

HORIZON SCANNING IN ARMENIA, EGYPT AND GEORGIA

SPOTTING THE FUTURE

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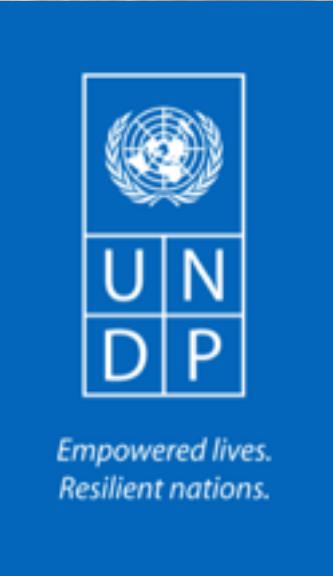


Photo: Medhin Paolos

PART ONE

DATA AND FINDINGS



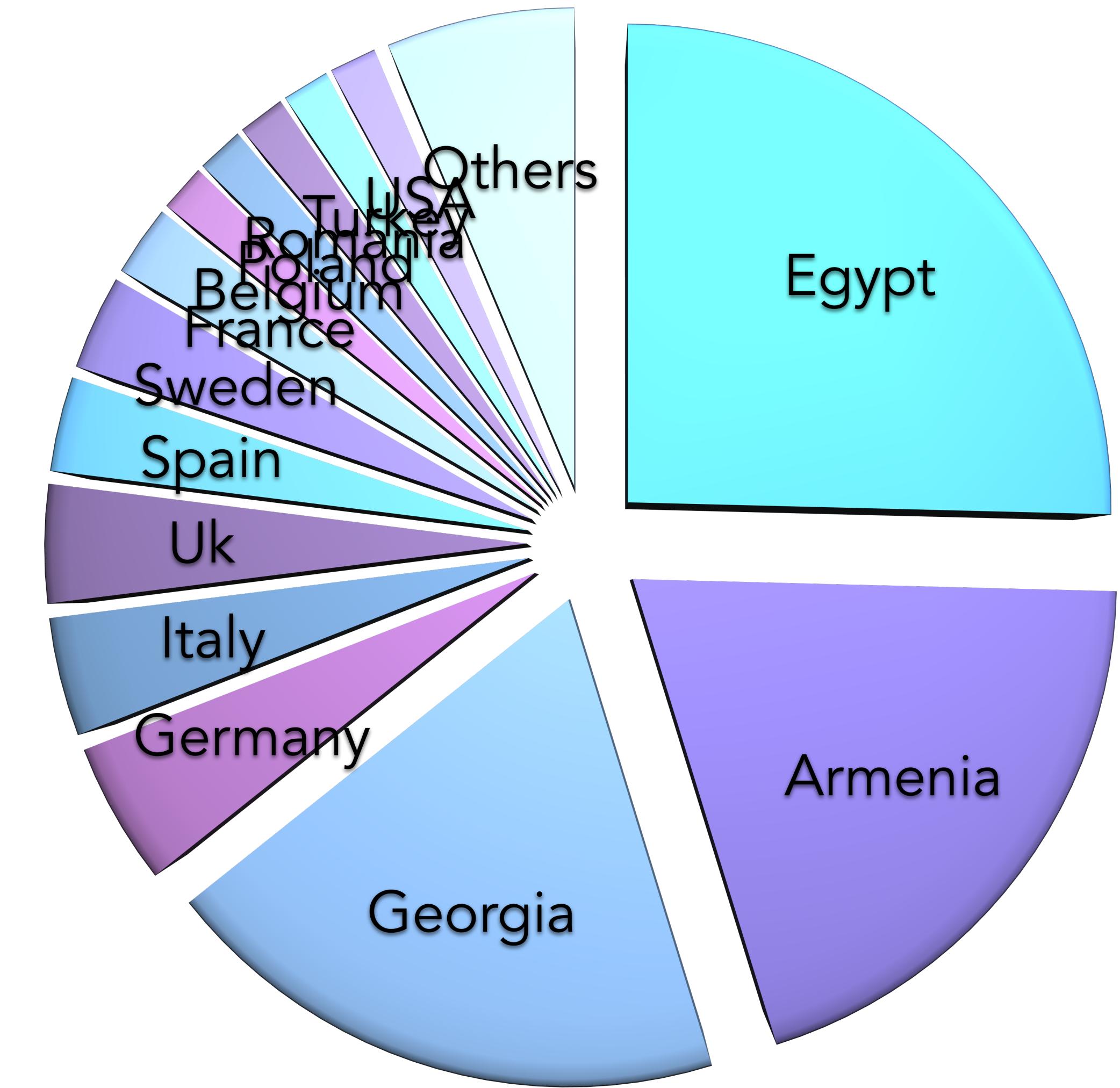
PURPOSE

- **Spot The Future (STF) is a foresight exercise on Armenia, Egypt and Georgia.**
It engages social innovators, hackers, activists and other would-be changemakers, mostly from the fringes of the economy and society, based on the premise that societal novelty starts at the edge.
- Its objective is to gain insight about near-future dynamics impacting post-2015 Development Goals, building on the engagement of over 3 million people in the UNDG World We Want consultations.



METHODS & DATA

- **Edgeryders and UNDP collected and analyzed ethnographic data by fostering an online conversation** in March-June 2014 It built upon the World We Want consultation processes.
 - The dataset consists of 161 posts and 782 comments from 128 individuals from 22 countries. **We targeted social innovators, activists, changemakers.**
 - Preliminary results were validated during a focus group discussion that took place in late June 2014, involving 8 participants.



MASSIVE ONLINE ETHNOGRAPHY

- **Ethnographic coding was applied to 161 posts and 782 comments on the Edgeryders platform.** Coding is a standard ethnographic technique. It consists of reading all contributions and assigning relevant keywords to snippets of texts.
- Keywords become then second-order data, and can be analysed in various ways.
- **243 tags in 6 categories were identified as recurring all along the STF conversation.**

The screenshot shows a web-based text editor interface with a toolbar at the top. The toolbar includes icons for bold (B), italic (I), strikethrough (S), and underline (U). Other icons include alignment (left, center, right), lists (bullet, numbered), and other document-related functions. A "Topic: C..." dropdown is visible. The main area contains a list of action codes on the left and a large block of text on the right. The text block discusses an international event in Tbilisi, mentioning Biogas, 7awalek, and Bussy project. Below the text is a section titled "The content" with a code snippet: "body p span".

►Action: arkeb eh◀
►Action: Armenian Progres...
