

## The role of civil societies in facing the social and economic ramifications of Covid-19 pandemic

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**Abstract** - Crises facing a given society represent a milestone in its history as they distinguish social life in its natural form, and its form after the sudden imbalance the society was exposed to. Crises may be economic, social, political, cultural, health-related or medical. They afflict a certain sector with partial paralysis, or permanent breakdown, and each crisis has its victims that are directly affected thereby, or indirectly through its various consequences. In addition, each crisis has its exploiters and beneficiaries who gain benefit therefrom and wish for its permanence. The current study attempts to monitor and analyze the role of NGOs during the different crises the Egyptian society has been exposed to, as each crisis has its impacts in different aspects of life. Among those crises, which emerged recently, is COVID-19 Pandemic. Hence, the problem of the study is to identify the nature of this disease, and the material and social support provided by these institutions in an attempt to face the various impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, by conducting 30 interviews with NGOs founders, and their representatives within the city of Alexandria. The result has shown that these bodies sought to provide alternative sources of income for the groups that were directly affected by the crisis.

**Keywords:** NGOs, community support, world crisis, covid-19 pandemic

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Crises facing a given society represent a milestone in its history as they distinguish social life in its natural form, and its form after the sudden imbalance the society was exposed to. Crises may be economic, social, political, cultural, health-related or medical. They afflict a certain sector with partial paralysis, or permanent breakdown, and each crisis has its victims that are directly affected thereby, or indirectly through its various consequences. In addition, each crisis has its exploiters and beneficiaries who gain benefit therefrom and wish for its permanence. In every crisis, still, the role of many parties in confronting it is found, trying to limit its negative effects on society. This includes official bodies represented in government bodies and political parties, and unofficial bodies represented in civil bodies and individuals that work voluntarily to serve the community. Their numbers have developed and increased significantly during the past years, but each has its own scope of work. Some of them are concerned with charitable services, or developmental services; in education, health and other services.

The current study has sought to monitor and analyze the role of civil institutions in the course of the various crises that the Egyptian society got exposed to, as each crisis has its impacts in different aspects of life. One of those crises that have recently cropped up is the COVID-19 pandemic. The problem of the study is to identify the nature of that role, and what those institutions have provided as financial and social support to try to confront the social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The outbreak of a new unknown virus has aroused the curiosity of sociologists and researchers, as many of them sought to try to explain the stages of the virus, and predict what is to come, through a study and an analysis of what WHO has done in similar cases, such as the influenza virus, which was considered a pandemic in 2009 (Abeyasinghe, 2013; Bagual et al, 2023).

Due to the successive emergence of new viruses, there must be systematic frameworks for balancing the risks of the emergence of this virus, and its potential effects on the general health of the individual, in terms of evaluating the chances of its transmission, its speed, and rates of spread, as well as measuring the individual's resistance to it. This was done through measuring the influenza pandemic, which outbreaked in the world four times, in 1918, 1957, 1968, and 2009 (Holloway et al, 2014).

Reports of WHO have indicated that there are billions of viruses around the world, and fortunately the number of what infects humanity is limited. Yet, the crowded social lifestyle practiced by the world causes the numbers of these viruses to increase annually, and some of them pose a clear threat to human health and life. The most dangerous are those that affect the respiratory system (Verma et al, 2022).

Therefore, WHO tried to define a classification for viruses, according to the extent of their severity, danger, and speed of spread. WHO activated degrees of alert for these viruses, so that they do not turn into an epidemic, so it is necessary to ensure the presence of trained medical teams in all societies, ensuring the distribution of vaccines for all viruses to every society, without discrimination be it economic, political, or social (*World Development Report*, 2022).

- The study seeks to show the nature of the various crises experienced by the urban community.

- The study sheds light on the COVID-19 as one of those crises, due to its various and serious damages to the world as a whole, in addition to the multiplicity of its victims and beneficiaries.

- The study seeks to enrich the theoretical heritage related to pandemics such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

The first goal is to "attempt to analyze and monitor the various impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in society." Several questions define this objective, namely (1) What are the social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in society? (2) What are the economic impacts of the pandemic on society?

