

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

2025 – 2030

ASFARI INSTITUTE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY AND CITIZENSHIP
AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT



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& CITIZENSHIP

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INSTABILITY, RISING INEQUALITIES, AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES, AND SHRINKING CIVIC SPACE

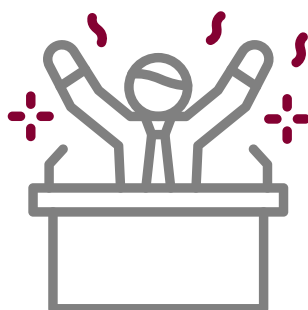
In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, authoritarian regimes continue to consolidate power through increasing restrictions on freedoms, suppression of dissent, and stifling of civil society.

This repressive environment not only curtails individual liberties but also undermines the very essence of citizenship, where individuals are unable to fully participate in the political and social life of their countries. Governments in the region have used economic instability and crises as tools to justify the extension of authoritarian rule. By concentrating power and control, these regimes prioritize maintaining their dominance over fostering equitable development. This power concentration leads to deepening inequality and disenfranchises citizens and non-nationals, stripping them of their ability to influence political decisions and hold their leaders accountable. The decline in democratic governance is evident through manipulated elections, unconstitutional extensions of presidential terms, and severe restrictions on political opposition.

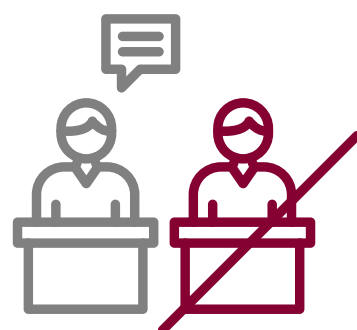
The Decline in Democratic Governance is evident through



Manipulated
Elections



Unconstitutional Extensions
of Presidential Terms



Severe Restrictions
on Political Opposition

As a result, civil society organizations and activists advocating for democratic values and human rights are increasingly targeted. This creates a constrained civic space where dissent is dangerous, and activism is met with repression, further eroding the sense of active and meaningful citizenship. In such an environment, the very concept of citizenship is diminished. The ability of individuals to engage in political discourse, advocate for their rights, and influence their communities is severely restricted. The lack of democratic accountability and transparency exacerbates corruption and inequality, making it difficult for citizens to challenge injustices and seek improvements in their lives. The rise of authoritarianism and the shrinking of civic space have profound implications for human rights, gender equality and diversity, and social justice. Without a robust civil society and democratic mechanisms, citizens find themselves increasingly marginalized, unable to claim their rights or effect meaningful change. This erosion of citizenship rights perpetuates cycles of repression and inequality, undermining the foundation of democratic engagement and social progress in the region.

MILITARISATION AND CONFLICT AND ITS INFLUENCE ON INDEPENDENT CIVIL SOCIETY

The MENA region's governance and civil society are profoundly shaped by ongoing conflicts, which significantly influence civil society's development and dependence on political events.



In Sudan,

the current war between the military and the Rapid Support Forces has eroded the gains made during the 2019 uprising, diminishing civil activism and citizenship.



Syria's citizens face dual challenges:

internal repression under the Assad regime and external demands for democratic reforms and transitional justice.



Palestinian citizenship and civil society

are deeply affected by the continuing genocide, occupation, as well as internal divisions.



Yemen's prolonged conflict

has led to widespread displacement and a fragmented sense of citizenship, with historical divisions exacerbating current civil space issues.



In Iraq,

civil society, which grew post-2003, grapples with foreign influence, increasing influence of fundamentalist politics as well as unchecked funding.



Morocco

has seen improvements in citizenship due to recent reforms, especially for the Amazigh people, though these changes are perceived as limited and state-controlled.



Algeria's historical trauma

from colonialism and civil war continues to shape citizenship perceptions amid current civil society challenges.



Tunisia, post-2011 revolution,

has made strides in democracy and civil rights, but recent political shifts and crackdowns threaten these advancements.



Ongoing regional conflicts and instability hinder

Libya's civil society efforts.



In Lebanon,

sectarian divisions influence citizenship and civil society, with the current economic crisis further complicating the situation.



Jordan's civil space

is restricted by the monarchy's grip and tribal influences, with recent concerns over government restrictions on civil society.



In Egypt,

the military regime's tight control has led to a decline in civil liberties and impacted citizenship.

THE WORK OF THE ASFARI INSTITUTE

The Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship at the American University of Beirut is a regional hub that bridges academia and activism in the MENA region. Since 2012, the Asfari Institute has provided resources, knowledge, and spaces for civil society actors, scholars, students, practitioners, as well as policymakers to connect and collaborate on issues related to social movements and activism, citizenship, with a strong emphasis on the universality of human rights, gender equality, intersectionality, and social justice.



