. Bahrain

3. Djibouti

4. Egypt

5. Iran

6. Iraq

7. Jordan

8. Kuwait

9. Lebanon

10. Libya

11. Morocco

12. Oman

13. Palestine

14. Qatar

15. Saudi Arabia

16. Syria

17. Tunisia

18. United Arab Emirates

19. Yemen

2. Questionnaire aimed to MENA's NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC

1. Why did you apply for consultative status with ECOSOC?

2. What are the advantages of having status for your organization?

3. How do you perceive the Arab countries representation in ECOSOC?

4. What are the reasons that explain this (low relatively) participation in your opinion?

5. What challenges your organization (and NGOs in general) face in its participation with ECOSOC?

6. How can ECOSOC improve the participation of Arab countries NGOs?

7. How did you learn about the consultative status with ECOSOC and how do you find the communication and information flow between ECOSOC and civil society's organizations?

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