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# **Just Transition Green Bridge - Strengthening Civil Society Actors:**

CSOs Mapping Report for  
Egypt

December 2023

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This report is sponsored by the “Green Bridge Project for a Just Transition” in partnership with the Arab Reform Initiative - Beirut, and the Moroccan Institute for Policy Analysis - Morocco.

# **Just Transition Green Bridge - Strengthening Civil Society Actors: CSOs Mapping Report for Egypt**

December 2023

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Alternative Policy Solutions is a non-partisan, public policy research project at The American University in Cairo. Using rigorous, in-depth research and a participatory process of consultations with a diverse range of stakeholders, we propose evidence-based policy solutions to some of the most difficult challenges facing Egypt. Our solutions are innovative, forward-looking and designed to support decision makers' efforts to introduce inclusive public policies.

The views and propositions expressed by Alternative Policy Solutions are those of the project's researchers and consultants and do not reflect the opinions of The American University in Cairo. Inquiries and requests regarding the project's activities should be addressed to the project's team directly.

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# I. Introduction

As with many other countries in the region, Egypt is embarking on a green transition towards a more sustainable economy. Amidst concerns and attempts to ensure that this transition is made to be just, it is imperative that all stakeholders work together to influence policy conversations, and ensure that government efforts to tackle climate change and environmental degradation include input from impacted communities. Ultimately, this will also support the emergence of accountable and democratic governance structures and work towards addressing long-standing inequalities.

As a first step, this report presents the main findings of a CSOs mapping in Egypt to assess the main stakeholders working on just transition themes in Egypt, in particular those working on just energy transition, food sovereignty, and just access to water. This research was conducted over the period between May and September 2023 by the Alternative Policy solution (APS) team. The report is structured as follows: Section II provides an overview of the current situation in Egypt, the main challenges resulting from ecological and climate change, the main actors in the green transition, and situates the findings of the mapping exercise in its wider context. Section III presents the mapping methodology including a description of the CSOs actors and an analysis of the main findings. Section IV offers a summary of conclusions and recommendations.

## II. Environmental Just Transition: The Egyptian Context

This section describes the main obstacles the country is encountering as a result of the ecological and climate breakdown. The section begins by defining the concept of “just transition” and discusses how it is perceived and presented in the Egyptian context, the national strategies and plans

put in place to achieve the transition to low carbon economy, and the main actors engaged in these processes.

### A. Defining and framing Just Transition

Climate change and the policy responses required to combat it raise new challenges for social justice, human rights, jobs, and livelihoods that must be addressed at all levels of economy and society. The concept of just transition originally appeared in US trade union movements in 1980s. In more recent years, the concept has gained more attention in the context of the green transition and its scope has been broadened. At COP 26 in Glasgow, a Just Transition Declaration was signed by countries in the Global North promising funding for climate action and decarbonization in poorer countries (UNDP, 2022).

According to the UN Committee for Developing Policies, “A just transition, broadly defined as ensuring that no one is left behind or pushed behind in the transition to low-carbon and environmentally sustainable economies and societies (...). Countries need to develop, through inclusive dialogue, approaches to a just transition that reflects the needs, priorities and realities of their societies and their historical responsibilities for climate change and environmental degradation” (UN, 2023).

However, in the available literature less attention is given to empirical evidence from case studies in the context of non-democratic political systems (Wang & Lo 2021). The debate on just transition is heavily dominated by Global North discourses that focus narrowly on mitigation – reducing greenhouse gas emissions – placing energy and cutting-edge technologies squarely at the center. These priorities do not always correspond to the demands and realities of developing countries, including middle income countries like Egypt. In explaining these differences, Abdenur (2023) argues that in developing countries there are higher levels of informality and poverty which means that a great proportion



of the population including women, poor people, minorities and migrants are highly susceptible to economic crises, policy changes, or a combination of both. These issues should be taken into account in the just transition discourse. The youth, who are the majority of the population in developing countries, will be the demographic group that is most severely impacted by the green transition. As such, creating dignified green jobs, especially for youth, is paramount. Finally, because many of these countries have more centralized government planning and decision-making processes, their implementation is often far less coordinated among various stakeholders than in industrial economies (ibid).

## **B. Impacts of Climate Change on Egypt**

Egypt is highly exposed to climate change, facing many risks to its economic, social, and environmental sustainability. The rise of the sea level and the heavy correlation between climate change and the Nile River flow are two of the most significant factors (EEAA, 2016 Website). Water scarcity, storms and heat waves are expected to influence crop yields, creating a great threat to national food security.

The most vulnerable sectors and areas in Egypt include coastal areas, water resources, and agriculture and food security. Moreover, climate change will also cause severe damage to human settlements, large areas of land designated for agricultural production, industrial areas on the northern coast, and touristic resorts on the Red Sea (UNDP, 2021).

### **1. Agriculture & Food security**

In Egypt, agriculture accounted for 12 percent of GDP in 2019, making it one of the most important sectors of the economy. This sector supports the livelihoods of 55 percent of the population and

provides jobs for 27.5 percent of the workforce (UNDP, 2021). However, agricultural development in Egypt is impeded by many factors, including the scarcity of water resources and the amount of land eligible for cultivation, which is located mainly in the Nile Delta. This, in turn, puts significant pressure on the growth potential for agricultural output. The expected sea-level rise is likely to affect agricultural productivity in Egypt (ibid).

### **2. Water scarcity**

Approximately 95% of Egypt's population lives along the banks of the Nile River, and most of the country's cultivated agricultural lands are located along its banks, making the country very dependent on this river (Abdel-Shafy & Mansour 2013,). The Nile constitutes 95% of Egypt's total water resources, with the remainder being sparse groundwater (Green Climate Fund, 2017).