►Action:Awesome Foundati...
►Action:barcamp◀
►Action: Bicycle Collective...
►Action: Biogas◀
►Action: bos 7awalek◀
►Action: Bussy project◀

epotters international event in ►Tbilisi◀
world can be Fast, Free, and Fun? What if Government,
Community Residents, and Volunteers we able to work
on Dreams? What if entrepreneurs were able to work
directly with people in less privileged communities, to understand their needs
and come up with solutions that make real difference?◀

The content

body p span

HOW IS IT DONE?

- **Seed** a conversation through high-quality content that is relevant to the theme. Start with people “at the edge” and traverse the social graph through social media.
- **Grow** your conversation by community management, respectful interaction and connecting people to each other.
- **Harvest** it by ethnographic software, built into the Edgeryders platform.
- **People select themselves to participate.** This ensures enthusiasm and eliminates researcher selection bias (the “usual suspects” effect).



NOT THE USUAL SUSPECTS

- Participants in STF were mostly 21-30 years old; socially active; and community-oriented.
- Diverse professional identities: architects, designers, researchers, documentary film makers, engineers, yoga instructors...
- Not afraid to step in and take initiatives.
- **Most were not “usual suspects” UNDP works with.**



THE PARTICIPANTS' PROJECTS AND THEIR KEYWORDS BY COUNTRY

COMMITTED TO ACTION

ENVIRONMENT,
ALTERNATIVE ECONOMY,
INCLUSION,
EMPOWERMENT,
INFORMAL EDUCATION

ENVIRONMENT, URBAN
PLANNING, GENDER
ISSUES, EDUCATION,
COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT,
SOLIDARITY, MEDIA

ENVIRONMENT, URBAN
PLANNING, GENDER
ISSUES, ICT, ROAD
SAFETY, SOLIDARITY,
MEDIA



EXAMPLE PROJECTS: COMMUNITY-BUILT RING ROAD RAMPS

- The citizens of the Al-Mu'tamidiya community in Cairo built four ramps to access the ring road from their neighborhood.
- Formally illegal, they were built to government specifications. Their cost is estimated at 25% of what the government would have spent to do the same work.
- Construction happened at the time of the revolution, when the security apparatus was busy in Tahrir Square. The post-revolution government decided to accept the ramps as a citizen-funded improvement and built a police station nearby.



