



UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE



مجموعة الأغر
Al-Aghar Group

المشاركة مع مركز أبحاث الخليج في كامبردج

Workshop No.: 2

**Al-Aghar Group Socio-political Engagement:
Multi-Folded Mobilization Initiatives**

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Abstract

Today, civil society organizations prove to be equal partners, side-by-side with the state and businesses, in promoting socio-political mobilization. Out of strong commitment toward developing the Saudi society, Al-Aghar group engaged in a variety of mobilization activities that involved multiple partners and addressed social, cultural and economic issues. This paper depicts the general framework guiding Al-Aghar activities, the mission and vision guiding the group's work, Al-Aghar umbrella strategy of the "knowledge-based society" as well as several major projects Al-Aghar took part in, with a highlight of the Knowledge Family Initiative. It will become clear throughout the paper that the group bases its work on a conception of a dynamic and viable society capable of undertaking responsibilities and producing independent, educated and competitive human beings that do not expect the state to do all the work.

In today's world, engaging in mobilization initiatives has turned into an integral part of civil society activities worldwide.¹ Unlike developmentalism, which divides the world into developed and developing and assumes the developing world need to follow the lead of the developed countries², socio-political mobilization does not entrap itself into the ethnocentric dilemma of the "First and third World" dichotomy. It is not a matter of economic development, democracy or modernity that creates the need to engage in socio-political mobilization. Countries which top the ranks of democracy, economic development and social modernity adopted/s wide-ranging mobilization initiatives with and without state involvement.³

1. Need for socio-political change in Saudi Arabia:

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is privileged with high levels of oil revenues as one of the world's biggest oil exporters.⁴ This reflects in the relative economic prosperity enjoyed by average Saudi citizens.⁵ Still, human society cannot solely progress out of being economically "doing well". For citizens to constitute members of a strong and viable society, much more is

¹ Civil society mobilization is for instance strongly visible in fighting diseases, like HIV in the developing world. See for that: Patterson, Amy S., *The Next Step: Civil Society Mobilization in Africa's AIDS Fight*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, May, 19th, 2015, at:

<http://csis.org/story/next-step-civil-society-mobilization-africa-s-aids-fight>

Technology is regarded as enhancing civil participation through offering wider access to information and civil society is becoming more visible through these technologies employed in circulating information. See Dennis, Kingsley, "Technologies of Civil Society: Participation, Communication and Participation", Vol. 20, Issue 1, *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research*, Taylor and Francis Online.

² For a good read on the basic assumptions of development theory and its critiques, see: Johnson, Kelly, "Developmentalism Then and Now: The Origins and Resurgence of a Grand Theory" in Howard J. Wiarda (ed.), (2010), *Grand Theories and Ideologies in the Social Sciences*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp.19-40.

³ See for instance: the National Endowment for Democracy in the USA, as a private, non-profit organization working in the field of promoting democracy worldwide and receiving annual funds from the US congress, at:

<http://www.ned.org/> and the National Democratic Institute at: <https://www.ndi.org/>

⁴ KSA has 18% of the world proven petroleum reserves and is the world's biggest petroleum exporter. See on this: "Saudi Arabia Facts and Figures", *The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries*, at:

http://www.opec.org/opec_web/en/about_us/169.htm

⁵ The GDP per capita in Saudi Arabia was 26 thousand dollars in 2013; according to World Bank measures. See for more figures of the Saudi economy: <http://data.worldbank.org/country/saudi-arabia?display=graph>

needed. This is where the role of socio-political mobilization comes in. This emphasis on strong society is not based on the duality of strong state/weak society and vice versa. Rather, it emanates from the belief that civil society should engage and contribute to the well-being of the citizenry; that the state is NOT an omnipotent which is responsible for delivering each and every service; that it is NOT the only sphere of socio-political mobilization initiatives.

2. Al-Aghar's involvement in Saudi mobilization initiatives:

Out of a strong commitment to the cause of promoting and enhancing the Saudi society, Al-Aghar group sponsored, planned, carried out and /or applied several mobilization initiatives that aim at empowering the Saudi population towards living in a "better" society. Nonetheless, one big question facing almost all civil society organizations around the globe is the financing.⁶ In an attempt to augment the autonomy of the group, we diversify our funding; we mainly rely on three main sources of financing: personal contributions (Al-Aghar steering committee);

commissioned projects and sponsors. Today, Al-Aghar aspires at securing long-term financing schemes, rather than the current year-by-year financing of its activities, in an attempt to enhance its autonomy even further.