Water scarcity poses a major concern for Egypt, as it spelled out in the 'National Water Resources Plan of 2017',<sup>1</sup> which proposed exploring additional water resource supply through groundwater, rainfall and flash flood harvesting and desalination. Other strategies that were discussed included increasing water usage efficiency and irrigation improvements such as reuse of drainage water, water distribution and demand management of water supply (National Water Resources Plan 2017 Website).

## **C. National Governance Frameworks in Egypt**

Egypt's 2014 Constitution includes special provisions for protecting and preserving the environment in Articles 45 and 46, which create political and social obligations to protect the environment as a pillar of sustainable development. The current environmental legislative framework

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<sup>1</sup> The plan was published in 2005 by the Arab Republic of Egypt Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation.

was established under Law No. 4 of 1994<sup>2</sup>. The Environmental Law (Law 105/2015)<sup>3</sup> adopted in 1994 and amended in 2015, is Egypt's main piece of environmental legislation (UNDP 2021). Egypt does not have a comprehensive climate law.

The country's existing legal architecture is comprised of piecemeal sectoral legislation which may help climate mitigation but is not necessarily drafted with a transition in mind. There are many laws and regulatory frameworks that include various environmental aspects, such as Law No. 48 of 1982 on Protection of the Nile River and its amendments; Law No. 12 of 1982 on Irrigation and Drainage, Law No. 202 of 2020 for managing waste in Egypt (UNDP, 2021). A legislative review is underway to include climate change in all relevant laws, though no timeline for its completion has been given (CAT 2022).

The institutional organization of environmental management in Egypt began in 1982 with the establishment of the Environmental Affairs Agency as the authority responsible for promoting and protecting the environment. In 1994, the Agency was re-established, per the Environmental Protection Law (Law No. 4 of 1994), giving it public judicial status under the then-Minister for Environmental Affairs, who chairs its board of directors. However, given its coordinating role among all ministries, the Agency did not have the authorities needed to perform its role. In response, the Ministry of Environment was established in 1997 to coordinate, formulate environmental policies, and control and monitor various environmental issues and indicators (UNDP, 2021).

In Egypt, environmental policy is formulated and implemented by several national institutions, including the Ministry of Environment, the

Environmental Affairs Agency, the Ministry of Trade and Industry, the Ministry of Health and Population, the Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation, the Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation, and other agencies (UNDP 2021). The Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA) is the lead entity on climate change. The Central Department of Climate Change (CDCC) is the technical arm of EEAA and is responsible for the development and implementation of climate-related studies, strategies, and programs. It serves as the Focal Point for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (EEAA, 2019 Website).

In the past few years, Egypt has made efforts to establish an institutional framework to deal with climate risks and build a relatively qualified national capacity. In 2007, "The National Committee on Climate Change" was established by the Prime Ministerial Decree no. 272 and was led by the Minister of Environment. The committee included representatives from a number of technical ministries, and was responsible for developing mitigation and adaptation strategies to address climate change (EEAA, 2016 Website). This committee was replaced by the National Council for Climate Change (NCCC) which was formed by the Prime Ministerial Decree number 1912 in 2015 with a membership of 9 ministries<sup>4</sup>. The NCCC is responsible for formulating the state's general climate change policies, developing and updating sectoral strategies and plans in light of international agreements and national interests, and building the institutional and individual capacities necessary to deal with climate risks (EEAA, 2018 Website). The Ministry of Environment and its Climate Change Department support its day-to-day operations.

2 Law No. 4 of 1994 on Environment. This Law, consisting of 65 articles divided in four parts and ten annexes, aims at protecting the environment (land, air and water) from pollution. To achieve the objective the Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA) is established for the protection and promotion of the environment.

3 The amendments include banning import, circulating and use of coal and petroleum coke without permit from the concerned authorities and strengthening penalties for violating the provisions of the Law.

4 These include the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Investment and International Cooperation, Minister of Water Resources and Irrigation, Minister of Planning, Monitoring and Administrative Reform, Minister of Finance, Minister of State for Environmental Affairs, Minister of Agriculture and Land Reclamation, Representative of the Ministry of Defense, and Representative of the Ministerial Group for Services.



In addition, energy sector policies are developed and implemented by the Supreme Council of Energy, the Ministry of Electricity and Renewable Energy, and the New and Renewable Energy Authority. Issues related to water resources are the responsibility of the Supreme Council of Water Resources and the Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation (UNDP, 2021). In Egypt various ministries have established national research institutes to study and assess the impact of climate change.

#### **D. National strategies, policies, and projects**

Egypt ratified the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1994, the Kyoto Protocol in 2005, and the Paris Agreement in 2017. At the national level, Egypt formulated a number of strategies to cope with the effects of Climate Change: The Climate Change National Strategy 2050, National Strategy for Adaptation to Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction in 2011, and the Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) in 2015, which was updated in 2022.

Egypt sought to align its climate adaptation actions with the country's Sustainable Development Strategy: Egypt Vision 2030, which recognizes the environmental dimension of sustainable development, and the importance of integrating "environment in all economic sectors to preserve natural resources and support their efficient use and investment, while ensuring next generations' rights" (SDS Egypt vision p. 14).