As for the second objective, it is represented in "an attempt to monitor the role of informal support provided by NGOs in facing the impacts of the pandemic." Several questions define this objective, including.

- (1) What is the role played by NGOs in facing the social impacts of the pandemic?
- (2) What role did NGOs play to face the economic impacts of the pandemic?

It is a group of non-profit institutions and societies, which have arisen as a result of the surrounding societal conditions, and whose members are linked to a common goal through which the institution seeks to achieve community service.

The term NGOs appeared for the first time in 1945, in the Charter of the United Nations, as Peter Willitz indicated that these institutions are a societal conscience, which reflects the social problems and crises of a society. They seek to limit their impacts and support the affected groups (Kellow & Gregory, 2018).

It is the social environment of the individual, in which reciprocal relations prevail, in terms of providing material and social support among them, as it serves as a circle for social interactions. The stronger the connection of members, the higher the degree of support among them, and this circle may expand to include official and non-official bodies in society.

Cohen argued that each individual has his/her own social relations, which represent a societal support ring in the midst of the crisis, but the extent of the effectiveness of that circle varies according to the nature of the individual. Despite the positive effects that this support bears in the life of the individual, it may transform at times to a source of psychological pressure, when this support turns into directions and control (Taylor 2018).

It's the turning point that society is exposed to suddenly, after which events get complicated rapidly, and may result in a threat to various material and human properties, as they are unpredictable situations that threaten the continuation of social life in its usual form.

Crises have become an integral part of modern social life, as they are the source of individuals' suffering and various losses. Therefore, they are often considered as the main cause of radical change in society (Seeger et al, 2003).

The word "crisis" appeared in the ancient Greek era, and it is composed of two parts, the first meaning a decision, and the second meaning a turning point, and thus it means the decision that leads to the occurrence of a turning point in society (Roberts, 1995).

Each crisis has stages, summed up in the stage of occurrence of the crisis, so that the feeling of its presence begins, accompanied by confusion and lack of clarity of vision. Then, it begins to widen from the starting point to several other areas, and this happens as a result of not understanding the actual occurrence of the crisis, then it begins to worsen, reaching the climax stage. That stage usually occurs when society is unable to contain crises, then the stage of shrinking of the crisis, and finally the stage of its end when society recovers from its effects (Qassem & Abdullah, 2016).

It is a natural or manufactured pest, transgressing scope of what is customary, and exceeding the ability of societies to contain or control it. Its effects are multiple, starting from human losses to economic and social losses as well as political aspects.

The pandemic, linguistically, expresses great intensity that sweeps through everything, and it is tantamount to sedition and a great calamity, which may occur and change with it the accepted constants of social life (Manzoor, 1993).

"Pandemic" is also a term rooted in the Arabic language, but it has not been used for ages, and it was recently linked to the COVID-19 virus, so some considered it one of the new terms, as the World Health Society resorted to using it, to express this virus after it turned into an epidemic that infected the world as a whole (Al-Akeli et al, 2021).

The study has used the theory of the Risk Society by "Ulrich Beck", as it monitors the state of lack of vision among some individuals, in terms of their lack of distinction between right and wrong, or what is ethical or otherwise. Individuals believe that actions are in some way legitimate, due to quick financial profit. They do not pay attention to the societal interest or the state of crisis that society as a whole suffers from, so it was most appropriate to explain the behavior of the category of beneficiaries from the crises.

He also believes that risk has added an individual character to the prevailing social system, and this has led to many noticeable changes in the past years, represented in unemployment, the shift to intermittent work, as well as the disappearance of the sense of job and community security (Beck, 1992).

The theory emphasized that the risk-taking society does not consolidate the idea of the class social pyramid, as it reinforces the idea of clear differences in income and wealth between individuals, as this is dominated by the high rates of damage and risk in the industrial society. This situation is considered as the natural product of modernization, and the cumulative process of the resulting interactions on the natural and industrial factors in modern society. Beck argues that the risk society works to reduce the size of the conflict between classes, and tends to equate between the disaster society and the risk society, as he believes that the great disasters provide an image for understanding the size of the risks that exist, so that it becomes an image of credibility (Curran, 2013).