"THE PEOPLE OF AL-MU'TAMIDIYA NEEDED TO BUILD THIS EXIT FROM A LONG TIME AGO AND WHEN THE CHANCE OPENED FOR CONSTRUCTING IT THEY TOOK THE CHANCE DURING THE TEMPORARY COLLAPSE OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES."

EXAMPLE PROJECTS: CARPOOLING IN ARMENIA

- A young woman created a Facebook group (Carpool Հայաստան) to coordinate on sharing rides. This happened in July 2013, in response to an increase of public transport prices in Yerevan.
- A massive response from society drove the city authorities to reverse the price increase – but the level of trust in strangers had increased for good.
- Carpooling Armenia is now internationalizing. In the course of STF a collaboration between it and an Egyptian entrepreneur was started.



"THE MOST AMAZING WAS THAT IN 2 DAYS MORE THAN 6000 PEOPLE WERE INVOLVED IN THE INITIATIVE. IT WAS LIKE A VIRUS. NEARLY NO ONE WANTED TO USE PUBLIC TRANSPORT, BECAUSE THERE WAS BETTER OPTION. ALL OUR SOCIETY WAS INVOLVED"

EXAMPLE PROJECTS: GIRLS WHO CODE IN TBILISI

- JumpStart Georgia noticed that participation to hackathons in Georgia is overwhelmingly male.
- It responded by providing office space and encouraging their staff to train young female professionals on writing code.
- IT specialists work directly with a group of around 15 women aged 22-35. The women are mostly journalists and activists. They learn to code in the programming language Ruby.