The goal of Egypt's National Vision 2030 is to achieve a "competitive, balanced, and diversified economy (...) based on justice, social integration and participation, with a balanced and varied ecosystem", which ultimately results in "improving the quality of life for all" (P. 3), which might reflect one of the principles of just transition. The strategy also gave attention to the importance of "wide social participation, taking into account the visions

of civil society, the private sector, ministries, and government agencies" to achieve sustainable development. Despite the emphasis placed on the social dimension with clear commitment to "the pillars of social justice, education and training, health and culture", a review of the strategy shows that no specific measures were mentioned to target the most vulnerable social groups in the society, except for the provision of "social protection and care to employees and workers" (ibid.: 151).

While Egypt lacks a comprehensive strategy to ensure a just transition, it has had some success with the phasing out of its energy subsidies and the promotion of green jobs (World Bank, 2022). The most recent national articulation of climate policy is reflected in Egypt's National Climate Change Strategy 2050 (NCCS), launched in 2022. The strategy reflects continuity with Egypt's Sustainable Development Strategy (Vision 2030). It lays down clear objectives and targets for Egypt to transition towards a low-carbon development pathway. Although the NCCC is the main body responsible for climate change policy, policies are formulated and implemented by many ministries, leading to fragmentation and coordination difficulties. The World Bank report (2022) highlighted the need for clearer roles and better coordination in order to reduce overlap in responsibilities and inconsistency in the formulation and implementation of climate change policy.

Egypt's vision for the energy sector is outlined in the Integrated Sustainable Energy Strategy to 2035 adopted by the Supreme Energy Council (SEC) in 2016. The strategy set the renewable energy targets at 20 percent and 42 percent respectively for 2022 and 2035. In 2019, Egypt generated around 10% of its electricity from renewables (IEA, 2019). Furthermore, in 2020, the Government took an important climate-related action: it mandated all ministries to focus on the shift toward a green economy and increased public investments directed to green projects from 15% in the 2020-2021 plan to 30% in the 2021-2022 plan (World Bank, 2022).

Despite all the effort put towards formulating strategies, in many cases their implementation remains a challenge with limited monitoring and evaluation to assess their success and impact.

Available literature reveals that transitioning to a net zero future is not currently a top priority in Egypt's central sustainable development planning document, Egypt Vision 2030 (CAT, 2022). The Egyptian government has launched a number of projects related to energy, food and water sectors. One example of these project is:

**The Nexus of Water, Food and Energy (NWFE)** program launched in 2022 with the aim of accelerating the national climate agenda and providing opportunities for mobilizing climate finance and private investments to support Egypt green transition (ERF, 2023). The project is led by the Ministry of International Cooperation (MOIC) and is comprised of a total of nine projects under each of the Water, Food, and Energy pillars: including one energy project, five food and agricultural projects, as well as three water and irrigation projects. NWFE aims at establishing renewable energy projects, projects that serve towards enhancing small farmers' adaptation to climate risks and increasing crop yields and irrigation efficiency (Shaheen, Y. ,2023).

## **E. Main actors/stakeholders in Egypt's green transition**

The climate policy scene in Egypt includes the government, the private sector, civil society organizations, and international institutions. This section presents a brief description of the wide range of actors and their role within the Egyptian context.

The Egyptian government is the main actor and sole decision maker in all matters related to environmental issues and climate change (World Bank, 2022). The local administrative units and local authorities in various governorates have limited powers, with much of the substantive

decision-making taking place at the national level within respective ministries and executive bodies (Yara & Essam, 2021).

Recently, the government has developed some mechanisms to improve public participation in policy decision making processes. For instance, in developing the Egypt Vision 2030 national strategy a participatory and inclusive approach was adopted. To this end, a series of workshops, seminars, consultations, and meetings with the public and main stakeholders were organized (Osama et al., 2019, and Egypt Vision 2030). However, the scope and the depth of these consultations are difficult to assess. It is also not clear whether any consultations were organized regarding Egypt's 2050 National Climate Change Strategy (CAT, 2022).

### **1. Civil Society Organizations/ NGO sector**

Egypt's civil society organizations experienced rapid growth under Mubarak's regime. The number rose from approximately 14,000 registered in 1993 to over 30,000 in 2011. The expansion of these organizations coincided with state policies of economic privatization which negatively affected the poor. The Egyptian government encouraged the CSO/NGO sector to fill in gaps left as a result of welfare state retrenchment (Farah, 2009 and Atia, 2013).

Although the Mubarak regime encouraged CSOs/ NGOs to proliferate, it also tightened control over the sector by co-opting much of NGOs and relegating many organizations to charitable and development work. (Farah,2009). This control was accomplished through the Law of Associations, Law 84 of 2002 (commonly referred to as the "NGO Law") which gave the government a sweeping power over all registered NGOs operating in Egypt. The Ministry of Social Solidarity (MOSS) is the agency charged with overseeing the CSO/ NGO sector. It had jurisdiction to regulate each organization's registration, governance structure, operations, fundraising, and dissolution. The

penalties for violating the law were severe and included imprisonment for CSO/NGO employees, fines imposed upon the organization's leaders, and dissolution of the NGO. The regime also contributed to the fragmentation of NGO sector by prohibiting any sort of formal or informal coordination of NGO activities, although Law 84 of 2002 did not explicitly ban collaboration among NGOs (Herrold, 2014).

The political opening that came with the 2011 uprising provided the Egyptian CSO/NGO sector a unique opportunity to rid itself of the repression by the Mubarak regime. That period witnessed growth and expansion of human rights organizations and projects related to constitutional reform, judicial reform, and transitional justice. Social and economic development NGOs incorporated civic education into their development projects, working with grassroots communities to build awareness of the political process and of beneficiaries' rights as citizens (Herrold, 2014).

