







REGIONAL WORKING GROUP ON

Citizens, Civil Society, and Public Sector Reform in the Arab Region

Code of Conduct and Draft Action Plan in Engaging Citizens and Civil Society in Public Sector Reform

Second Meeting
2-3 May 2006
Beirut, Lebanon

Code of Conduct and Draft Action Plan in Engaging Citizens in Public Sector Reform

I. Citizen's right to good treatment

- Public servants should deal with citizens in an objective and fair way regardless of their race, religion, gender or political affiliation.
- Citizens should feel that the public servants who handle their affairs are qualified, professional, and competent, observe professional ethics, and avoid political nepotism and favoritism.
- A code of conduct should be established for the public servants specifying their rights and responsibilities towards the citizens.
- The number of documents and supporting papers required to complete administrative services should be commensurate with the content of the administrative service.
- Time limits should be set for completing the administrative service.
- Citizens should obtain certified copies of every administrative decision related to them, stating the basis upon which such decision has been taken.
- The citizens should be provided with high quality administrative services in conformity with international standards and specifications including the standards relative to environment preservation.

II. Citizen's duties

- Citizens should deal with the public servants with respect and politeness.
- Citizens should not resort to power abuse or the use of pressure on public servants to bypass laws and regulations, or the use of bribes in their administrative formalities.
- Citizens should pay the taxes and fees due in accordance with the laws and regulations. They should facilitate the work of the public servants to enable them to carry out their duties properly.
- Citizens should comply with the laws and regulations of the concerned public administration.
- Citizens should assist in reducing the financial burden on the public administrations by preserving public utilities and properties. They should join associations that work towards increasing public awareness of citizen's duties in preserving public establishments and properties.
- A citizen charter should be developed that defines citizen's rights and duties towards the public administration.

III. Citizens' access to information

- The State should recognize the right of the citizen to have access to information.
- Reception offices should be established at the public administrations, institutions and municipalities to provide citizens with the required information.
- Booklets, posters and publications (Citizen Guide) should be provided to citizens explaining the work mechanisms of ministries and public administrations at the national and local levels as well as the public sector's programs and how to participate in them.

- The state should launch campaigns for disseminating information on the public sector's programs including the municipalities' activities.
- Posters containing the basic information on the public projects which are being implemented should be placed at the sites of these projects. The citizens should have an access to the documents related to these projects at the public administrations.
- The public administrations and institutions should publicize in the media the areas where public funds are spent.
- The public administrations and institutions should publicize information on their budgets.
- Administrative bylaws and instructions should stipulate that the public sector's evaluation reports are available to the public.
- Useful, complete and correct information should be provided to the citizens.

IV. Right of citizens' appeal

- Complaint offices at the different administrations should be established.
- An ombudsman should be available to deal with the different administrations.
- Citizens should have the right to file petitions to the official institutions. The requirements and conditions for submitting petitions should be explained.
- Citizens should be able to have recourse to the courts in case they are not convinced of a certain administrative decision.

V. Citizens' right to be consulted

- Official units at ministries and public administrations dedicated to the consultation with citizens should be established.
- Committees or associations of citizens should be formed to give their opinions about public sector's projects and the quality of services given at the national and local levels.
- Ministries and public administrations should organize hearing and discussion sessions with citizens, including hearing sessions on the budget.
- A system should be established allowing citizens and public servants to submit proposals to improve the administrative work within the different administrations.

VI. Citizens' Participation in public policies and public services

- Citizens should participate in conferences of stakeholders.
- Projects of cooperation between the municipalities and the citizens should be encouraged in order to deliver public services, such as cleaning streets, planting trees, launching public awareness campaigns, organizing tourist activities, etc.
- The public administrations should call on citizens to test developed and new services, such as the public telephone booths, a new system for public transports, etc.
- Programs should be introduced for cooperation between the State and the schools to encourage the participation of youths in formulating public policies.
- The State should launch public awareness campaigns about the importance of the participation of citizens in planning and implementing public policies.

Code of Conduct and Draft Action Plan in Engaging Civil Society in Public Sector Reform

I. NGOs in the Arab Countries

- Freedom should be expanded to establish NGOs and to allow them to practice activities and enjoy their rights provided by the law. In addition, they should be given additional privileges such as the right to bid for government and municipality contracts, the right to free access to public media, the right to obtain information, etc.
- NGOs should have the right to initiate legal procedures if they are denied licenses or if the authorities intervene in their activity.
- Oversight by the State over the NGOs should be restricted to provisions in the law. The State should abstain from direct intervention in the internal affairs of the NGOs. It should not exercise censorship on NGO activities, such as the cancellation of internal elections, intervention in appointing their board members imposition of prior censorship on expenses, compulsory merges of organizations, imposition of excessive fines on the pretext of maladministration, dissolution of organizations by ministerial decision, banning their activities on security grounds, confiscation of the properties of the dissolved organizations, etc.
- NGOs should be encouraged to form coalitions, networks and forums with each other.
- The State should provide the NGOs with financial support in a balanced and transparent way. Practical conditions should be laid down for the NGOs to obtain aid from the state, including direct financial support and tax exemptions.
- Citizens should be encouraged to appeal to appropriate civil society organizations to solve their problems with the State's authorities, have their claims answered, and present their proposals for reform.

II. Consulting the NGOs in legislation and the formulation of public sector policies

- Frameworks and forms which the State uses to consult civil society organizations and to listen to the forces and institutions of civil society and the public sector should be strengthened and activated. Examples of these entities are the upper house, economic and social councils, and specialized advisory councils (such as the local and national councils, sectoral councils, private councils, etc).
- The legal framework and required material resources should be provided to the advisory councils so that they can be effective and influential in securing the participation of the civil society organizations and the private sector in proposing, drafting or debating the general policies.
- Working groups should be formed bringing together government authorities and non-government parties including the civil society organizations and experts to address the issues related to public services.
- The State should organize seminars, workshops and symposiums to survey the civil society's views about its policies.
- Administrative units and institutions should be established to consult the NGOs (Examples of these units are consultative councils together with the state, NGOs, and the private sector; public relations offices, etc.).
- The NGOs should have access to the proposed draft laws in parliament and the ministries.

- The NGOs should be allowed to give their opinion in detail on the draft laws.
- The NGOs should be called on to participate regularly in debates of the parliamentary committees.
- The ministries should consult the NGOs regularly on certain projects for development and public services.
- The NGOs should be encouraged to present studies to the parliament and the ministries.
- Annual reports should be prepared on the extent of NGOs' consultation on public sector's policies.

III. Organizing NGOs' participation in public service delivery

- Laws and administrative instructions should provide for the participation of NGOs in the delivery of public services.
- A national plan and sectoral plans should be laid down to distribute tasks between government and non-government sectors in providing the services.
- The State should increase its financial support to the NGOs concerned with providing public services.
- The State should provide the required administrative facilities to service providers of the non-governmental sector.
- The State should organize training programs for the NGOs concerned with the delivery of public services.
- The State should encourage establishing networks of NGOs that provide services in the same sector (health, education, environment).
- Annual reports should be prepared on the extent of NGO participation in providing public services.
- The State should publicize the successful experiences of its partnership with civil society in providing public services.