This paper addresses the vision and mission guiding Al-Aghar group involvement in mobilization initiatives, the different projects it contributed to –with a relative focus on the Knowledge Family Initiative (KFI)- and the intended impact/outcome of the group efforts in this regard. It will become clear throughout the paper the diversity of the partners“ Al-Aghar works with towards realizing its vision; the diversity that captures the essence of civil society engagement and partnership.⁷

⁶ See for a brief of the challenge of financing civil society activities: "The Challenge of Resources of Civil Society: Changing Funding Prospects for Civil Society", *CIVICUS* at: <http://civicus.org/cdn/2011SOCSreport/Funding.pdf>

⁷ All the data and information on Al-Aghar activities included in this paper were adopted from the group documents.

3. Vision and Mission:

Like many civil society organizations, Al-Aghar group had clear vision of the corporate values it wanted to promote through its civil engagement. However, formulating this vision was not an easy task. Rather than blindly endorsing common mottos of civic action, Al-Aghar sought a genuine approach to civic engagements; one that encompasses both the wider goals of civil society and the specificities of the Saudi society. Promoting Awareness, Engagement and Autonomy was, thus, defined as the vision of Al-Aghar.

If it wasn't for this vision, multiplicity of partners of Al-Aghar and diversity of projects the think tank took part in, would never have been attained. From the very beginning, it served as guideline for Al-Aghar to select projects and initiatives and this role of Al-Aghar vision will become evident in the second section of this paper addressing the partners and projects. As highlighted earlier, economic well-being is not enough and the state cannot -and should not- be doing all the work. A dynamic and viable society was, therefore, the mission of Al-Aghar. Today, out of a strong belief in the role of knowledge in creating the dynamic and viable society we aim at, the think tank uses the term "knowledge-based society" in reference to its mission.

When Al-Aghar started as a non-profit think tank in 2001, the group had in mind addressing social, economic and political issues central to enhancing the viability of the Saudi society. However, it was only in the last five years that the scope and range of the think tank activities gained vast societal ground. It became imperative for Al-Aghar to keep up its success to develop into a national research institution, serving as a solid base for the studies, activities, partnerships and strategies the group engages in.

4. Approach and Strategy development:

As will be evident in other sections of this paper, Al-Aghar endorses a bottom-up approach towards societal change. Change starts out in the smallest unit of society, the individual. When an individual enjoys specific human traits and healthy surroundings, that enhances his/her physical, mental and emotional capabilities, the knowledge-based society is attained. This is why, Al-Aghar has its focus, among several other projects, on the Knowledge Family Initiative (KFI). The initiative will be thoroughly discussed in the next section of the paper.

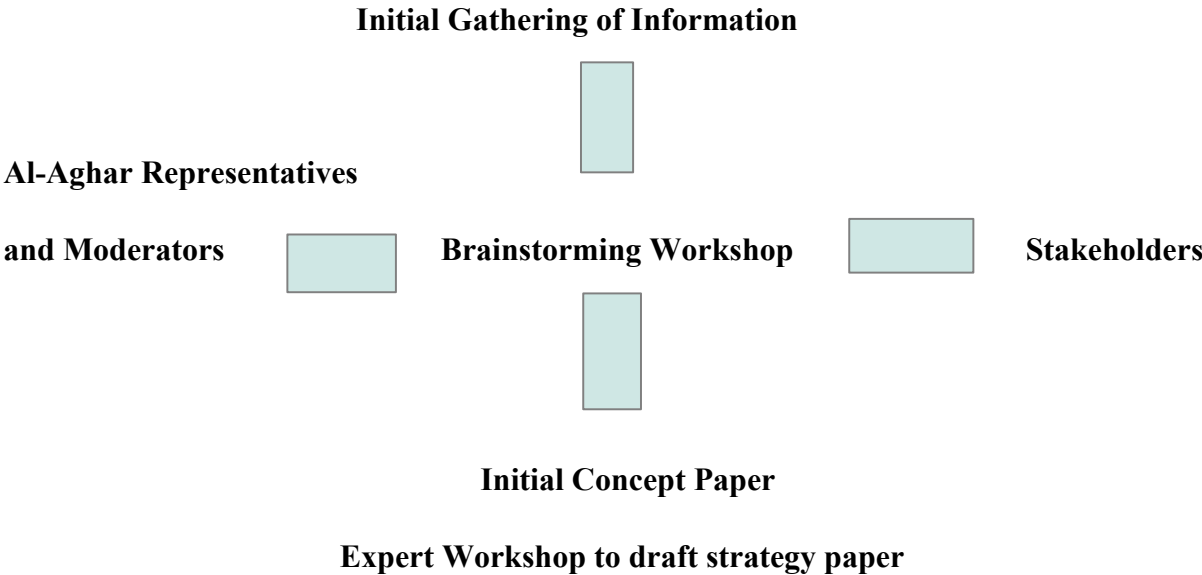
Generally, we seek approaching different issues through a unified approach comprising the following three main aspects:

First, we always intend to have the studies offered by the group as part of a larger strategy with our eyes focused on the practical implications of the studies to benefit the Saudi society.

Second, we seek engaging partners of diversified backgrounds, i.e.: businessmen, politicians, intellectuals, and certainly the state.

Third, after an initial gathering of information, we organize events, mainly brainstorming workshops, towards discussing and moderating discussion on the kind of studies we offer.

The centrality of these workshops is manifested in the following diagram, showing how the process flows:



As evident in the graph above, Al-Aghar played the role of the moderator among the various other actors involved. This moderating role is even more visible in the process of developing the strategies, that our projects fit in. This is how we develop strategies:

<i>Engage Stakeholders</i>	<i>Set Framework</i>	<i>Moderate Outcomes</i>
Policy Makers, Academics, Business Men/Women, Thinkers Politicians, NGOs, Youth.	Al-Aghar designs the discussion framework	All Workshops are moderated by Al-Aghar moderators to outline strategy components.

5. Umbrella Strategy: Knowledge-based Society:

From Al-Aghar perspective, the "knowledge-based society" is a globally-integrated society aiming at attaining sustainable development through investment in Saudi human capital and building a modern and technology-based infrastructure for the purpose of improving quality of life and prosperity of the Saudi citizen. This mission was translated by the group into concrete goals/targets:

- Enhance the kingdom"s strategic position internationally and enable it to pioneer the Islamic vision of development and act as a center for an international invention network.
- Produce a new generation of Saudi nationals influenced by a culture of knowledge and life-long learning.
- Diversify the kingdom"s economy.
- Improve the knowledge infrastructure, to achieve exponential growth in a knowledge society both economically and socially.

The strategy was initiated by Al-Aghar in 2008 and then presented to the Custodian of the two Holy Mosques (CTHM), who directed it to the Kingdom's Supreme Economic Council. From there, the ministry of planning collaborated with the Korean Development Institute (KDI) to update the strategy and include it in national planning.

6. Knowledge Family Initiative - Highlighted:

As pointed out earlier, the KFI is currently our central project towards realizing our mission: the "Knowledge-based Society". The underlying rationale of this project is to enhance the process of early socialization of the child through defining and addressing the challenges hindering the upbringing of the child. As implied in the KFI, the group puts more emphasis on the family upbringing of the child than other environments that might affect the child's behaviour. This does not mean the group overlooked the role of other factors. It will become clear below that school behaviour and other influences were taken into consideration in the analysis.

6.1 Research and findings for KFI:

In 2012, an initial investigation had been conducted to explore the triggers and barriers parents face when raising their children. This was a preliminary research that investigated the different factors that contribute to why parents behave the way they do when raising their children. This initial research was conducted in Jeddah via interviews with mothers, fathers, and maids. Observations in malls, schools and public locations were also employed.

During this early phase, the group reached very interesting findings on such challenges. For instance, it was found out that parental behaviour is defined both by intentions and actions. For example, parents might intend to raise their children "well" but they do not know how to optimally do that; allowing their children to constantly watch English TV so they would learn the language. To the best of their knowledge, they think this is the best way for their children to acquire a new language. They may also want to raise good children but they either do not do their best – as they might have other concerns that negatively affect the time spent with their children or they might be less keen to exert an effort in the upbringing of their children because of their exposure to other influences, like the internet and school. Hence, they cannot control what the children are doing and allow them to do whatever they want.

