



Jordan Civil Society for Food Systems Transformation

Policy Brief no. 8

Key messages

- **Jordan's food system faces critical challenges, including the double burden of malnutrition, food waste, diminishing water resources, and climate change.** Civil society organizations (CSOs) role and involvement in Jordan's food system is still under-utilized. CSOs can and should play a bigger role in food system transformation.
- **The National Strategy for Food Security (2021–2030),** combined with initiatives like the **No Food Waste Initiative** and the **Foresight for Food System Transformation,** emphasizes a collaborative, forward-looking approach. However, CSOs must overcome challenges such as capacity deficits, limited cooperation, and funding hurdles.
- **Strengthening partnerships between CSOs, the government, and other stakeholders will be key to achieving sustainable food security and addressing long-term systemic changes in Jordan's food system.**
- **Civil society organizations buy-in on a unified vision and agreement on a common path** for food system transformation will serve to focus the efforts of civil society organizations to better serve the population to reach the desired food system outcomes, namely Food and nutrition security, Economic and social well-being, and Environmental sustainability.
- **Creating a platform for communication and, coordination and collaboration among civil society organizations is essential to focus the efforts to serve Jordan's population,** harnessing the strengths, geographical presence, staff and capabilities of each CSO to better work towards achieving food system transformation.



Introduction

This policy note is part of a series prepared by the Foresight for Food Systems Transformation (FoSTr) Programme,¹ aimed at equipping decision-makers, politicians, researchers, and practitioners with relevant data, insights, policy tools, and recommendations to foster a shared understanding of critical issues concerning food system transformation. The need for these policy notes arose following FoSTr workshops following FoSTr workshops and other relevant events during 2022–2024, where stakeholders emphasised this issue, highlighting the lack of awareness and necessary interventions. This policy brief is intended to act as a diagnostic and issues paper rather than a detailed analytical document, ensuring it meets its purpose effectively.

Why focus on the role of civil society in food systems transformation? The food system in Jordan faces multiple challenges including the increase in obesity among adults, the rise in unhealthy dietary patterns, and the high consumption of processed foods. Jordan has made progress with low undernourishment among Jordanian, but it has significantly high undernourishment among refugee community. Another challenge in food system is the rise in food prices and the reliance on imported foods, reducing people affordability to healthy diets. Furthermore, drought stress and climate change reduce the crop productivity and negatively affecting food availability. Another factor that enhances the vulnerability of food system is the rise in the percentage of food waste.

An urgent food system transformation in Jordan is needed to tackle these challenges and create more resilient food system. Priorities in food transformation is given to prioritize improve nutrition, sustainability, inclusiveness, and resilience in the food system. A systemic approach to policymaking, incorporating future perspectives to evaluate long-term requirements and scenarios.

In 2021, the Jordanian government has developed its first National Strategy for Food Security (2021–2030). The government also established the Council for Food Security, where civil society representatives can contribute their insights and opinions. A Food Security Management Information System and launching the ‘No Food Waste Initiative’ to address food system challenges were also recently initiated. Through Foresight for Food System Transformation (Foresight4Food) project, the objective is to engage stakeholders in foresight and scenario analyses to clarify perspectives and assess risks, allowing Jordan to proactively prepare its food system for future demands and uncertainties.

The role of the CSOs in the ‘No Food Waste Initiative’ is to minimize food waste by providing campaigns, awareness, framework, and conducting research to address the waste food issue effectively. The engagement of multiple stakeholders is needed to prepare the food system transformation for future demands and challenges. The involvement of civil society organizations in food system transformation ensures the sustainability of the system and meet the needs of all stakeholders.

¹ The FoSTr programme covers four countries in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. It provides Jordan with a country support facility for food systems foresight and scenario analysis. The country-led and multi-actor foresight process aims to assist stakeholders in their contributions to national food systems transformation. It supports the dialogue, analysis, and understanding necessary for co-creating future food systems that are sustainable, healthy, equitable, and resilient.

Research approach and methods

Due to the short nature of this policy note, which limits itself to a summary of policy issues related to the food security governance system in Jordan, the methodology applied focused on the relevant literature review, meetings and consulting with policy and subject matter experts. Information was gathered from the. The first draft of the study was reviewed by FoSTr experts, the Secretariat of the FSC, the Ministry of Agriculture, the policy and planning committee of the Food Security Council and finally, this semi-final policy note was presented in the FoSTr workshop for review and comments.



