



## Policy Brief

Building Resilience: Strengthening CBOs  
for Social Cohesion in Southern Jordan

2024

## About the Brief

This Policy Brief is informed by an in-depth analysis led by the Al-Nahda Women's Studies Team at ARDD, examining the role of women-led and youth-led community-based organizations (CBOs) in fostering social cohesion in Southern Jordan. The research, conducted from November 2023 to January 2024, explores how these CBOs and other stakeholders, advance social cohesion initiatives while navigating significant challenges. Despite their efforts, obstacles remain, highlighting the need for strategies that empower these organizations to maximize their impact. Therefore, this brief underscores the pivotal role women-led and youth-led CBOs play in overcoming these challenges and leveraging oppor-

tunities to enhance their effectiveness within the communities they serve. Drawing on insights from the research, this document seeks to inform policies and practices for the sustainable implementation of social cohesion initiatives, aligning with Jordan's National Action Plan II (JONAP II) and United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325). By highlighting the importance of CBOs and offering targeted recommendations, this policy brief aims to contribute to catalyzing efforts toward building a more cohesive and resilient society in Southern Jordan.

## Introduction

Jordan's strategic position amidst a conflict-affected region has placed it as one of the world's primary host countries for refugees with a continuous influx of different populations shaping its socio-political landscape. Hosting over 3.3 million international migrants and nearly 758,000 refugees and asylum seekers -including, Syrian, Iraqi, Yemeni, Somali and Sudani- Jordan grapples with multifaceted challenges in maintaining social cohesion and stability. Furthermore, Jordan has been a host for more than 2 million Palestinians since 1948, with most holding now full Jordanian citizenship. However, about 167,000 Palestinians, mainly those who came from Gaza after 1967, do not have Jordanian citizenship -relying on the services of UNRWA, living in refugee camps, and facing limitations. The intricate dynamics of this diverse population landscape require nuanced approaches to address pressing issues. Women, often disproportionately affected by displacement crises, have emerged as resilient leaders within these contexts. They have played a pivotal role in promoting social cohesion, advocating for peacekeeping initiatives, and mitigating the risks of violent extremism. Recognizing the urgency of addressing these complexities and the contribution of women in conflict and post-conflict settings, Jordan embraced the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, aligning its national objectives with international frameworks through the Jordanian National Action Plan (JONAP) in 2018. JONAP prioritizes women's empowerment and active involvement in peacekeeping efforts, echoing resolutions such as UNSCR 2122 and 2242, which underscore the critical role of women's leadership in enhancing social cohesion and preventing violent extremism (PVE). Against this backdrop, this policy brief presents evidence-based findings on the effectiveness of women-led and youth-led CBOs' initiatives in fostering social cohesion and PVE in Southern Jordan. As Jordan is implementing the second phase of the National Action Plan (2022 – 2025), it is imperative to conduct a comprehensive analysis of CBOs' contributions, strategies, and challenges. This analysis will serve as a guiding beacon, identifying areas for capacity-building and empowering CBOs to play a more significant role in advancing social cohesion and preventing violent extremism within the region.

Navigating Socio-Economic Challenges: The  
Policy Landscape in Jordan

The current policy landscape in Jordan reflects the complex dynamics resulting from significant demographic shifts concerning the influx of different waves of refugees.

This continuous change has caused tensions between refugees and host communities and higher demands on the government. While some express resentment towards the refugee reception system, others advocate for their welcoming integration into Jordanian society. The influx of Syrians started in 2011, has profoundly impacted Jordan's social and economic fabric, straining food security and livelihoods for both refugees and vulnerable Jordanians. Consequently, the government has faced increased pressure to address heightened vulnerabilities, unemployment rates, and service demands, leading the international community to provide extensive financial aid aimed at strengthening social cohesion. However, despite these efforts, a lack of empirical evidence hampers the effectiveness of social cohesion programs and initiatives, especially given the complex and evolving nature of social stability challenges. The scarcity of data on the impact of aid programs presents a significant obstacle to assessing their success and refining strategies to better meet the needs of affected communities. Additionally, the absence of comprehensive studies on the long-term implications of refugee integration and coexistence further complicates policy-making and intervention efforts. Moreover, disparities in aid distribution between regions, notably in the south, highlight the unequal access to resources and support, exacerbating existing socio-economic disparities.