## **2. METHOD**

The systematic procedures are considered a reflection of the phenomenon under study within any society, through the use of the method and the tool appropriate to its nature, to analyze and describe the data and information related to the phenomenon under study (Badawi, 1977).

The study is a field study, where the researcher collects its data; evaluating the important elements related to crises in general, and the COVID-19 pandemic in particular. Impacts and the similarities and differences between them and other research phenomena are discussed (Alqassas 2014).

The study also relies on the descriptive analytical approach, which seeks to describe and analyze the problem of the study in all its aspects, by counting the data related to it, to reach its causes and the elements affected by it, in an attempt to generalize the results drawn from it in the future (Saudi & Al-Khudairi, 1992).

The study has prepared an interview guide with a sample of 30 individuals. The questionnaire was concerned with support and community support providers from institutions and NGOs in Alexandria Governorate. It's divided into three main topics, through a set of primary data about the provider of community support programs, introductory data about the civil society that provides community services, and the role played by the national society for community service during crises, as follows.

## **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **3.1 Scope of the civil society activities and its relationship to the extent of continuity of this activity**

In relation to the activities of civil societies and the extent of continuity of that activity, the interest of those societies in providing free training courses or their financial value is reduced is a continuous interest and activity throughout the year that is not affected by crises. It ranked first with a rate of 27%, followed by the second; interest of civil societies in providing financial and in-kind services to the neediest groups in society at a rate of 17%, then comes the continuous marketing of handmade products for breadwinner women and special groups at a rate of 10%. The interest of civil societies in providing training courses on handicrafts and skills, with continuity, may also increase with seasons and specific times, as it ranked first with a rate of 17%, while financial and in-kind services ranked first, as they represent the services most affected by the occurrence of crises within the community, by 7%. This may be due to the realization of these bodies of the importance of training courses in the various craft and educational fields in the development and progress of society. It may also be due to the keenness of these bodies to find alternative sources of income for these groups, so they contribute to establishing a stable life despite the changing societal conditions, and it may also be because the destruction of different

societies is the basis for their renaissance and progress from their interest in handicrafts and small projects.

### **3.2 Groups targeted by the activities of civil societies and their relationship to the extent of continuity of this activity**

In relation to the target groups of the activities of the NGOs and the extent of the continuity or cessation of these activities, the interest of NGOs in developing and supporting people with special needs \_ (blind girls - people with mental disabilities - people with mental illnesses) - is a continuous activity throughout the year, as it ranked first at a rate of 17%. The second place is equally occupied by the limited and non-income groups, concern for the breadwinner women, concern for the elderly, at a rate of 10%. As for the third, the concern for the category of orphans is also equal with the concern for the category of martyrs' families, with a percentage 7%. On the other hand, we find that interest in women who mainly support the family has ranked first in activities with continuity, but with an increase in the rate of interest in them at specific times and seasons by 20%. Interest in the youth category has ranked first in activities of civil societies that are characterized by continuity, but decrease with the presence of crises in society by 7%. This may be due to the awareness of these societies of the importance of supporting people with special needs on an ongoing basis, and the need to integrate them within the different groups of society. This may also be due to the great attention given by the Egyptian state for this category, and then society as a whole realized the value of integrating them and developing their capabilities as a nucleus for the development of society in general.

### **3.3 Type of civil society representative and its relationship to the social changes that occurred in society in light of the COVID-19 crisis**

As for the type of representative of the civil society and its relationship to the social changes in Egyptian society during COVID-19, we find that there is a clear difference in realizing the value of the things lost between males and females. The males ranked first in realizing the value of canceling activities like sports, various leagues and football matches, with a rate of 10%. Also, they ranked first in awareness of the value of canceling funeral pavilions and funeral ceremonies, with a rate of 7%, while females ranked first in awareness of missing family gatherings, with a rate of 40%, as well lack of weddings, social celebrations, various artistic activities and concerts, in addition to lack of religious rituals and their spirituality in various places of worship. This may be due to the nature of the woman's attachment to the family and her innate tendency to warmth in the family, family bonding, and the pursuit of meeting and continuous gatherings despite the different life circumstances.