Between 2013 and 2018 the Egyptian state gradually regained its social control and the image of a state-centric relationship between state and civil society was re-established. The NGO Law (70/2017) which was approved by parliament in November 2016 gave the government extraordinary powers to control NGOs and imposed harsh punishments and fines for any violation of its provisions. Among its restrictions are a ban on field research and surveys without government permission, and forcing NGOs to either adapt their activities to government priorities and plans or face up to five years in prison. The law also gives the authorities wide powers to dissolve NGOs, dismiss their boards of administration and subject their staff to criminal prosecution.

In 2019, a new NGO Law (Law 149/2019) was approved replacing Law (70/2017). The new Law governs the process by which domestic and foreign nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) can achieve legal recognition and sets forth provisions on their activities, oversight and monitoring, funding, and sanctions for violations of the law. The new law

has placed restrictions on the right to freedom of association; limiting the role of civil society to certain fields and constraining its activities - particularly under the pretense of national security - and granting authorities expansive monitoring powers (Tahrir institute, 2019).

Although the law states that domestic NGOs are recognized upon submission of their paperwork to the Ministry of Social Solidarity, their registration can still be challenged by the ministry in the following 60 days in cases where NGO activities are deemed to violate the constitution or the law, or where there is an issue with paperwork. Additionally, an NGO cannot open a bank account until the ministry first communicates with the bank. Foreign NGOs must apply for and receive approval for their activities from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs before being able to engage in any activities in Egypt (ibid).

For many organizations to be able to work in the communities in various fields including climate change or the environment, they preferred to register as social enterprises (Legally registered limited liability companies with a tax registration card) or as social initiatives (non-registered initiatives developed by a group of people, with a very defined scope and based on voluntary or informal activities (Greenish, 2023).

Egypt's main national strategies, namely SDG Egypt vision 2030 and NCCS 2050, acknowledge the importance of the role of civil society in all fields including climate change. For example, the Climate Change Strategy 2050 clearly stated the importance of "Encouraging the civil sector entrusted with environmental activities to play its supervisory and technical role in improving the governance and management of work in the field of climate change." This has not translated into action on the ground, as our mapping research indicates. The activities of CSOs/NGOs remain limited to certain activities that are dictated by the government's plans.

There are many civil society groups and organizations working on environmental issues and climate change, mostly focusing on public awareness and climate mitigation related activities (EIPR, 2016, Greenish, 2023). However, their impact can be described as weak due to the restrictive political environment which curtails the CSOs involvement in the public sphere (Human Rights Watch 2022), as well as insufficient funding and lack of cooperation among various CSOs (EIPR, 2016; Greenish 2023). As will be discussed later, CSOs have the potential to drive a significant increase in climate concern and climate action in Egypt, but they are structurally excluded from national and international processes on climate change (Greenish, 2023).

## 2. The Private Sector/ Investors

The private sector plays a key role in economic and social development in Egypt. The private sector contributes about 60% and 70% of GDP and employment respectively, led by the manufacturing, agriculture, retail trade and construction sectors. The private sector is dominated by micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) which are involved in diversified types of business, and can be found even in remote areas of the country.

Public and private sectors partnership (PPPs) in economic development dates back to the early 1990s. The objective is to increase private sector involvement in public services through leveraging private sector spending against public spending. PPP entails that the private sector collaborates with the government assuming substantial financial, operational, and technical risk for the sake of undertaking projects for efficient delivery of public services (Samir, et al. 2018).

In 2006, the Egyptian government established the Public Private Central Unit (PPPCU) to coordinate the PPP projects stages across the concerned ministries and public authorities. Later, in 2010 the parliament approved Law 67 to regulate PPPs,

covering all the details of project stages, creating a very encouraging environment for PPPs in Egypt. This partnership brings together consortia including developers, investors, constructors and other service providers to finance, construct, operate and maintain assets through long term contracts for the development of high quality infrastructure (ibid).

Regarding climate change and the green transition in Egypt, it has been argued that the private sector has a critical role to play as an investor, developer, and producer of environmentally friendly goods and services. Public-private investments can help meet changing demand patterns, alleviate pressure on natural resources, and build resilience to climate risks (Shaheen, 2023). In his study of the private sector's perception of climate change and green transition in Egypt, Shaheen (2023) argues that private sector firms are aware of the issues presented by climate change as well as its existential realities, however, not all firms prioritized nor operationalized these concerns within their operations. According to the author, the reasons behind such reluctance to transition related to the cost of adopting green business practices, the legal and regulatory framework that was seen as inflexible and inefficient, macroeconomic issues and uncertainty, as well as a lack of the general public's awareness on climate change.

The Egyptian private sector is already involved in a number of mega projects financed by climate change funds such as the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and the Clean Technology Fund (CTF) as well as other multilateral financial institutes such as the International Finance Corporation (IFC), African Development Bank (AfDB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). It is worth noting that most of the private sector actors are mainly big companies and multinationals. Due to the high volume of finance involved in these projects, accompanied by very stringent and complex processes, the SMEs sector has little or no direct

access to such projects. However, they can be involved through subcontracting from the project proponents. The effective involvement of SMEs will entail a well-coordinated platform or institution that provides technical support to SMEs and promotes collaboration with the government and large private companies directly involved in NDC-aligned projects (Fobissie, K. and H. Shalaby, 2021).

### 3. International organizations

Bilateral and multilateral funds are major sources of climate finance in Egypt. These funds are provided by various donors in the form of grants, concessional loans, technical assistance, and debt swap programs. Key donors include The World Bank, African Development Bank (AfDB), various European Institutions, United States, Germany, France, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Arab Fund (AFESD), United Arab Emirates and South Korea (Fobissie, K. and H. Shalaby, 2021).