**While international aid has predominantly targeted northern and central regions, the southern governorates receive comparatively fewer resources, accentuating geographical marginalization even further. The international budget allocation for the Jordanian Response Plan (JRP), from 2015 to 2023 was \$61.7 million allocated in 192 projects and just \$2.5 million went to the Southern region.**

Finally, the scarcity of CBOs in the south additional compounds the issue, hindering grassroots initiatives essential for fostering social cohesion and stability in these communities. Addressing this disparity requires targeted efforts to support the capacity building and sustainability of CBOs in the south, empowering local actors to drive social cohesion efforts from within their communities and in line with UNSCR 1325 principles under JONAP II. By examining grassroots-level implementation of the JONAP the brief aims to identify strategies for strengthening social cohesion and resilience in Southern communities.

# Women and Youth-Led CBOs in Southern Jordan's Social Fabric: Fostering Change

## Developing a Local Definition of Social Cohesion

The research first sought to build a common understanding of the broader concept of social cohesion through an exploration of Southern community perspectives. The inquiry revealed that they recognize *social cohesion as something that transcends personal boundaries, encompassing respect, understanding, affection, and compromise. Rooted in familial, neighborly, societal, and national relationships, it thrives on understanding and respect for customs, traditions, and laws, contributing to the building of a morally sound generation and enhancing cohesion across society.* Moreover, social cohesion is depicted as a connection among group members based on shared goals, standards, and culture, fostering a collective sense of purpose and unity. Informed by these insights, a tailored definition of social cohesion for South Jordan emerges, emphasizing connections characterized by respect, understanding, and compromise, and involving unity, interdependence, shared goals, supportive behavior, and a commitment to trustworthiness, compassion, and solidarity.

## Initiatives for Social Cohesion in Southern Jordan

The research revealed a diverse range of initiatives implemented by CBOs aimed at fostering social cohesion and addressing societal challenges. Within the CBOs interviewed, a majority (63.16%) exhibit a clear mission and objectives, although some still lack a precise focus on social cohesion and preventing violent extremism (PVE). Nonetheless, these CBOs actively engage with their local communities, particularly women and youth, through initiatives ranging from establishing partnerships and building social capital (100%) economic empowerment, support for vulnerable families, and conducting awareness campaigns on gender-based violence (GBV) and drug abuse. Similarly, CSOs based in Amman and active in the South interviewed demonstrate a rich tapestry of initiatives emphasizing collaboration, empowerment, and dialogue. Their activities encompass political engagement, capacity-building for women, prevention of GBV, and community advocacy. Furthermore, international organizations, donors, and governmental institutions prioritize empowerment, youth engagement, and developing collaborations. **Despite varying approaches, the common goal among these diverse actors remains the promotion of inclusivity, education, and collaborative efforts to build a more cohesive and resilient society in Southern Jordan.**

During the interviews, the alignment of the initiatives related to social cohesion with UNSCR 1325 and the JONAP emerged as a critical dimension. Among CBOs, a minority of 36.84% directly assert alignment with the national framework, while 21.05% indicate no alignment at all. Conversely, 36.84% exhibit a superficial engagement, lacking a comprehensive understanding of the UNSCR 1325 implications. Within CSOs, 5 out of 7 affirm alignment with UNSCR 1325 and JONAP, highlighting a shared dedication to advancing women's empowerment and participation in peace and security efforts. Stakeholders in governmental offices also signal alignment, with two affirming to integrating gender perspectives into their programs. This diversity underscores the need for nuanced understanding and dialogue to navigate the complexities of implementing international frameworks within organizational contexts.

It also showed how the promotion of social cohesion activities hinges on direct community engagement, commonly fostered by personal relations, and complemented by community trainings, workshops, and laboratories involving youth and women. However, these activities often address social cohesion indirectly, with a general trend towards promoting experiences not explicitly focused on these topics. Main programs predominantly implement typical initiatives such as handcrafting, cooking, and sewing for women, and sports and cultural activities for youth. While most CBOs collaborate with other CSOs and NGOs, only a small minority engage in partnerships specifically related to social cohesion and PVE, indicating a limited understanding of the importance of these concepts. Direct contact and personal relations with stakeholders and the community drive engagement, with limited collaboration with donors highlighting challenges in accessing financial resources. This underscores the need for enhanced understanding and strategic partnerships to effectively address social cohesion in the southern region.

