

**Funder Learning Visit to the Arab Region
Tunis
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Strategic Funding in Transitional Situations in MENA: Working Sessions & Final Wrap-Up

Facilitators:

- **Regan Ralph**, Executive Director, Fund for Global Human Rights
- **Jo Andrews**, Director, Ariadne-European Human Rights Funders Network

Report back from small group discussions:

- Marginalized subjects within 3-day discussions: Psycho-social disabilities; ethnic minorities.
 - Conclusion: Work together to develop more knowledge on these subjects.
- Education, universities, and knowledge-building:
 - Before the uprisings, the government didn't allow much research (on literature, folklore, etc.). Now, people are able to talk about political science. There are lots of political scientists visiting the region. Possible collaboration with American association of political science would lead to a potential pool of research grant applicants.
- Advantages of collaborative funding
 - Reducing administrative costs, potential for collaborations in this region. A word of caution: with new funds coming into the area, waiting can be just as beneficial as spending. These ideas may well be explored further via Ariadne portal.
- Getting funding into Egypt: There is a correlation between creativity and risk to recipients. Keep sharing strategies via Ariadne portal. One strategy to focus on could be strategic litigation.
- If any foundations want to work on women's issues, which are a sensitive subject in this area, they would need to develop a good understanding of region. They should not be deceived by stereotypes, and should work with local actors. People in this region perceive work on women's rights as a western export, and so some hostility and resistance and linked to former regimes (i.e. link with Mubarak and personal status law). In many countries, groups may not use a human rights framework, or women's rights language. Look first at their long-term vision for change. If that vision seeks to address oppressive practices and to advocate for systematic change, use whatever entry point is available.
- Suggestion – Having a space where one could share tried and true processes around how to get money into challenging contexts could be very helpful. (portal)

Reflections on the visit

- Good idea to bring in Islamist politician, as westerners often accused of speaking with only one side of the debate.

- Expectations were different; thought there would be much clearer discourse (language a barrier?)
- Dialogue with someone on other side

Lessons Learned:

- Listen. Take your time. Stick with the problems and not necessarily with the organization. (Organizations obtain energy and lose energy. The same group may not always be the best group to work with, depending on the situation.)
- Be sensitive to rapidly changing contexts (any money put in will have an impact, good or bad)
- Be clear about grantmaking frame, e.g. regional, national, local
- Fund processes, not activities
- Money is an incomplete answer - capacity building, experience from other regions, peer to peer learning and support
- Your grantees may invent new, better ways to do human rights work. Learn from them.
- Particular role for private philanthropy: Fill gaps others can't take the risk to fill. Work with organizations that are politically or socially risky. Collaborate more. Funders can move more quickly than more bureaucratic institutions. Funders have a unique niche for catalytic work.
- Came to know how little we know about what happened during the revolution and we know even less about what will happen next. We need more knowledge, don't rush into funding
- Be very careful about intervening in something that is going to have its own trajectory, its own momentum ("our revolution"), while also recognizing that we are also part of it. What can we do? It's about taking a position, funding, etc – its also happening within our own contexts.
- As funders, can we make the connection between movements? Create opportunities for joint sharing or learning, not as Westerners coming with our own agenda but sharing experiences.
- Donors need to be clear about a theory of change and test that with input of grantees. Then we have a sense of what success looks like.
- One of key reasons I was interested in coming was to learn from other funders about barriers to funding. Globally, governments are using similar strategies to crack down on activists. Governments and activists are sharing experiences about transition, crackdowns, etc – how can we do this as funders?

- There can be the illusion that this moment will exist in the region a year from now, but it won't. Constitutions will be adopted, things will change. This is a window and it can close very quickly. Once it does, you will have a more limited capacity to achieve policy influence.
- Within moments of transition, need to be in both crisis mode and long term planning mode
- Would be interesting to discuss about whether philanthropy can be political (it is by its nature, think about the power we have)
- Suggestion to add a day and visit groups based out of the capital