The EU has provided extensive support to Egypt on mitigation and adaptation related issues including water resource management, development of sustainable agriculture, expanding public transport networks, the roll out of renewable energy, promotion of energy efficiency and pollution abatement.

## III. CSO Mapping

### A. Definition & Objectives

CSOs have an important role to play in climate change policy. Their involvement in climate policy provides more opportunities for societal access to climate information in order to ensure that the most vulnerable groups can participate in and be heard at climate change negotiations. CSOs can also contribute to policy formulation, institutional capacity, and coordination among various actors at the national level (Ben Youssef, 2021).

This section presents the details of the mapping research, including the selection of CSO participants, the methods and tools employed for data collection as well as the main findings of the study.

For the purposes of this report, CSOs are defined as “non-state actors whose aims are neither to generate profits nor to seek governing power. CSOs unite people to advance shared goals and interests” (UNDP 2006). The target group for the current mapping includes a wide array of CSOs: local, national, and regional NGOs/CSOs, professional associations, foundations, research centers, community-based organizations (CBOs), local initiatives, trade/labor unions.

The current CSOs mapping aims to:

1. Identify the CSOs working on just environmental transition in Egypt, especially in the fields of energy, food sovereignty, water access/ injustice.
2. Gain a better understanding of the current mechanisms and spaces for CSOs to engage in advocacy around just transition in Egypt.
3. Analyze the power dynamics between CSOs and the government regarding policy formulation and decision making.

### B. Mapping Process and Methods

To achieve its objectives, the mapping applied a number of interconnected methods to conduct this research, using various instruments for the selection CSOs participants and for data collection, as presented below.

1. Creating CSOs database & selecting participants

A call of interest, developed by ARI, was published on various online social platform in the four partner countries, along with an announcement



text and short questionnaire covering basic information about the organization. In addition, APS sent e-mails with the questionnaire to more than 100 CSOs identified through a desktop review of comparable mapping projects carried out by Greenish (2022) and EIPR (2016). The following steps were undertaken to select the CSO participants in Egypt:

1. Compile a complete list of the CSOs working in Egypt who registered in the Just Transition Green Bridge project database as well as those who responded to the e-mail.
2. Develop a set of criteria for selecting the organizations to participate in the mapping research which includes geographic location, type of organization, thematic field of work, and consent to participate in the project.
3. Employ “snowball method” to reach a wider range of civil society organizations involved in environmental issues in Egypt. Through this method new CSOs were recruited by those who were already selected.

## 2. Description of CSO participants

A total of 50 participants were recruited for the consultations representing 29 CSOs operating in ten governorates in Egypt, five experts/researchers and two international organizations (the World Bank and GIZ).

### Geographic location

The distribution of the sample of organizations who attended the consultations clearly showed the success of the outreach efforts. The majority of participants (35 CSOs) came from Cairo, Alexandria, and Upper Egypt governorates including Menia, Bani Sueif, Aswan, Luxor, Assiut, and Fayoum. Two organizations came for Lower Egypt governorates (Behaira and Dahlia), and

the remaining organizations came from Coastal governorates (Marsa Matrouh, Al Munofia, and Dimiatta).

### Type of organization

In general, most CSOs in Egypt are NGOs, Community Based Associations (CBAs) and Charitable Associations established by the local community to provide social services and address the needs of community members. A variety of types of organizations attended the consultations, including 11 NGOs, four community-based organizations, three syndicates/ trade unions, one youth initiative, two research centers, two women’s organizations, four social enterprises and one law firm.

### Thematic fields

Egypt hosting the COP 27 increased interest in environmental issues among CSOs. Many organizations adopted issues related to the environment in their work, although others just “added the word ‘environment’ into their titles in order to be legitimate in building on a new scope of environmental activities”<sup>5</sup>. This environmental work has not yet broadened to cover specific issues or activities related to climate change (Greenish, 2023). This holds true for most of the organizations that participated in the consultations. The CSOs/ CBAs operating in rural areas mainly focused on agriculture, irrigation, pollution, and development issues such as poverty alleviation. The majority work on environmental awareness campaigns (beach cleaning, banning use of plastic, water pollution, and recycling). Other CSOs are involved in research on issues related to climate change and the environment.

### Target groups

Most CSOs/NGOs work directly with beneficiaries in communities and villages. Their target groups include small farmers (male and female),

<sup>5</sup> As revealed through our interviews

fishermen, young people, families and households, and women.

### C. Organizing Consultations

The consultations served as a platform for the CSOs and other stakeholders to discuss “just environmental transition” in their local context. To this end, the APS team organized three consultations with the selected CSOs, which were held in May, July, and September 2023. Prior to each consultation an agenda was prepared and sent along with the invitation to all participants. Each consultation ran for 4-6 hours, organized in three sessions. The discussion was recorded, transcribed, and compiled in a report.

#### Description of the sessions

The three sessions of each consultation were organized around a set of questions relevant to the project’s objectives. The introductory session was meant to introduce the project and allow the participants to introduce their organizations, focusing on their activities and achievements. The second session was devoted to the discussion of participants’ perception of just transition and the possibility of achieving it in Egypt. The final session focused on the role that CSOs can play in furthering just transition, the challenges they encounter, and their needs their engagement.

The set of questions used to facilitate the consultations were developed by all the partners of the project: What is meant by the concept ‘just transition’? What are the themes most relevant for just transition in Egypt? What is the role of CSOs in this issue? What are the barriers and challenges civil society organizations encounter in their work? What is needed to create an enabling environment for more effective engagement of CSOs? What kind of capacity building and support do the organizations need?

