

## **The Middle East & North Africa (MENA) Program**

### **What is the Bank Information Center?**

The Bank Information Center (BIC) is an independent, non profit, non-governmental organization that advocates for the protection of rights, participation, transparency, and public accountability in the governance and operations of International Financial Institutions (IFIs) like the World Bank, regional development banks and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). BIC partners with civil society in developing and transition countries to influence the World Bank and other IFIs to promote social and economic justice and ecological sustainability.

Given the central role that IFIs play in influencing the discourse around development and catalyzing investment, BIC seeks to amplify the voices and activities of grassroots organizations and social movements in order to ensure that people have greater influence over the development decisions that affect them and their environments, and to promote more sustainable outcomes of and alternatives to IFI-financed operations.

### **Why might civil society organizations in MENA be interested in more actively addressing the role of IFIs?**

**IFI lending to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) has increased dramatically in the last few years:** The World Bank's financing to the region reached \$1.7 billion in 2006, up from \$5.6 million in 2002. MENA also became the fastest-growing of the International Finance Corporation's (IFC) regional portfolios in 2007. IFC investments in the region reached \$1.2 billion in 2007 - nearly double the amount invested in 2006. The European Investment Bank (EIB) committed €8.7 billion to the region for the years 2007-2013. Over the last five years, its lending to the region has represented over 40% of its lending outside Europe.

**IFI operations may have negative impacts:** The stated aims of IFI financing for investment projects and policy reforms in MENA are often to reduce poverty and encourage economic development. However, ill-conceived IFI loans in many regions of the world have caused widespread environmental, social and economic damage, displaced communities, and presented health risks. Many IFI operations in MENA promote free trade and private investment in services and large-scale export projects – policies which might have negative impacts on the poor and which, if not well monitored, could present opportunities for corruption.

**Civil society groups can play a role:** IFI activities in MENA are often carried out without the informed participation of affected people, civil society organizations (CSOs) and – in many cases – even the legislatures of the banks' borrowing countries. The participation of civil society - early and at different levels throughout the decision-making process - is vital to mitigate the negative impacts of any operation and to guide better choices about which development projects and policies to pursue. An informed civil society is better able to hold its own government and the IFIs accountable regarding their development decisions.

### **AMPLIFYING LOCAL VOICES TO DEMOCRATIZE DEVELOPMENT**

Most IFIs have organizational structures and procedural opportunities that can provide space, albeit limited, for civil society groups to participate in various stages of the policy making process. In some cases, CSOs have been able to take advantage of these opportunities to make IFIs modify their policies, change the design or implementation of projects, and adopt some standards to mitigate possible negative social and environmental impacts. While many civil society groups around the world are engaging with and challenging IFIs operating in their regions, civil society in the MENA region has been relatively absent to date.

## **How can BIC help civil society in MENA?**

BIC remains a principal source of information and strategic support to CSOs, affected communities, and grassroots movements working to address the negative side-effects of globalization. Our position in Washington, D.C., expertise with the IFIs, and networking capacity all enable us to serve as a sort of ‘ambassador’ for groups in the field so that they can more effectively represent their interests at the IFIs and achieve more equitable development outcomes. This ‘bridging’ function also allows BIC to leverage lessons learned by our partners on the ground into policy reforms at the IFIs.

BIC offers a variety of information and advocacy support services, and conducts joint activities with civil society partners, including:

- Outreach and trainings on IFI basics, analysis and advocacy
- Dissemination of hard-to-obtain IFI documents
- Updates on IFI activities and impacts in select countries, sectors and policy areas
- Monitoring of problem projects and policies
- Analysis of policies and trends at the IFIs
- Advocacy support to civil society organizations, influencing the IFIs to protect rights

## **For more information**

Please address questions and comments about BIC’s MENA Program to:

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