### **3.4 Type of civil society representative and its relationship to the economic changes that occurred in the Egyptian society in light of the COVID-19 crisis**

Through the type of representative of the society and its relationship to the economic variables that occurred in society in light of the COVID-19 crisis, the female ranked first in awareness of these variables, in terms of the variable of laying off many workers to reduce the volume of employment in light of the crisis, by 37%. Also, she got aware of the cessation of certain job sectors by 20%, as well as freezing the salaries of some workers for a specific period of time by 13%, in addition to reducing the salaries of many others in an attempt to maintain their job positions by 10%. This may be due to the nature of women as they are able to realize the needs of those around, as well as seeking to find solutions to them. Maybe it is the result of the nature of women in their vision and monitoring of economic conditions and their endeavor to overcome their fluctuations, and this may also be due to the extreme clarity of the impacts of that crisis, so it was necessary for society to realize it and seek to try to find alternatives.

### **3.5 Type of civil society representative and its relationship to the groups that benefited from the COVID-19 crisis**



As for the type of representative of the society and its relationship to the groups that benefited from the COVID-19 crisis, we find that the female has ranked first in all categories, as her vision was that the most beneficiary categories are mobile phone companies and Internet networks, with a rate of 30%, while pharmacy owners followed benefitting from selling medical face masks, sterilization supplies, etc., by 27%. Next come owners of shops selling consumer goods and various foodstuffs, by 23%, and this may be due to the woman's direct interaction with the needs and requirements of the family, and this may also be due to her constant interest in resources of income of the family and trying to coordinate it with its needs.

### **3.6 Type of civil society representative and its relationship to the groups affected by the COVID-19 crisis**

As for the type of representative of the civil society and its relationship to the groups that were directly affected by the COVID-19 crisis, we find that the female also ranks first in her perception of all groups, as her vision was that the most affected group was irregular daily employment, at a rate of 37%. Workers followed that in the tourism sector, with a rate of 23%, and also the owners of coffee shops and cafes, with a rate of 13%. It is certain that she is aware of the damage to the owners of beauty centers, with a rate of 7%, and this may be due to the woman's sense of the problems of the surrounding society, as she instinctively feels the need of others. This may be a result of the clarity of the crisis and its generalization on different groups and segments of society, which led to an attempt to unite to get out of it with the least amount of losses.

### **3.7 Age group of the civil society representative and its relationship to the social variables that occurred in society in light of the COVID-19 crisis**

Regarding the age group of the representative of the civil society, and its relationship to the social variables that occurred in society in light of the COVID-19 crisis, we find that the cancellation of family gatherings was the largest variable for the age group of 50:60 years, at a rate of 16%. In second place the age group of 40:50 years is found at a rate of 14%, while we find that the cancellation of sports activities, various leagues, and football matches took the lead among the age group of 30:40 years, at a rate of 7%. This may give an indication about the interests of each age group and what it misses, as it the younger age groups form sporting events and various social and artistic activities a large part of their interests. The older age groups had interest in family and its various gatherings, and the attempt to attain interdependence and continuous communication.

### **3.8 Age group of the civil society representative and its relationship to the economic changes that occurred in society in light of the COVID-19 crisis**

Regarding the age group of the representative of the civil society and its relationship to awareness of the economic changes that occurred in light of the COVID-19 crisis, we find that the age group of 40:50 years was the most aware of most of these variables, in terms of layoffs for some workers, at a rate of 17%, as well as in terms of sectors that completely stopped working for a certain period of time, by 10%. This may be due to the fact that this group is most in contact with the labor market and the impacts caused by that crisis, and this age group may be among the groups that have already been affected by the crisis.