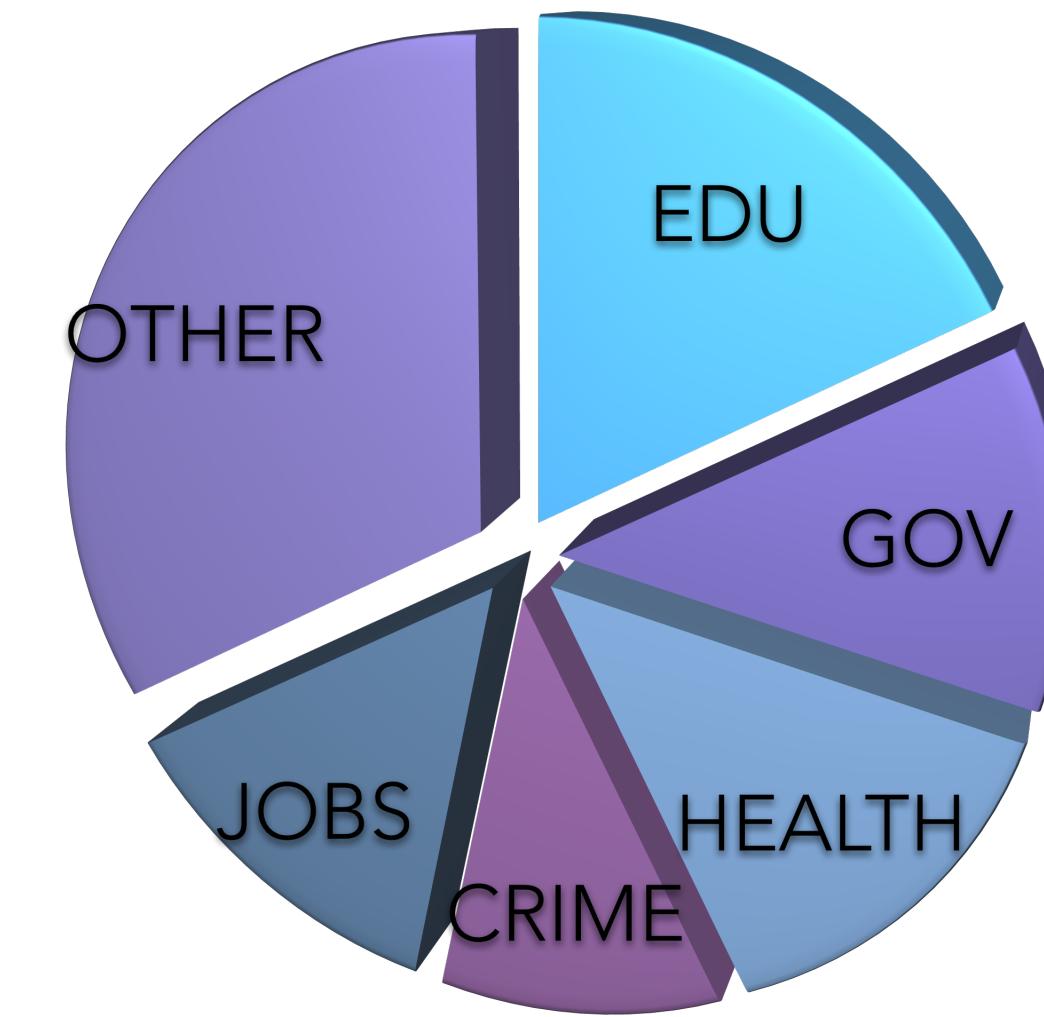


Photo: Jumpstart Georgia

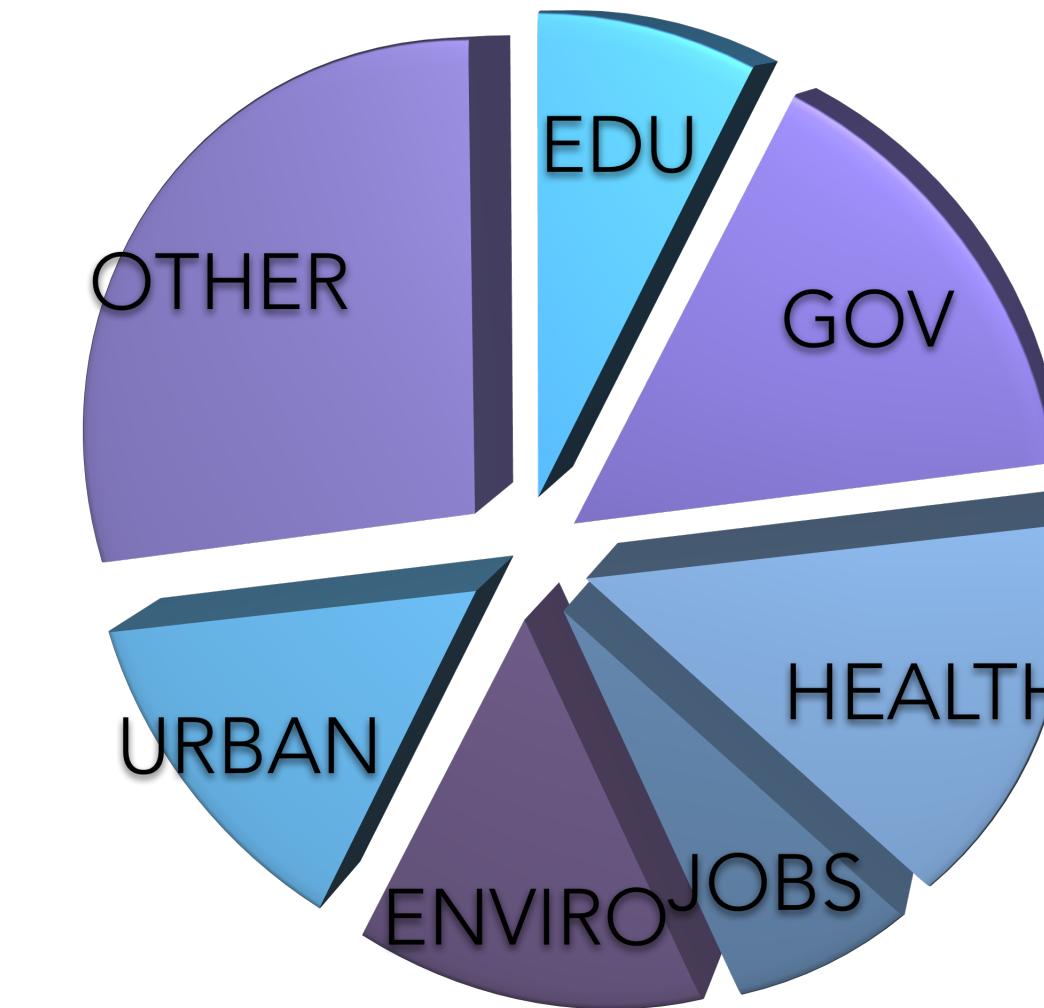
"COMPUTER PROGRAMMING [...] IS ALSO AN ESSENTIAL SKILL FOR IDEALISTS IN COUNTRIES WHERE OPEN DATA ARE STILL SCARCE, AND WHERE INFORMATION IS ESSENTIAL IF ONE IS TO UNDERSTAND SOCIETY AND WORK TO MAKE IT BETTER."

