

Building an Advocacy Coalition for NGO Law Reform- Case Study from Jordan

I. Problem Statement

The civic sector in Jordan is growing rapidly, with an increasing number of NGOs of varying sizes and capabilities working in diverse sectors. Civil society organizations in Jordan can be registered or established in six different forms: the first one is a **“Royal NGO”**, which has affiliations with members of the royal family, established by special decree. **Professional Business Associations** are made up of members from a specific profession or industry to promote their interests to government, and build their internal capacity and expertise. The third form is a **Charity Association**, registered under the Ministry of Social Development, with a purely philanthropic agenda. **Foreign NGOs** are allowed to register as a branch of a foreign association. **Cultural Associations** are registered under the Ministry of Culture and have cultural, artistic, and educational programs. The last form is a **Not-for-Profit Company**, registered under the Ministry of Industry and Trade. These organization follow the same law that regulates for profit corporation, with the exception that profit cannot be shared among stakeholders.

These CSOs operate under a law that used to be called the law of “Charity Associations,” issued in 1965, which was linked to the Ministry of Social Development. The radical expansion of the NGO sector created the need for amendments to this law starting in 1995, after which it was called the law on "Social Associations and Assembly". This law organizes the terms of licensing under different ministries and government bodies according to the purpose and objectives of each organization; such as Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Industry and Trade and the Higher Council for Youth. Furthermore, several additional laws were issued to organize civil society organization registration and operation procedures, and finally a new independent law was issued in 1997 related to civil companies and non-for –profit companies.

In light of the fragmented and outdated jumble of laws described above, and the rapid expansion of civil society’s work in Jordan, the need arose for a new, comprehensive association law that would adhere to human rights and international best practices. In 2006, Partners-Jordan (PJ) and Adaleh Center for Human Rights Studies (ACHRS) teamed up to lead a coalition of Jordanian NGOs, with the support of the Ministry of Political Development, to work on a unified association law. A draft law was developed with input from all stakeholders gathered using a variety of participatory and cooperative methodologies. The draft law was submitted to the Prime Minister’s office for consideration in November of 2006. However, in May 2007, the government issued restrictive new regulations that made the work of NGOs registered as “not-for-profit companies” more difficult.

In 2007, a draft association law was presented by the Ministry of Social Development to the Jordanian Parliament. This law generated opposition from Jordanian civil society and the international community, as it contradicted many international standards related to forming and operating associations. For example, it granted the Minister the authority to shut down associations without a court decision.

As a result, in 2008 the Prime Minister withdrew this law from the Parliament and asked that it be returned to the government to be re-drafted with more participation by civil society and other stakeholders and alignment with international standards and best practices. A first attempt at this re-drafting process was attempted, but did not meet the minimal expectation of NGOs in Jordan or internationally. In response, the civil society coalition created by PJ and ACHRS regrouped to convey

their concerns about the draft law to the government, and to attempt to play a constructive advocacy role in the creation of a new law.

II. How the Center entered the Problem

- As outlined above, PJ along with the Adaleh Center, recognized the importance of having a unified Association Law in line with the Jordanian constitution, human rights and international standards, and initiated the mobilization of national NGOs to address this issue.
- PJ and the Adaleh Center were nominated by the other coalition NGOs to operate as the Secretariat for the coalition.
- PJ used Partners' Cooperative Advocacy methodology to design and lead the advocacy process from start to finish, including organizing and facilitating meetings with MPs, Ministries, embassies and other important stakeholders.
- PJ was the driving force behind seeking funding for capacity building within the coalition.

III. Main Stakeholders

- NGO Coalition leaders: Partners-Jordan and Adaleh Center for Human Right
- Coalition members: MIZAN (women's rights association), Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists, LHAP (Environment Association), Tkeit Um Ali (charity association), Jordan Women's Union, Al-Urdun Al-Jaded, Women's Rehabilitation Center, National Association for Freedom and Democracy, Sisterhood is a Global Institute (SIGI), Democracy Development Association, Arab Women's Association, National Center for Human Rights.
- Jordanian Government, particularly Ministry of Political Development and the Office of the Prime Minister
- Jordanian Parliament
- International Community, particularly bilateral and multilateral donors investing development aid with the objective of improving governance in Jordan.

IV. How PJ Convened the Coalition

1. Created a core group of a few NGOs and visited the MoPD to obtain their support for this initiative.
2. Identified active NGOs who had worked previously on advocacy campaigns, and had presence in the area of civic work
3. Held one-on-one meetings with at least one NGO representing the following sectors: Human rights, democracy, freedom of journalists, environment, charity, women and children's rights, and cultural associations. Selected NGOs were invited into the coalition and asked to nominate other interested organizations.
4. Sent out invitations to all potential members asking them to attend a meeting to inaugurate the coalition and to build consensus on next for the group.