Analysis and key findings



What is Civil Society?

Civil society is broadly understood as the aggregate of non-governmental organizations and institutions that represent the interests, values, and goals of citizens outside the government and the private sector. These include a wide range of organizations such as non-profits, charities, advocacy groups, labor unions, and other forms of community-based organizations. Civil society aims to mediate between individuals and the state, fostering dialogue, social values, and collective actions to address societal issues (Edwards, 2004; Keane, 1988).

Civil society plays a critical role in transforming food systems by advocating for sustainable practices, promoting food security, and addressing social justice within food production and distribution. Civil society organizations (CSOs) act as mediators, engaging in policy influence, raising awareness, and directly supporting community-based programs. For instance, the advocacy efforts of organizations have pushed for environmental policy changes that limit the use of harmful pesticides and support organic farming practices. Other CSOs, raise public awareness on sustainable food practices, educate consumers on the importance of supporting local agriculture, and emphasize the environmental and health benefits of plant-based diets. Additionally, other organizations provide essential food assistance to low-income communities, thereby enhancing food access and security at the local level. Through these roles, civil society drives shifts in both consumer behavior and policy, contributing to the evolution of food systems toward sustainability and inclusivity.

Civil society's role also extends to research and knowledge dissemination. Organizations such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) collaborate with CSOs to gather data on food security and best agricultural practices, which in turn informs evidence-based policy-making and implementation strategies for food systems. Monitoring and accountability are other essential functions, as CSOs hold corporations and governments accountable for their commitments to sustainable practices. In summary, civil society's diverse roles in advocacy, education, research, and accountability are crucial to transforming food systems toward equitable, resilient, and sustainable models.



Civil Society in Jordan

Jordan's civil society comprises a range of organizations focused on social, economic, and environmental issues, with an emphasis on sustainable development and social welfare. CSOs in Jordan include non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), charitable foundations, professional associations, and youth and women's organizations. These organizations Civil society organizations (CSOs) are mainly geared towards charities, they engage in activities such as food aid, community development, awareness-raising, service provision and advocacy. Jordan's CSOs are generally centered in urban areas, particularly in Amman, due to better access to funding and resources. However, many CSOs operate in rural areas across Jordan, addressing community needs in regions such as Irbid, Mafraq, Karak, and Ma'an (Al-Zoubi, 2021).

Civil society organizations (CSOs) are mainly geared towards charities, to serve better nutrition and food security, by providing food aid for vulnerable communities, and to improve rural livelihoods and to improve agricultural practices and sustainability.

NGOs in Jordan, such as JOHUD and the Jordan River Foundation, focus on development, environmental protection, and poverty alleviation. CBOs typically address localized issues, often providing support for small-scale agriculture, food security, and capacity building. Charitable organizations like Tkiyet Um Ali focus on welfare and emergency relief, addressing food insecurity through donations. Professional associations, including the Jordan Agricultural Engineers Association, support sector-specific advocacy and skills training. Youth and women's organizations promote social inclusion, providing economic opportunities and empowering disadvantaged groups (UNDP Jordan, 2021). However, Scattered efforts of Civil society organizations (CSOs) need to be focused under a national umbrella to better serve the food system transformation.



Key Civil Society and Non-governmental organizations in Jordan

There are more than 2500 CSOs in Jordan falling within several categories, Majorities of the CSOs are working in charity (almost half of them). Other than charities, almost 10% of CSOs have goals that can be related to food systems, such as healthcare, agriculture, environment, women and children, chambers of commerce and industry, and professional associations.

Several Jordanian CSOs are already contributing to food systems through initiatives that address food security, support sustainable agriculture, and promote community nutrition. While working to achieve their goals The Jordan River Foundation's work in agricultural development supports local food systems and enables farmers to access resources for sustainable production. Similarly, JOHUD's focus on rural development includes agricultural training programs that strengthen community resilience to food insecurity. The Royal Health Awareness Society offers nutrition education to improve public knowledge on healthy eating and food safety. Tkiyet Um Ali focuses on welfare and emergency relief, addressing food insecurity through food aid and donations. Additionally, the Jordan Food Bank works to reduce hunger and food waste by redistributing surplus food to vulnerable communities, playing a critical role in food security for low-income populations (Jordan River Foundation, 2022; JOHUD, 2021; RHAS, 2021; Jordan Food Bank, 2021).