SYSTEMIC CHALLENGES

- **The challenges mentioned in the data are mostly consistent with MyWorld 2015 survey:** environment, education, poverty, migration, un- or underemployment, lack of transparency and corruption in institutions
- **Almost no mention of protection from crime and violence** in STF.
- **Greater emphasis on urban planning and environmental issues** than in MyWorld 2015.



MyWorld2015
top 5 choices in
the 3 countries



Spot The Future

TOP-DOWN APPROACHES

- In their everyday work, changemakers are challenged by bureaucracy, vertical hierarchical systems, top-down approaches.
- Problematic relationships with governmental institutions appear in all three countries.
- Authorities and donors mistrust grassroots, experimental initiatives.
- **The traditional grant proposal-grant-project-report is seen as leading to blind fund chasing and no outcome.**



"ALL OUR REQUESTS FOR MEETINGS AND FURTHER ACTION WERE IGNORED. IT'S TRUE, WE NEVER INITIATED A PUBLIC PROTEST OR A PETITION REGARDING THE ISSUE, BUT THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT'S MOST FRUSTRATING ABOUT COMMUNICATION, AS AN ORGANIZATION OUR EFFORTS ALONE ARE NEVER ENOUGH."

DEALING WITH TOP-DOWN APPROACHES

- Support each other, sharing human and other resources.
- Lobby for more flexible and alternative sources of funding – or try crowdfunding (in Egypt it plugs into religious institutions like zakaa and sadaka).
- Break down projects in small chunks and target small, independent donors.
- Get training in project management – also informally, by simply sharing experiences.



COLLABORATION IS HARD

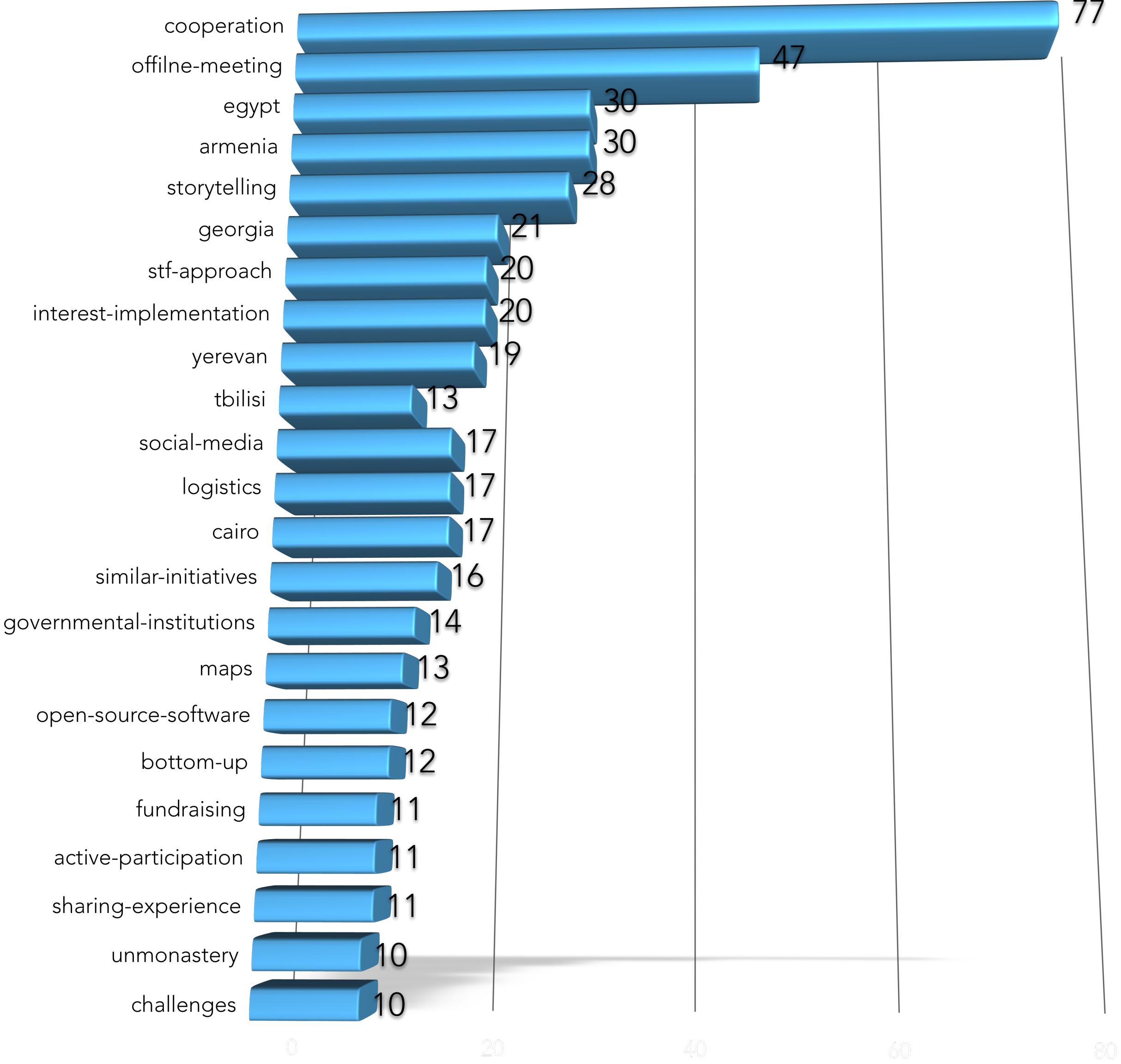
- **Individuals and organisations trying to affect change perceive each other as competitors.**
- Duplication of effort is a constant threat.