OUR VISION

Dynamic, diverse, and inclusive civil society in the Arab region where individuals in their diversity enjoy their full rights and freedoms, and are empowered to understand and exercise their role as rights holders.



OUR MISSION

To serve as a solid regional knowledge and convening hub for civil society in the Arab region that promotes notions of citizenship.



OUR CORE VALUES

Human rights, gender equality, intersectionality, dignity, accountability, care, and individual freedoms.



OUR INTERVENTION PRINCIPLES

Working with partners and promoting collaborations, emphasizing sustainability and rational use of resources, challenging discrimination and oppression, localizing and decolonizing knowledge production.



OUR STRATEGIES

Localized research and knowledge production, building capacities, convening, and advocacy.



OUR WORK

Since 2020, the work of the Institute has ranged from re-imagining and redefining citizenship and good governance to women's political and economic participation and refugeehood and migration. As part of our mandate to promote citizenship, we recently established the Good Governance and Citizenship Observatory (GGCO) which aims to serve as a regional platform for organizations to actively participate in shaping their communities and advocating for transparent governance. In addition, we facilitated discussions and produced knowledge addressing challenges faced by migrants and refugees in precarious situations, social movements and activism, feminist foreign policies, as well as women's political participation, and centering the care economy. We have also developed and implemented capacity-building programs for civil society organizations (CSOs) in the MENA region. These include the Certificate in Influencing and Political Acumen for CSO directors, the BEDNA Capacity Building Training for human rights activists, as well as the Supporting Arab Women at the Table Regional Fellowship for grassroots women peacebuilders and activists on the Women, Peace, and Security agenda from a feminist lens.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS 2025-2030

In the coming three years, the Asfari Institute will focus on the following strategic goals to enhance its impact and advance its mission.



1. SUPPORT MENA CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS:

Empower civil society actors in the MENA region through capacity building, fostering solidarity, and enhancing networking opportunities.

Actions:



- Organize workshops, training sessions, and seminars to build the skills and knowledge of civil society organizations (CSOs).
- Create platforms for dialogue and collaboration to strengthen ties among civil society actors across the region.
- Provide resources and tools to help CSOs navigate challenges posed by political backlash and the shrinking of civic spaces.

Expected Outcomes:



- Increased resilience and effectiveness of civil society actors in advocating for change.
- Strengthened networks that enhance regional solidarity and collaboration.



2. BUILD A COLLABORATIVE NETWORK OF EQUITABLE, SUSTAINABLE PARTNERSHIPS:

Establish and nurture equitable partnerships with local organizations and actors throughout the region.

Actions:



- Collaborate with local, regional, and international organizations to co-create and implement research, projects, collective advocacy, and initiatives that reflect shared goals.
- Allocate resources and support to local partners to ensure the sustainability and impact of joint initiatives.

Expected Outcomes:



- A robust network of civil society partners who are empowered to achieve shared goals.
- Enhanced capacity of local organizations to sustain their efforts independently.



3. PROMOTE GOOD GOVERNANCE AND CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION:

Advocate for and promote principles of good governance, citizenship education, and an inclusive understanding of citizenship.

Actions: _____ 

- Develop educational programs and materials that emphasize the importance of citizenship and good governance.
- Engage with educational institutions to integrate citizenship education into curricula.
- Advocate for policies that support transparent governance and the protection of civil rights.

Expected Outcomes: _____ 

- Greater public awareness and understanding of citizenship rights and responsibilities.
- Improved governance practices in communities and institutions across the region.



4. INCREASE DIVERSITY AND SUSTAINABILITY OF OUR INCOME:

Diversify and stabilize the institute's income sources to ensure long-term sustainability.

Actions: _____ 

- Identify and pursue new funding opportunities.
- Develop revenue-generating programs, such as paid training and consultancy services.
- Build relationships with international donors and foundations aligned with the institute's mission.

Expected Outcomes: _____ 

- A more diverse and sustainable funding base that reduces reliance on a single income stream.
- Increased financial stability to support the institute's long-term goals.



5. ENHANCE THE VISIBILITY OF OUR WORK:

Increase the visibility and impact of the institute's work through strategic communications and documentation.

Actions:



- Implement a comprehensive communications strategy that includes digital media, publications, and public events.
- Document and share the outcomes of the institute's research and projects through accessible and engaging formats.
- Strengthen the institute's brand and presence in both regional and global discussions on civil society and citizenship.

Expected Outcomes:



- Greater recognition of the institute as a leading hub for civil society and citizenship in the region.
- Increased influence on regional and global debates related to civil society, governance, and citizenship.