### D. Conducting individual interviews

The objective of the interviews was to further investigate the challenges CSOs encounter in different settings and their effort to overcome them and also to reach some CSOs who could not participate in the consultations. Moreover, using various methods in the research helped to verify and validate the data collected. To this end, APS prepared an interview guide and conducted 11 individual interviews in four governorates (Cairo, Alexandria, Behiara, and Fayoum). The selection of the CSOs was based on the consent of the respondents to take part in the study. The interviews were carried out with 7 CSOs/social enterprises, a research center, a community-based association, and a law firm.

The APS team also organized one focus group discussion attended by a subsample of 10 CSOs. The aim was to gain a better understanding of the CSOs’ perception of their role in environmental transition in Egypt and the dynamics of the relationship with other actors in this field, including the government and international institutions.

### E. CSO Participants’ insights: Main Findings

The results of the consultations and the interviews presented below are grouped under three broad relevant themes: 1) Defining just transition; 2) Challenges and opportunities, and 3) CSOs engagement in just transition.

#### 1. Just Transition: perceptions and priorities

In general, there was no clear understanding of environmental just transition among most of the participants. There was a tendency to conflate transition to low carbon economy with just transition. This is not surprising given the novelty of the concept in Egypt and the absence of the term “just transition” in the official discourse and national strategies pertaining to climate change. However, the discussion took a different direction

once the facilitator made a short presentation on the history, meaning and importance of just transition.

Some participants felt that the concept is ‘foreign’ and imposed on Egypt and developing countries by developed countries, that it overlooks local socio-cultural context and the knowledge and experiences of people in developing countries such as Egypt. Other participants discussed the Arabic translation of the term, and argued that “انتقال عادل” is not the right translation in Arabic because it implies maintaining the status quo with minor changes, while the term التحول العادل (just transformation) implies breaking away with the current situation and creating a new normal.

Some participants defined the term as “a strategy to move towards more sustainable economy that will tackle issues of food security and the growing population in Egypt”. Others situated just transition as an issue concerning both the North and the South, as a way of achieving justice by “holding those who caused the climate risks responsible for supporting the countries in the South such as Egypt in achieving the transition”. For many others, “just transition meant “putting the right policies in place that facilitate a transition away from the status quo to a more sustainable economy”.

In many sessions, participants had more questions than answers, which revealed the vagueness of the term for them. Questions included: does just transition mean the same thing in different geographic settings here in Egypt like coastal areas, deserts, the Delta? What about people’s needs in relation to the goals that need to be achieved? How to account for the contradictory role of the big corporates, on the one hand they are the main provider of employment and on the other hand they are damaging the environment?

The concept of justice was repeatedly mentioned by participants. Some explained that the

transformation from fossil fuel energy sources to renewable “clean” energy sources undoubtedly comes with “winners and losers.” Those who will be severely affected are the poor, employees and workers by. One participant specifically mentioned the impact on the thousands of employees who work in the big petroleum companies and their future when Egypt makes the transition.

The more established CSOs operating in Cairo or other big cities like Alexandria, and therefore were more involved with the donor community, had a better grasp of the term. Those participants rightly mentioned the importance of considering the most affected among and the disadvantaged social groups such workers, small farmers, and the poor in any plans or strategies pertaining to environmental transition,” because these groups are usually economically and socially neglected and consequently suffer the most from the impacts of climate change.”

One of our interviewees explained that the concept of just transition has gained weight and popularity after COP27 which was held in Egypt in 2022. “Now we have many projects that are called something green, like green Sharm El Sheikh. However, until now there are no real policies and/or actual plans that could be translated into concrete actions on the ground to achieve transition let alone ‘just transition’. The only exception is the move towards the use of renewable clean energy as the government has set a target and seems to be taking the right steps to achieve it”.

In another interview, the respondent stressed that justice should be approached from the distribution of resources angle. Accordingly, we should identify the most important aspects impacting citizens’ livelihoods, such as drinking water, sanitation, crowding, and affordability, etc. and analyze how these needs are distributed. The results of such exercises reveal substantial gaps and injustices in the distribution of resources and necessary services across the governorates in Egypt.

Finally, a number of CSOs specifically identified the need to account for the gendered impact of climate change and incorporate gender issues in any discussion, planning and action regarding just transition. In the same vein, the cooperatives/ trade unions working with small farmers and fishermen mentioned the need to understand the impact of the transition on these groups and how to mitigate it.

Participants were also asked to identify the most urgent environmental issues in Egypt. The answers varied based on the geographic location of the CSOs and their field of work. It was evident that the three themes of the project are very relevant in the Egyptian context. Water scarcity and unjust access to water was mentioned in reference to many villages and how it negatively affects small farmers. Agriculture production and food security were another important issue, as well as energy in its relation to both water and agriculture. For example, in Damietta climate change exacerbates the problems of small fishermen livelihood and the fish stock in Egypt. Water and air pollution, and solid waste management, were among the issues mentioned.

## 2. Challenges & Needs

CSO participants were asked to talk about the challenges they encounter and the support they need to improve their work and outreach.

**Restrictive political environment** One of the main challenges mentioned by almost all CSOs is the restrictive political environment in Egypt which curtails their public and civic engagement, as explained in the review of the NGO sector above. The regulations pertaining to establishing an NGO, receiving funds, and implementing activities in communities were mentioned by all CSOs. Others cited the lack of meaningful communication and the limited space offered for CSOs involvement in issues related to climate change and environmental transition. Many CSOs stressed the importance of creating mechanisms to engage CSOs and communities in transition processes not only

through consultation but actual participation in decision making.