In fact, whether the parents will raise their children in a healthy and proper way depends on multiplicity of criteria, including: parents' priority on what they want their children to know; parents know-how on how to raise their children; relationship between husband and wife;

time spent with children; manner on disciplining children; manner on how parents communicate
and

interact with their children; manner on how children are awarded when doing a good job; exposure to television and liberty given by parents; experience of parents with their own parents; how they are affected by maintaining an image in society and how they let this pursuit of „good image“ influence how they raise their children; effect/role of teachers in their lives; exposure with maids and power parents give to them; maids“ teachings/values and relationship with the children; parents“ values, beliefs and behaviour & how they pass this to their children; parents“ plans for their children“s future and how they believe this will happen and their involvement in what their children do. Based on how parents react on these factors, they fall under three broad categories: those who are trying hard; those who do not make an effort and those who are careless/not genuine.

Still, in developing the group perspective, a more holistic approach was endorsed. The research started out from a larger perspective to the Saudi society, identifying the various phenomena affecting the Saudi citizens, like marriage rates, divorces rates, internet exposure, single parent rates, whether children stay with parents after divorce or not, etc. In the first stage of this study, the team met with various experts, who generally supported the findings of the preliminary research. That brought us to the second stage, where experts would put their recommendations on factors affecting parenting in general and in the Saudi society in particular.

After interviewing thirty experts including locals and internationals, focus was put on the following aspects:

- Understanding of similarities and differences between Saudi parenting style and other societies;
- Exploring other demographic, economic and societal factors that might have affected the way parents and children are at the present time;
- Determining size of the market and key segments (i.e. % with children aged 0-7, % Single homes, % Divorce & re-Married Parent, etc.);
- Categorizing personality types and behavioural traits that lead to a balanced child;
- Recommendation on other areas we should explore / strategies we should adopt;

-Designing grading filter (against a set of variables) classifying parents in a range of parenting behaviour.

6.2 Qualitative and Quantitative research:

In phase three, we took things to the "real world". An exploratory round of Qualitative Focus Group Discussions were conducted amongst parents to generate verbatim, feelings & content for the Segmentation study. This was followed by a Quantitative segmentation study; administered face to face; by professional interviewers. Respondents were recruited on a Quota basis across the zones of Jeddah, using the snowball technique. They were made comfortable that all personal information would be kept confidential so that they can answer freely and openly. Finally, a diary was piloted in certain homes to record day to day behaviors for use in future phases.

The group sought exploring additional factors that might be affecting parents in other regions and how these factors affect in the result of parenting. Through a close-up on families, the KFI sought, among other things, understanding reasons why parents strive to raise their children the way they do. Using Grading FILTER (from 2nd Phase), parents were recruited (selected based on inputs from observation, feedback from schools, inputs from other third parties, etc.) Moderators spent an entire day with these categories, observing their interaction with one another; conducting in-depth interviews with them and the children.

Moderators were trained psychologists who have an eye and know-how in noting and understanding people's behaviour – not just what they are saying but also examining their actions and would NOT inform the parents on the study subject, but rather spend time with them as a way to „observing lifestyles of Saudi homes“.

In addition, the mini focus groups with mothers and fathers (5 each separately), explored Upper (AB), Middle (C1/C2) & Lower (DE) social classes, or paired interviews with husband & wife. These were conducted in Jeddah & Riyadh. All these stages aimed at finalizing the battery of questions for parenting segments that is to be rolled out nationally.

The families were identified from schools, where we interviewed teachers and had them identifying children who could be the results of different styles of parenting. The team's

assistance in reaching these teachers was required. Towards that goal, the ministry of education help in recruiting parents (e.g. calling up a Parent/Teachers meeting for specific parents), would greatly assist the research process. Once the qualitative Scan is finished, and all segments/clusters identified and properly defined, Al-Aghar suggested organizing a workshop with the team where the findings are reviewed and potential branding themes are brainstormed.

After identifying the different variables that affect parents and how they parent, from which we classified them into different categories, there was a need to explore their representation of the KSA population. Quantitative research was therefore necessary to: identify demographic & psychographics of the different categories of parents; quantify the categories of parents and establish the themes(s) identified by the team.