Beyond those already engaged, other types of CSOs could expand their involvement in food system transformation. Environmental organizations like the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN) can promote sustainable agricultural practices and biodiversity conservation, supporting an agroecological approach to farming (RSCN, 2021). Youth and women-focused CSOs could encourage participation in sustainable agriculture, offering training in urban agriculture, food processing, and small-scale farming to foster job creation and food resilience. Research and policy institutes, such as the Jordan Strategy Forum, can provide valuable insights into food security, influencing evidence-based policy changes. Lastly, cooperatives and agricultural associations like the Jordan Farmers Union can play a key role in fair-trade practices, improved market access, and sustainable techniques for small-scale farmers (Jordan Farmers Union, 2021).

Key civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations involved in food system in Jordan are:

CSO	Role
The Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development (JOHUD)	Works on improving food security and nutrition, focusing on community development and empowerment.
Jordan River Foundation (JRF)	Empowering communities and promoting child safety and protection through a variety of integrated programs; adopting international best practices in assessment, implementation and quality control.
Tkiyet Um Ali (TUA)	Eradicating hunger and malnutrition in Jordan by delivering donor support to people who live in extreme poverty through sustainable, healthy food programs in accordance with scientific methods, Islamic Sharia', and best environmental practices.
National Alliance Against Hunger and Malnutrition (NAJMAH)	NAJMAH is based on key partnerships between the government sector, civil society institutions, the private sector and the Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development. It is also a non-profit, non-governmental organization mainly concerned with the axis of fighting hunger through a specific set of strategic goals.
Chambers of Commerce and Industry	Participating with public sector institutions to draw policies related to the sectors of industry, trade and services besides participating in the process of developing the strategies and the suitable plans for their implementation.
The Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN)	Engages in conservation efforts including sustainable agricultural practices, promoting biodiversity, and ensuring food security through environmental sustainability.
Royal Health Awareness Society (RHAS)	Empower the Jordanian community to adopt a healthy lifestyle through raising health awareness and enhancing an environment conducive to safe and healthy behaviors.
Jordan Food Bank	Provides food assistance to vulnerable populations and works to address food insecurity through various outreach and support programs.
The Jordanian National Forum for Women (JNFW)	Engages in initiatives related to food security, advocating for women's roles in sustainable agriculture and food production.
Arab Group for the Protection of Nature (APN)	Works to promote sustainable agricultural practices and food security, focusing on preserving natural resources and promoting local food production.



Roles of Civil Society in Food System Transformation in Jordan

In Jordan, civil society organizations actively contribute to food system transformation through public awareness, community development, advocacy and capacity-building initiatives. The CSOs can also link government policies with the real needs of the community to ensure that community needs are met and represented in the policies, especially those from the marginalized areas. Organizations such as the Jordan River Foundation (JRF) engage in projects that support local food systems by providing resources to farmers and promoting sustainable agricultural practices, especially in underserved areas (Jordan River Foundation, 2022). JOHUD (Jordan Hashemite Fund for Human Development) also plays an important role in rural areas by offering training and resources for sustainable farming, which enhances local food security and resilience to environmental challenges (JOHUD, 2021). The Royal Health Awareness Society (RHAS) provides educational programs on nutrition and food security, focusing on schools and community centers to encourage healthier food choices and reduce food waste (RHAS, 2021).

In terms of future roles, CSOs in Jordan could also support urban agriculture and community gardening projects to address food insecurity in urban areas. These initiatives would provide fresh produce, promote community engagement, and create green spaces in urban environments (Al-Karablieh & Salman, 2021). Furthermore, Jordanian CSOs could advocate for agroecological practices that emphasize biodiversity and ecological health, thereby encouraging farmers to adopt sustainable practices that minimize chemical inputs and conserve resources. This approach could be facilitated through workshops, pilot projects, and partnerships with local farmers. Additionally, CSOs could play a more active role in supporting small-scale farmers and developing local food markets to improve access to affordable, nutritious food while strengthening rural economies.