5. Formed a core group within the coalition to follow up on the approved action plan.
6. Held periodic group meetings with other stakeholders and decision makers to inform them about the progress of the work and next steps, and to get feedback

V. Processes Used

1. A questionnaire was distributed among Jordanian civil society organizations in March of 2006 to collect input from civil society on the problems encountered in the current law. The feedback from the questionnaire was developed into a draft suggested law that was shared with survey respondents in April 2006. Partners Jordan and the Adaleh Center then conducted meetings with civil society in all three regions of Jordan to collect feedback on the suggested draft law, which was integrated into the next draft.
2. Hired a legal consultant to work with experienced coalition members on the draft law. It was important to hire an external consultant to avoid tension within the coalition group, and to ensure the objectivity and professionalism of the final result.
3. The Ministry of Political Development formed a ministerial committee consisting of seven ministries. Weekly meetings were conducted with the ministerial committee under the patronage of the minister of political development. Members of the committee shared their suggestions, which were integrated into the draft law.
4. Weekly meetings with coalition members to discuss the new integrated inputs from both the ministerial committee and NGOs in the field.
5. Once consensus was reached among members of the ministerial committee, coalition members and widely amongst NGOs, Partners Jordan and Adaleh Center submitted the draft law to the MoPD in July, 2006.
6. International community was kept informed and involved with constant stream of memos, meetings, phone calls and emails.
7. An experienced international organization was asked to make a comprehensive comparative study between the draft law suggested by the government and international standards.
8. Cooperative planning meetings were held with decision makers from the Ministry of Social Development
9. Awareness workshops: PJ organized 12 one day workshops in all twelve governorates of Jordan, attended by about 600 different NGOs, to orient them on the Coalition's efforts, present the comparative study of the limitations of the

current law as far as human rights and international standards, present the reasons for the amendments requested by the coalition members, and seek their approval and consent for such changes.

10. Media coverage: Coalition members had good and direct relations with several media outlets. A daily newspaper attended selected coalition meetings. Interviews with several coalition members were broadcast on TV, helping to pressure decision-makers to cooperate with the coalition.
11. Conducted a detailed analysis of the government's suggested Association Law compared to the Jordanian Constitution and the Association Laws of other Arab countries that meet international standards. The study included a grid showing each article of the law, the suggested amendments and the justification for the changes.
12. Attended meetings with the relevant specialized committee in the parliament to convince them of the changes suggested by the Coalition.
13. Conducted one-on-one meetings with MPs from different parties to create a movement to accept the changes suggested by the Coalition.

VI. The Drivers of Change

- Seeking the assistance of the International Center for Non for Profit Law (ICNL) proved to be an important choice. They provided a thorough analysis of the draft law suggested by the government in contrast with best practices. This study strengthened the Coalition's position and provided concrete base for negotiation.
- Lobbying with the international community put a lot of pressure on the government to listen to the Coalition and finally to accept the invitation to attend cooperative planning sessions between the Coalition and the Ministry of Social Development.
- The perseverance, commitment and hard work of the Coalition members.
- Jordanian media was strategically involved in the whole process, which resulted in high visibility for the cause.
- The initial investment of time in developing a clear strategic plan for the Coalition ensured that everyone's efforts contributed in a coherent way to the final goal.

VII. Outcomes

- A new Association Law that incorporated (to a certain extent) the suggestions of the Coalition.

- A change to the administration of NGO registration to ensure more transparency and less government interference through a Board of Directors, 4 members of which are from NGOs.
- The penalties imposed on Associations were reduced.
- The process of approving the registration and receiving funding was improved with enforceable time limits for the government to abide by.

VIII. Main Obstacles

- Conflict among coalition members about strategies to approach this issue.
- The structure of the Coalition's operations was not clear from the beginning, which allowed for conflicts to arise among coalition members.
- The government insisted on having a representative attend all Coalition meetings, which made it more difficult for the Coalition to have open discussions and reach true consensus.
- Time constraints: Often the Ministry of Social Development pressured the Coalition to work within very limited time frame, which didn't allow for much consultation among Coalition members and caused disagreements in front of the Ministry staff in the formal meetings.
- Organizations who were not part of the Coalition, but who were nonetheless concerned with the issue, implemented activities and communicated with the government without consulting or harmonizing their approach with the Coalition. It is very important for the NGO sector to have as unified a voice as possible when working with the government on issues such as this one.

IX. Sustainability

- The main sustainability factor for any coalition is a strong belief in the cause and the coalition members' willingness to invest effort and time to deal with it.
- Financial issues can be a challenge if a coalition wants to implement activities such as research studies and workshops. Often, funding is available from donors or private sector sponsorship, but it can take a long time between asking for funds and receiving them. This is why creating a strategic plan at the commencement of any coalition is crucial, as it helps the coalition members foresee the need for funding, and provides ample time to work on it.

X. Recommendations for similar coalitions and their supporters

- Create strong links to your community. Provide a continuous stream of information and updates on the progress of the Coalition's work.
- Seek the support of the international community to help in lobbying for the coalition's cause.
- Gain visibility in the media by engaging them in the whole cooperative planning process and adopt neutral language instead of only offering accusations and negativity.
- Encourage well-established NGOs to partner with local community organizations to implement projects as a means to build their capacity to be involved in advocacy practices.
- Support the work related to building curricula (especially in Arabic) in step-by-step coalition building and management for advocacy groups .