"WHAT I FIND LACKING IS PEOPLE TALKING WITH EACH OTHER, NOT JUST ABOUT EACH OTHER."

COLLABORATION IS THE WAY TO GO

- “Cooperation” is by far the tag recurring most often.
- Appreciation was repeatedly expressed for the “neutral ground” provided by STF workshops.
- Bi-weekly meetings started among a group of Georgian participants.
- **There is a hunger for peer-to-peer collaboration.**



FINDING MOTIVATION

- **Changemakers and activists perceive themselves and their peers as indifferent and skeptical.** They report struggling to motivate themselves and others.
- This is explained by perceived powerlessness ("I can't change anything") and social mistrust ("people are too selfish/conservative").
- However, **most participants are able to motivate themselves into action.** Their main motivations are altruism and necessity.



"LET'S BUILD A PLATFORM TO DOCUMENT THAT INPUT IN A PUBLIC SPACE AND MONITOR THE GREEN SPACE THAT EXISTS! IT IS OUR CITY. LET'S TAKE BACK OWNERSHIP OF IT!"

PART TWO

VECTORS OF CHANGE



NEW PLAYERS IN THE GAME

- **Young changemakers are on the move to achieve positive change.** Most of them are newcomers and many fly below the radar of institutions. They are a new agent for change and can be expected to have an impact.
- While broadly consistent with post-2015 development goals, **their agenda has its own priorities**, such as the management of public spaces. We expect to see them rise in the political agenda.
- **Policy implications:** give these newcomers space to take ownership of the issues they care about; refocus tried-and-true approaches towards issues that they don't.



COOPERATION AND SWARMING

- **Peer-to-peer cooperation is perceived as the main for their initiatives to grow.** They don't try to scale by recruitment; rather they share resources, mobilising each other on the issues they care about.
- **We expect to see "swarming" behaviour:** almost instant redeployment of manpower and other resources (such as social media traction) from issue to issue, from campaign to campaign. This can be very effective.
- **Policy implications:** provide safe spaces for changemakers to learn to cooperate, also internationally. Avoid zero-sum game setups.



INTERFACING WITH INSTITUTIONS

- **The traditional grant cycle model is perceived as distortive and obsolete.** Changemakers struggle to fit innovative activities within the frame of hierarchical relationships and administration-oriented approaches.
- **Policy implications (mitigation): provide training on grant application writing, project management and evaluation.** This should allow some initiatives to “fit in” without losing coherence.
- **Policy implications (radical): test and deploy new forms to support grassroot, innovative initiatives.** Ask for help in designing them. We know it’s hard!



DEMOCRATIC TECHNOLOGIES

- In their struggle for effective action, **young changemakers use a mix of DIY approaches, open source software and open data.** Geodata in particular are seen as a tool to convey information and support advocacy on issues from carpooling to harassment.
- **We expect to see a fast spread of democratic technologies** such as open source software, open hardware, DIY, cheap drones.
- **Policy implications:** support and promote open data policies; support and promote all democratic technologies. Try to refrain from hyper-regulating them, or the business models that they enable (eg. Uber-like businesses).



CONTACT

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