- Alternative sources of income for groups that have lost, or decreased, source of income, in light of the COVID-19 crisis, is the primary role that civil societies sought to achieve. This group was fully capable of working and giving, and many of them seek to achieve financial sufficiency for his/her family, so it was necessary to seek to provide these sources.
- Providing training courses on various handicrafts free of charge, or at a reduced financial value, was the largest and most important activity offered by civil societies to serve and develop society. This may be due to the vision of those societies that developing human skills was the way to develop society.

- That role relatively differed in light of the impacts caused by the crisis, as the attention of these bodies focused on providing care and support for groups and segments of society with limited or no income. This may be due to the fact that the financial security of these families was the main goal that society as a whole sought to achieve, though not affecting the continuity of these training courses, as they continued electronically.

- The most important social changes that occurred as a result of the crisis was the abolition of family gatherings, which reflected the nature of Egyptian society and the strength of its family ties in its various life situations.

- Despite the different visions about the extent of the positive or negative results of the crisis and its changes, all of those visions have agreed on realizing the value of direct social interaction and the extent of its impact on our social life.

- Women were more affected and missed family gatherings than men, and this may be due to their strong attachment to the family and their innate tendency to interdependence and direct and continuous communication.

- The age group that misses these family gatherings the most was the age group of 50:60 years. This may be due to the focus of the interest of the older age groups around the family, and the attempt to strengthen social ties.

- The most important economic changes that occurred as a result of the crisis were the layoffs of some workers, in order to reduce the volume of employment within the investment institutions, and this problem became clear through the high rates of these individuals.

- The woman's view of most of these economic variables also agreed with laying off some workers, and this may be due to her awareness of the needs of those around her, and her monitoring of those conditions in order to try to overcome them and reconcile her life conditions accordingly.

- The age group of 40:50 years was the most in agreement with these results, and this may be due to it being the most in contact with the labor market and its fluctuations, or that it was the age group most affected by that crisis.

- The groups that benefited the most from the crisis were the owners of mobile phone companies and Internet networks. This may be due to the attempt of most members of society to conduct their social relations and their professional and educational career through alternative means via the phone or the Internet, while the groups most affected by this crisis were daily irregular workers. This category appeared clearly as it was counted, and it amounted to one million and 500 thousand irregular workers.

- Women's view of the groups that benefited most from that crisis was more consistent with the results than men's, and this may be due to their interest in the family's income resources and their endeavor to coordinate them with their various requirements. This may be due to the clarity of the crisis and its generalization on different societal groups, but it has also added a special dimension to the groups that have been affected, as it referred to the owners of beauty centers, which is a female vision in particular.

- The age group of 50:60 years was the most consistent group whose vision was consistent with the results in that the owners of mobile phone companies and Internet networks benefited most from the crisis. This may be due to the fact that this age group was the keenest on family bonding and alternative social communication in that crisis, while its vision of the most affected groups was also irregular daily employment, in reference to the high rates of that group and then the transformation of its special problems into a general societal problem.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Crises are life situations that best reveal the nature of societies. Some societies witness increased isolation and individualism in the event of a crisis. Yet, this crisis may reveal a society's spirit of unity, solidarity, and cooperation in order to mitigate its severity. The presence of civil societies is surely tantamount to illustrate this solidarity, so their role must be highlighted for the development of society, and their financial support must be increased through official agencies and various voluntary efforts, with the need to ensure the transparency and integrity of these

bodies, in order to ensure the development of society. COVID-19 pandemic is considered a moment in which the world as a whole changed, as certain events taken for granted, such as social and cultural gatherings, and various activities, suddenly disappeared. It was not expected that there would come a moment when weddings, funeral pavilions, and sporting activities would disappear. No one would have imagined that the call to prayer would not be heard inside mosques, or church bells, so this pandemic has turned into a special calendar, through which events are classified into "before the COVID-19 crisis", and "after the crisis". Even if the pandemic ended today, or continued for other years, the social impact it left behind will remain a milestone in the memory of every individual.

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