6. ESTABLISH STRONG MONITORING AND EVALUATION MECHANISMS:

Implement robust M&E mechanisms to assess the impact and effectiveness of the Institute's programs and initiatives.

Actions:

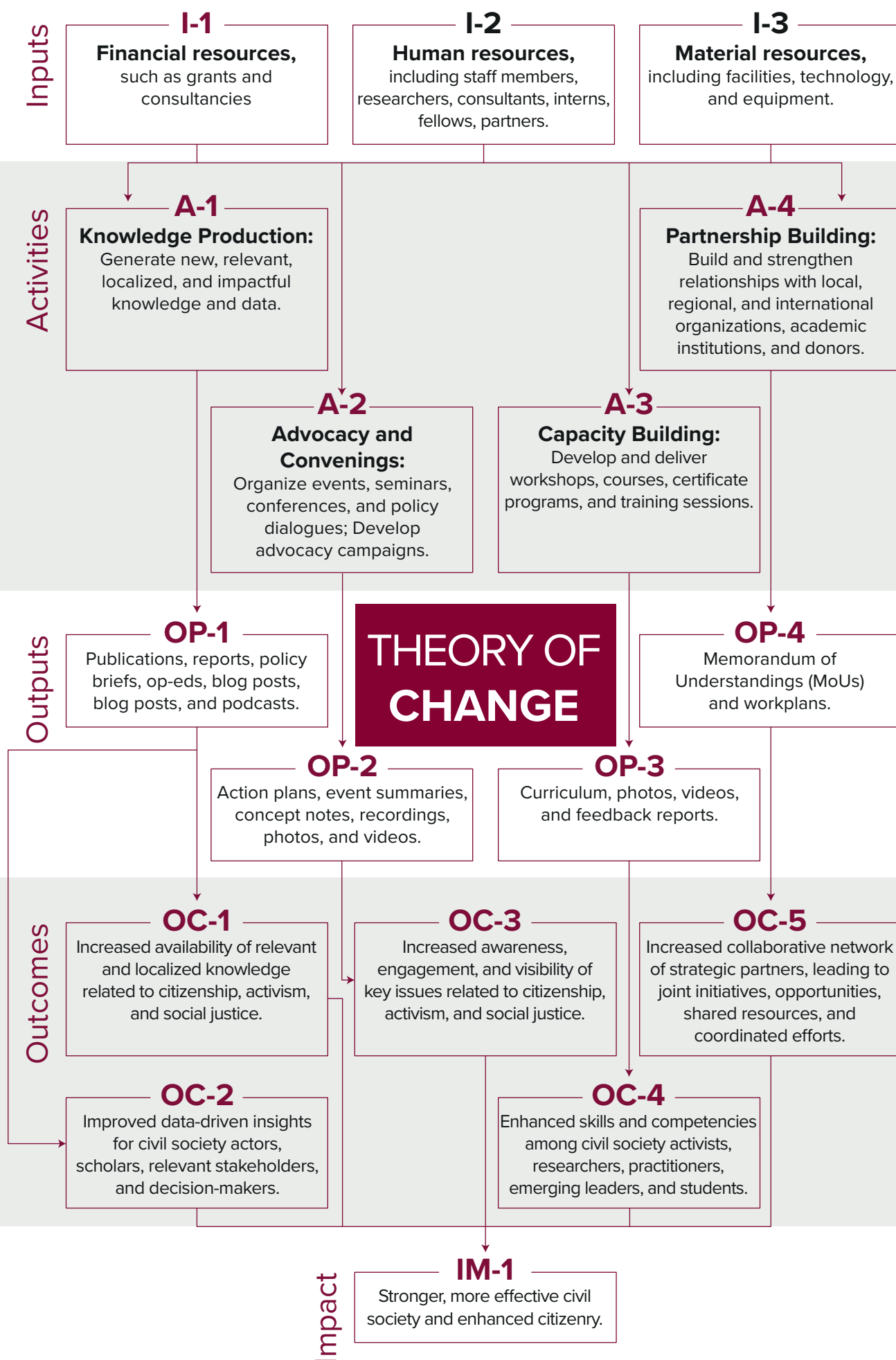


- Develop and adopt a comprehensive M&E framework tailored to the Institute's goals and activities.
- Conduct regular impact assessments and program evaluations to ensure alignment with strategic objectives.
- Use M&E data to refine and improve programs, ensuring they meet the needs of stakeholders and achieve intended outcomes.

Expected Outcomes:



- Improved program effectiveness and alignment with strategic goals through data-driven decision-making.
- Enhanced accountability and transparency in the Institute's operations.
- Increased ability to demonstrate the impact of the Institute's work to stakeholders and funders.





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