Face-to-face interviews with parents were conducted in Jeddah and Riyadh to attain nationwide representation of our findings; prioritizing parenting drivers by segment. In figures, a total of 604 interviews were conducted, at 95% confidence level, with an average standard deviation of 20, and error margin of 3.2% is achieved. The Likert five-point scale was primarily used to gain the ratings, intents & attitudes from respondents. A total of 177 diaries were placed (50/50 males/females) in Jeddah amongst the relatively upper class homes.

6.3 Identification of attitudinal segments among Saudi families:

Four attitudinal segments of parenting skills were identified:

-Segment A (Aware & Concerned-20%): eager for knowledge on how to become better parents, they are highly concerned about the child's future. They are critical on their own ability to raise children in the best manner. Key Trigger is that their children should be better than them. They are most open to external sources for acquiring parenting knowledge. They generally view new "westernized" lifestyle and degrading education system negatively though.

-Segment B (Aware but Not Concerned-5%): appreciate the fact that parenting knowledge is important, but do not make the effort to acquire it. It seems they are disheartened, having made

(unguided) efforts to be better parents but with lack of results. They blame everyone (themselves, the spouse, or the environment) as they see the child as an *amana* (trust) from God. To them, the digital world replacing the natural outdoors is the real problem.

-Segment C (Know It All-57%): feel that they are already doing a great job and are not open to advice from anyone but themselves. They see their children advanced (modern) lifestyle (compared to their own) as a signal for success. They make the least effort towards acquiring knowledge on parenting.

-Segment D (Don't Know, Don't Care-18%): Parents who don't believe knowledge is important in raising children; that is they assume parenting is "a God-given trait/talent". They are generally the most content, and believe parenting success should be measured through kids attaining better careers and social prestige. However, what stops them from formally acquiring knowledge is their belief that parenting is *fitra* (innate/instinct). Unlike Type C, they accept that knowledge on parenting exists with others.

6.4 Implementation of KFI:

Al-Aghar recommended the focus to be directed to converting the largest segment, which is type C (Know It All), into the desired type A (Aware And Concerned). The Type A segment is extremely critical of their own capabilities on parenting, realizing it is an area requiring the utmost attention and care. They formally believe that parenting nowadays is much more difficult and challenging when compared to older generations; thus, seek to enhance their parenting skills as one way to adapt to this challenge.

Based on that research and relevant workshops on the topic the knowledge family is, among other things, the family where the parents base their upbringing of their children on knowledge of the broad array of parenting methods and techniques; one that acknowledges the dynamic nature of today's world and defies the tendency to freeze and stagnate. Al-Aghar

envisages an incremental approach towards the implementation of the KFI. It starts out with a large-scale

national awareness campaign on adequate parenting to create a state of "desiring" enhanced parenting techniques, then a role model would be established through the Forum for Building the Saudi Individual; there would also be training and support groups to help guide parents and finally parents applying enhanced parenting would be rewarded.

The project was conducted in collaboration with the National Bank, King Abd al-Aziz and his Companions Organization for Giftedness and Creativity, King Abd al-Aziz University for Sciences and Technology and technical collaboration of the Saoud University and College of Business Administration. Today in 2015, Al-Aghar, together with its strategic partners, seeks adapting the study findings into an initiative concerned with the family and its qualifications. If adapted into a national initiative, KFI affects, in fact serves, several other national policies, like the national policy for sciences and technology; social responsibility programs and strategies. It also enhances the work of national agencies and other entities working in the field of exploring and/or promoting talents.

7. Al-Aghar's Many Projects-One Goal Strategy:

Since the "Knowledge-based Society" mission was formulated in 2008, Al-Aghar conducted several studies in the areas of social, economic, and cultural affairs. In this section, it will become clear, that the diversity of projects Al-Aghar took part in comprised an array of partners that include businessmen, intellectuals, policy-makers and the state. It is not a matter of luxury or propaganda that the group seeks diverse partners; it is one major attribute to the group's autonomy and character as a civil society organization promoting a dynamic and viable society. It will also become clear that Al-Aghar has continued interest in the projects and studies it conducted/implemented. This is particularly true when it comes to the aforementioned KFI, the biggest and probably most renowned of our projects to the Saudi society. The projects we discuss in this section are by no means the whole list of activities on Al-Aghar agenda. Still, these are the major projects that the group see as contributing directly and indirectly to the Saudi society.