Several examples were given during the interviews regarding the difficulties the CSOs encounter in working directly with community members. Some interviewees mentioned the inability to obtain permits to work in the community and the absence of partnership with government entities that might facilitate the work. While this situation seemed to occur to many organizations, some CSOs have a different experience. One respondent explained that in their work they partner with local NGOs and Community-based Associations (CBAs) which proved to be very useful for their work in the community. Our respondent further explained that for “the project to be successful one has to partner with the government entities and local authorities”.

**Lack of data and information** Another important challenge facing CSOs working in this field is the lack of data and information related to climate change and/or government policies and actions in this regard. For some participants even the available information was inaccurate most of the time. In addition, some respondents mentioned encountering difficulties to conduct surveys or any sort of research (focus group discussions, stakeholder mapping, etc.) to collect meaningful information about the targeted communities.

**Weak public awareness** Many CSOs mentioned lack of public awareness among communities about the impact of climate change as a challenge. Statements like “people don not really care about the environment because they don’t know what the problems is,” “people cannot see the relationship between their daily problems and climate change,” and “changing people’s attitudes, behavior and daily practice that are harmful to the environment is very difficult,” were mentioned, as well as a lack of trust towards the CSOs. Many participants spoke of the need to engage local communities in consultations and conversations on climate change and green transition.

### **Absence of Collaboration among Egyptian**

**CSOs** Many participants highlighted the lack of collaboration among CSOs/NGOs working in the field of environment and climate change as a main obstacle hindering the exchange of information and experiences and sometimes leading to the duplication of the work. This problem, according to the Greenish report (2023), is further intensified by the limited membership of CSOs in strategic and independent national and regional networks in the field of environment and climate due the legal restriction imposed on these organizations. All participants placed great emphasis on the importance of building such networks among CSOs to advance their work at the national and regional levels.

**Insufficient Funding** Almost all organizations cited lack of funding as a main challenge which affects their work and the continuity of the projects they are working on. Participants cited official regulations as one reason behind the difficulties they encounter in obtaining the funds they need to maintain the workflow of their organizations.

**Government focus on attracting investors** Some participants felt that one of the biggest challenges is that “in Egypt, the focus is still on investment at the expense of achieving social and economic sustainability. In the same vein, all the planned clean energy projects aim to attract investment and are meant for export rather than the focus is on energy security in the country.”

**Technical support & capacity building** One of the issues cited by many small CSOs working on environmental issues, as some respondents explained “in order to expand our work we need to acquire the needed skills and knowledge especially in areas relating to policy negotiations, developing policy papers, fund raising, and conducting action research and disseminate our success stories.”

Participants were encouraged to identify the different types of needs (technical, skills and capacity building among others) to facilitate their

work and enhance their public engagement in environmental transition.

**Networking and communication** The need to build networks and maintain networks was mentioned by many CSOs. It was interesting to note that during these consultations CSOs took opportunities to network with each other and to identify areas for potential collaboration amongst themselves.

### **3. Role of CSOs in the transition and relationship with government**

The findings of the consultations and interviews pointed to the limited space available for CSOs to participate in current climate policymaking, and general patterns around treatment of environmental activists. Many CSOs explained that “only selected NGOs were invited to attend public consultations and information sessions related to government’s national strategies and also to the COP 27.” Others said that even when they were invited to a general event like the online National Dialogue which aims to engage multiple-stakeholders on various developmental and environmental issues, “it was organized in a lecture format with no space for real discussion and exchange of opinions.”

For some time, there was a perception that the environment was an area in which CSOs were allowed to work. However, our interviews revealed that permitted engagement is contained to specific issues, mostly those related to air pollution, planting trees, beach cleaning and the like. CSO engagement with community needs or the impacts of climate change on farmers and fishermen are extremely limited. One of our respondents explained that “the situation got tighter after the COP27, due to the protest activities carried out during the event.” Despite all the obstacles many CSOs encounter in their work, they still believe that they have a role to play in furthering environmental transition.



**Working with community members** Many organizations cited the need for education and raising environmental awareness among communities to engage them in dialogue around just transition. As one participant explained: “I believe we can make a difference if we better grasp the meaning and characteristics of just transition to include it in our work and educate people about it.” Another participant stressed the importance of “studying and understanding the National Strategy for Climate Change 2050 to be able to identify the gaps to advocate for policy amendments and/or change.”

**Working with local authorities:** The results of our interviews with several NGOs located in governorates outside of Cairo shed light on the importance of working with local authorities. The NGOs from Fayoum and Alexandria felt that they have a role in building bridges with local authorities not only to facilitate their work but also to create partnerships with them. As our respondents explained, “for small NGOs partnering with the local authority is essential especially to obtain permits to carry out public events. When we have a clear plan, activities, and targets the governor and the other officials give us all the support we need. So, we should capitalize on the role played by the local authorities and partner with them in implementing projects.” The situation differs when we look at urban central governorates like Cairo and Giza.

**Advocating for the rights of the disadvantaged** The trade unions and cooperatives working with small farmers and fishermen felt that they have a role in advocating for the rights of these groups and helping them secure decent employment in the transition to a low carbon economy. They explained that creating employment and securing jobs for those who will be most affected is a way to reduce poverty and inequality in the transition.