Challenges Facing Civil Society Organizations and NGOs in Jordan's Food System

The main challenges facing the CSOs working in food system falls within the following:

- 01** | **Fragmentation and Duplication of Efforts:** The amendment of society law in 2008 allows a registration of society with a minimum of 8 people, leading to a rapid rise in the number of newly registered organizations. With 50–55 new organizations registered monthly, fragmentation and intense competition for limited funding have emerged, resulting in duplicated efforts and scattered resources that reduce overall impact in the food system.
- 02** | **Limited Cooperation Among Stakeholders:** The collaboration among CSOs, government ministries, academics institutions, and decision-makers is weak and not structured, reducing the ability of CSOs to advocate for policy changes and deliver effective services related to food security.
- 03** | **Difficulty in Government Monitoring:** The high number of CSOs reduces the government's ability to monitor their activities effectively. This can lead to government struggle to ensure the compliance of the CSOs with laws.
- 04** | **Funding Challenges:** Since most CSOs rely on external sources for funding, funding is mostly from foreign donors and is tied with the goals and activities stated by the donors. CSOs face difficulty in obtaining funding approvals from the government. It also reduces the ability of CSOs to address Jordan-specific needs in the food system and diminishes their capacity to advocate for local priorities. This reduces their access to financial resources and reducing their ability to sustain and expand their activities within the food system.
- 05** | **Knowledge gap and lack of Common Vision of Food Security and Food System Transformation.**
- 06** | **Weak structural and financial capacity of CSOs** as they require strengthening of their administrative and staff bodies, internal restructuring, and better allocation of resources.

Policy Recommendations

Actionable recommendations for strengthening the role of civil society in Jordan's food system transformation are:



Move from Consultation to True Partnership with CSOs: Public private partnerships (PPPs) and collaboration between CSOs and the government are essential for effective actions and policies. This collaboration can be enhanced by using digital platforms to address challenges in food system, especially in rural areas.



Share Data and Information Effectively: Both the government and CSOs need current information on who is helping and where more assistance is needed, to improve efficiency and avoid duplication of targeted beneficiaries.



Work Together for Big, Lasting Changes: CSOs should work on long-term changes to the food system to address the root causes of food insecurity, push for fairer food policies and find long-term solutions for food aid. This can be achieved by reaching more people, changing policies, and changing the mindsets of the community on how to produce and consume food.



Capacity Building: Provide training and capacity building for the CSOs on food system-related activities to enable them to advance public awareness, and to work more effectively with local communities for food system transformation.



Unify efforts: Avoid duplication of efforts and work in tandem towards achieving food system transformation.



Acknowledge the Key Role of CSOs: The role CSOs play in supporting vulnerable people is often overlooked by the government. The government needs to adopt a more flexible and community-based approach to ensure everyone, especially the food insecure, is reached.



Roadmap for the future: a common agreed path can be developed for Jordan's food system transformation, benefiting at first from the bigger CSOs that have experience, reputation, staff, and geographical presence, while working systematically to bring other interested and capable CSOs on board where they fit into the big picture of transformation.

Conclusion

Jordan has a substantial number of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), dealing with a wide spectrum of issues and interests. Although more than half the almost 2500 CSOs are charities, there is a significant number of CSOs engaged in issues relating to food systems. However, a gap analysis is needed to map the experience, capabilities, resources, beneficiaries and geographical spread of CSOs to get a full picture of the current status of civil society organizations, their interests and capabilities to better know what each one can realistically achieve.

The role of CSOs in Jordan's food system is below their potential. Civil Society Organizations can and should play a big role in Jordan's food system transformation to strive for better food and nutrition security, economic and social well-being, and environmental sustainability. Regular collaboration and cooperation between the civil society organizations and the rest of the food system actors is needed to ensure steering towards the right path, and to amend the direction when needed.

A shared vision by the Food Security Council can pave the way for better understanding of the roles and activities required by civil society organizations and will constitute a call for action to mobilize the efforts and activities.

Finally, changing the mindset towards a culture of cooperation, collaboration and complementarity would be highly beneficial for civil society organizations to work together and with other food system actors.



Note about policy brief authors

This policy brief was written by Dr. Asem Nabulsi (FoSTr deputy country facilitator), Prof. Nezar Samarah and Prof. Anas Al Nabulsi (Jordan University of Science and Technology) under the [Foresight for Food Systems Transformation](#) (FoSTr) programme. FoSTr supports Jordan with a facility for food systems foresight and scenario analysis. This country-led, multi-actor process aims to foster dialogue, analysis, and shared understanding to co-create sustainable, healthy, equitable, and resilient food systems.



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