Focusing specifically on CBOs, the data indicates that the 63.16% interviewed appear to have well-defined structures with clear internal roles and governance boards, while 33% lack clarity in their organizational structure. Key leaders, actively engage in various roles, supported by additional positions. Volunteers are integral to operations, with 47.37% of CBOs relying on volunteer assistance due to limited organic staff with fixed contracts. However, expertise in social cohesion and PVE topics remains limited, with only 26.32% of CBOs claiming proficiency in these areas and a majority lacking the necessary tools and knowledge to operate effectively in this regard. Financial resources also pose challenges, with only 26.32% of CBOs having a clear yearly budget, and 73.68% not allocating specific resources for PVE and social cohesion activities. Conversely, CSOs based in the capital enjoy easier access to financial resources, given their proximity to donors and proficiency in English, enabling strategic resource allocation for social cohesion initiatives. Similarly, INGOs and UN agencies benefit from established networks and expertise, facilitating access to international funding opportunities.

For the majority (78%) of surveyed CBOs, financial constraints loom as the most pressing challenge, hindering effective implementation of their activities. This obstacle is further compounded by geographical marginalization, as weak transportation systems impede engagement and outreach efforts. Furthermore, high unemployment rates, coupled with limited awareness of social cohesion and PVE, exacerbate the difficulties faced by these organizations. Despite these obstacles, CBOs express a willingness to enhance their capacity to contribute meaningfully to social cohesion and PVE initiatives. Similarly, coordination challenges emerge as a common theme across various entities, including INGOs, government agencies, and CSOs, highlighting the need for streamlined collaboration mechanisms. Building trust and engaging communities also prove to be recurring challenges, underscoring the importance of nuanced strategies. Geographical constraints further influence program implementation, with cultural nuances shaping the challenges faced by CBOs.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, this brief highlighted the indispensable role of women-led and youth-led CBOs in nurturing social cohesion and preventing violent extremism in Southern Jordan. While these organizations exhibit commendable dedication and endeavor to address societal challenges, they face many obstacles in their path. **Financial constraints, coordination difficulties, and limited capacity pose significant hurdles to the effective implementation of their initiatives.** The insights gleaned from local communities **offer a profound understanding of social cohesion as a dynamic, lived experience woven into the fabric of community life.** However, there remains a notable gap in integrating social cohesion and PVE concepts into organizational missions and activities. Similarly, the spectrum of commitment to UNSCR 1325 and JONAP underscores the need for tailored approaches to foster greater alignment and understanding. While direct community engagement remains a cornerstone of their approach, there is a palpable need for a more concerted focus on social cohesion and PVE within their programs. Additionally, capacity deficiencies further hinder their ability to enact impactful change. Addressing these challenges necessitates tailored capacity building initiatives and strategic alignment with Jordan's National Action Plan on WPS. By bridging these gaps and empowering CBOs, their full potential can be fostered.

## Recommendations

### National and International Organizations

- Prioritize community engagement and participation in social cohesion initiatives, from project design to evaluation. This entails fostering meaningful dialogue and collaboration with local stakeholders, including CBOs, community leaders, and individuals, to ensure interventions are contextually relevant and responsive to community needs.
- Create inclusive spaces and opportunities for diverse groups within the community to actively participate in social cohesion efforts. This includes women, youth, marginalized populations, and vulnerable individuals. Ensure that interventions are inclusive, accessible, and sensitive to the needs of all community members.
- Foster dialogue and knowledge exchange platforms to highlight the importance of gender perspectives in peace and security efforts. Encourage stakeholders to explore ways to integrate these principles into their strategic plans and initiatives, aligning with UNSCR 1325 and JONAP objectives.

### Donors

- Develop targeted capacity-building programs to enhance understanding and inclusion of social cohesion and PVE within organizational missions and objectives. Provide training, resources, and technical support to build capacity, promote best practices, and raise awareness about the importance of social cohesion.
- Strengthen the organizational structures of CBOs, particularly in areas such as strategic planning, program design, and partnership development, through training and resource provision.
- Provide funding and technical assistance for initiatives that integrate multiple dimensions of empowerment, education, and social cohesion, aligning with the principles of JONAP and the WPS agenda.
- Facilitate access to funding opportunities and guide grant writing and donor engagement strategies, particularly for organizations in remote areas.

### Policy Makers

- Foster collaboration and partnership among the stakeholders to leverage collective expertise, resources, and networks for more impactful social cohesion interventions.
- Establish and lead coordination mechanisms for regular communication and information sharing to ensure alignment of objectives and maximize resource utilization.
- Explore opportunities for joint programming and partnership between civil society and governmental bodies, leveraging respective strengths and resources to achieve shared goals.
- Encourage diversification of funding sources to reduce dependency on international and governmental funding and mitigate financial uncertainties.