**Regional and international networks** In accordance with the findings of the Greenish

Mapping Study (2023), many participants felt that joining regional and international networks would create greater opportunities for CSOs to play a role in the environmental just transition in Egypt. One example mentioned was the “Action for Climate and Environment,” whose members focus on protecting the rights and interests of population groups that are most affected by climate change, as part of their commitment to a just transition.

**Planning for the transition** CSOs felt that transitioning to clean energy requires a clear vision of how Egyptians’ new, green lives will look in every sector of our society, and how this will be sustained in the future. They stressed that we should have the tools and indicators to measure the progress we achieve towards the stated goals.

**People’s agency and local knowledge** CSOs stressed the importance of engaging people in the decision-making processes to ensure that their actual needs are taken into account. They talked about the need to appreciate and value people’s local knowledge. “We always talk about raising people awareness regarding climate change, but if we just observe carefully, we can see how t Egyptian small farmers manage their land and the changes they encounter. The farmer may or may not fully understand the impact and scope of climate change, however, they understand the changes that happened to their environment and their way of living and they handle them well”.

**Engaging the private sector** Participants stressed the importance of the role of the private sector in energy transition in Egypt. They believe that managing and implementing energy transition should be carried out in partnership between the public sector and the private sector. This entails active engagement of the private sector and creating an enabling environment to achieve this goal.

## IV. Conclusions

The current background report presents the main findings of the CSOs mapping carried out by APS in Egypt as part of the project entitled “Strengthening Civil Society Actors: Towards a Just Environmental Transition in the Middle East and North Africa.” The project aims to empower CSOs working on the environment and climate change to actively take part and engage in public policies and to influence policy dialogues in and about the MENA region.

The main objective of the CSOs mapping is to build a better understanding of the current situation and future directions regarding just transition in Egypt as related to the main themes of the project, namely energy just transition, food sovereignty, and just access to water. To this end, the mapping applied a number of interconnected methods to conduct this research using various instruments for gathering information and views of CSOs such as organizing consultations and carrying out individual interviews with CSOs, researchers and experts. The selection of the CSO participants was based on a set of criteria developed for this purpose, which included geographic location, type of organization, thematic field of work, and consent to participate in the project. A total of 50 participants were recruited representing 29 CSOs operation in 10 governorates in Egypt.

### 1. The current situation: main findings

The importance of CSOs in climate policy stems from their ability to provide opportunities for communities and the public to be informed about policies and plans pertaining to climate change, and to ensure that their voice is heard at climate change negotiations. Moreover, their local connections with communities provide them with first-hand knowledge of the impacts of climate change on the ground.

It is widely acknowledged that the role of CSOs in climate change negotiation and governance differs across various political and legislative contexts. While CSOs/NGOs are more likely to be present in countries with stable democracies and receive more support from the government, those operating under a politically restricted environment tend to have a limited role in policymaking (Ben Youssef, 2023). The mapping exercise revealed that the restrictive political environment is the main obstacle to effective engagement of CSOs in furthering just transition. Limited space for public participation and official regulations governing the establishment and operation of CSOs/NGOs curtail their engagement in activities related to climate change and environment. This indicates the marginalization of this sector in the overall policy discussions around the issue of climate crisis and environmental transition in Egypt. All the CSOs that participated in the mapping exercise showed a high level of commitment to working on climate change and to further the transition to a low carbon economy. They are engaged in a wide variety of activities including organizing awareness raising campaigns and educating their communities, creating networks with local authorities to implement projects, providing trainings to community workers, and helping small farmers and fishermen to build cooperatives to secure their rights to public services such as health.

Although the term “just transition” was not clear for most participants, their work on the ground reflects the core principles of the concept such as securing employment and livelihood of the workers and the poor in general, raising awareness and informing local communities, and the call for involving communities and all stakeholders in climate change and transition conversations.

### 2. Way forward: Recommendations

“Moving forward entails bringing the issues related to green transition and just transition to the fore and initiating a societal discussion on these issues,”

one of our interviewees said. This section is based on the main recommendations and needs collected during the mapping research in Egypt.

### **Create a space and concrete opportunities for CSOs participation in transition policymaking**

The existing government restrictions on CSOs curtail their input in climate and environmental transition discussions. There is a need to create meaningful spaces for CSOs (representing the communities they work with) to engage the actual questions of the transition and how to mitigate the negative impacts on the most vulnerable groups. It is important to note that the NCCS 2050 and SDS Egypt Vision 2030 clearly lay out a direction for the government towards partnerships with civil society in the implementing climate change strategies: “civil society has an important role to play particularly at the community level.”

### **CSOs capacity building programs**

A wide consensus emerged among CSO participants on the need for building their knowledge and skills pertaining to just transition and writing policy papers, policy dialogue and formulation of policy options.

### **Raising awareness and educating communities about climate change and green transition**

In accordance with the findings of the Greenish report (2023) our research revealed that the Egyptian people are aware of the changes in the weather and climate that are affecting them. However, they do not always connect these challenges to climate change as a broader concept. The report further explained that one of the main reasons behind this situation is the limited Arabic media coverage, and the framing of climate change as an issue that is foreign to the Egyptian context. This could be achieved by organizing awareness campaigns, meetings, and consultations within the communities. The media has a vital role to play in these awareness campaigns.

### **Stakeholder consultations at the community level**

In Egypt, The Law 4/1994 on Environmental Protection requires consultation of community members and concerned parties with the necessary information about a project before its implementation. All stakeholders should be invited. Paragraph 6.4.3 from Law 4/1994 on Environmental Protection provides detailed information on the scope of the public consultation, methodology and documentation that is required. It is of utmost importance to organize consultation at the community level to inform and engage people on issues and projects related to green transition.

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