7.1 Makkah Region Developmental Strategy:

Out of our appreciation to the distinctiveness of the Makkah region both to the Saudi economy and to the Muslim world, Al-Aghar sought promoting its human development on one hand and securing basic needs of the Makkah inhabitants on the other hand. The effort to develop the region is practically an investment in one of the strongest revenue-generating sectors of the Saudi economy. It is without a doubt that the think tank stands for promoting human development and fulfillment of basic needs in other Saudi regions. The effort exerted in the Makkah initiative was, thus, intended both as pilot project and contribution to the Saudi economy.

In fact, the Makkah initiative and similar projects enhance the diversification of the Saudi economy. Diversifying the economy can only add to the national economy, esp. that oil revenues are much dependent on world prices of oil.⁸ Furthermore, it became clear during the world financial crisis, that negatively affected both global stock markets and oil process worldwide, that the Saudi economy would benefit from diversifying its sources of revenue. This is why the group organized workshops with various public figures and intellectuals to present recommendations regarding how to mitigate the negative repercussions on the Saudi economy. More generally, Al-Aghar envisages the diversification in terms of increasing the Saudi focus on information technology and communication and this is partly why our motto has turned to be "knowledge-based society" and our biggest project became the KFI. In this regard, Al-Aghar presented several initiatives that were endorsed by the Saudi government. These include: a proposal to develop the Saudi economy; several initiatives to improve the Saudi economic performance and a national innovation ecosystem.

7.2 Innovation to the Market initiative:

This was a paper prepared for the purpose of providing information interested parties about the commercialization process of innovations in the Saudi Kingdom. It provided concrete recommendations to enable Al-Aghar understand the current situation in this field. This helps Al-

⁸ The oil prices decline in 2015 strongly damaged revenues. See for this, Schoen, John W., Oil's Fall is a Ticking Time Bomb for Some Countries", *NBC News*, 18 May, 2015, at:

<http://www.nbcnews.com/business/energy/oils-fall-ticking-time-bomb-some-countries-n269271>

Aghar in the future to provide well-informed consultation. The paper was based on the workshop held during Ibtikar (Innovation) Exhibition of 2010, titled "Future Entrepreneurs". Fifty inventors and twelve Saudi entrepreneurs of the Entrepreneurs Organization (EO) took part in the workshop.

7.3 Saudi Water and Power Forum:

In collaboration with al-Bushnak Academy, one of the leading Saudi centers on the water industry, Al-Aghar organized a workshop on King Abdullah economic city. Engaging sixty-five experts, policy-makers, businesses, the workshop aimed at producing a thorough study titled "A Strategic Study for Innovative Transformation of Water and Energy in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia". The paper was presented in the sixth Saudi water and Power Forum held in October 2010.

As a continuation of this effort, the ministry of planning planned and carried out "The South Korean Transition to a Knowledge Economy", held in June 2011. The Korean macro-economist Dr. Suh Joonghae presented the Korean model and Saudi government was highly interested in transferring and adapting the Korean model to the Saudi economy. This effort on the part of the Saudi government was mainly instigated by Al-Aghar "Knowledge-based Society" strategy which was presented by the group, as aforementioned, to the CTHM, whose Excellency gracefully put the strategy into effect.

8. Conclusion: Where Al-Aghar stands today:

After engaging in several mobilization initiatives and moderating multiple partners and projects, Al-Aghar succeeded in establishing a huge network of some five hundred leaders from various Saudi sectors, from a wide spectrum of policy makers, academics, businesses, politicians, NGOs and youth. The group also gained the reputation of "the strategic think tank" through building competence in research, national engagement, partnerships and communication.

As evident throughout the paper, the group targets a viable and dynamic society, where knowledge is integrated in the parenting, infrastructure, economy and national planning, so that the Saudi citizen would not only be a "well-educated" individual but also one that does not

represent a liability on his/her society. KFI is central to our mission and overall strategy in this regard and we went great strides towards putting this initiative into concrete on-the-ground reality. Still, the main challenge that faces the group today is bi-folded: develop and expand its activities beyond the role of the facilitator and increase its financial autonomy through longer-term financing. Once overcome, the group strongly believes these challenges will turn into opportunities to enhance Al-Aghar role as an NGO and, more generally, strengthen civil engagement in the Saudi society.



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