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**Flourish or Wilt: Taking Stock of Women's Human Rights in an Era of  
Revolutionary Political Change**

Tuesday, January 24, 2012  
9:30 am – 12:00 pm

***Session Organizers:***

- Annie Hillar, Director of Programmes, Mama Cash
- Zeina Zaatari, Regional Director, Middle East and North Africa, Global Fund for Women

***Facilitators:***

- Zeina Zaatari, Regional Director, Middle East and North Africa, Global Fund for Women
- Nicky McIntyre, Executive Director, Mama Cash

***Panelists:***

- Nawla Darwiche, Co-Founder and Board Member, New Woman Foundation (Egypt)
- Nurgul Dzhanayeva, President, Forum for Women's NGOs of Kyrgyzstan
- Sabrina Mahtani, Executive Director, Advocaid (Sierra Leone)
- Nadia Sraieb-Koepp, Co-Founder, Engagement Citoyen (Tunisia); Press Officer, United Nations

***Sponsors:***

- Mama Cash
  - The Global Fund for Women
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The session opened with a brief overview of recent revolutions in the MENA region. Women were key actors in the revolutions, and faced the burden of policing mechanisms, patriarchy and sexual harassment. In many ways this is not new; moments of national upheaval generally allow for transgressions with regard to gender roles. Revolutions that involve women don't always result in positive women-inclusive outcomes and women are often excluded from decision-making tables (perhaps with the exception of Tunisia).

Challenges for funders: Continually shifting landscape, lack of coordination between funders and civil society, lack of best practices and historical work

Nawla, who works closely with women workers in the industrial sector in Egypt, opened by sharing examples of women's involvement in shaping the Egyptian revolution:

- Strike in a textile factory of 26,000 workers where 3,000 women first stopped their machines and asked the men to begin to strike.
- Woman also initiated 6<sup>th</sup> of April movement.

- One of the initial demonstrations in Tahrir Square was female.
- During the 18 revolutionary days women were everywhere. At least 23 women were killed as part of revolution. More are suspected to have been killed, but many families do not report their deaths due to social stigma.
- During the 8<sup>th</sup> of March demonstration in Tahrir Square, women were attacked by both fundamentalists and those in old regime.

After Mubarak stepped down women were totally marginalized. Women are represented by less than 1.5% in parliament. There has been growing violence against women, which is commonly seen after revolutions.

Nawla then shared that on February 16<sup>th</sup> women will form a coalition of 15 NGOs and hold events, publish statements and organize press conferences. On 8<sup>th</sup> March they will go into streets again saying “the street is ours”.

What do they need from the international community?

- Concept of democracy reformulated. It is not inclusive for women, it is elitist as it is understood now
- Solidarity of international community with women’s rights. On the 8<sup>th</sup> of March people will go in front of Egyptian embassies abroad. Need solidarity with Egyptian civil society (which currently under siege)
- Currently overwhelmed by international donors, come in and spend money everywhere, scared about the youth, all this wealth coming without any criteria. Consult with local orgs before funding
- Put pressure on own governments to stop exporting weapons that are used against revolution. Out of all of people wounded, 1,800 lost at least 1 eye
- Help human rights defenders, they are under siege. Difficult to get entry visas for western countries. Sometimes people have to leave country very quickly

Nurgul leads the Forum of Women’s NGOs in Kyrgyzstan, which supports women’s participation in political processes and brings women to position within decision-making bodies.

- Kyrgyzstan was formerly part of the Soviet Union, 20 years of transition to market economy
- Growing impact of fundamentalism, more religious buildings than schools.
- Percentage of women in Parliament reduced to 0% a few years ago, now at 5%?
- Five changes in constitution, two revolutions
- Zero percentage government finance for women’s rights and issues in country
- Privatization of schools, hospitals, growing maternal death rate
- Many girls now don’t go to school. Before (when she was younger), all women had education
- Quotas address quantity issue, not quality
- In 2007 instead of 19% of women in local elective, dropped to 15%

One challenge her organization faces: how do you measure the success of their program? The confidence of women to run for local elections cannot be measured.

- Major part of the program: capacity building and partnership development (alliance building with political parties and business)
- Program makes women visible
- Creating think tanks

- 50 days campaign

Recommendations to donors:

- Trust women's groups. They need to grow with your investment. Rural women's groups have large networks
- Local ownership! Don't have local funding opportunities, but they are working on that, in country support. Why? Brings long term sustainability to your investment. Requires new measures of success. How do you measure confidence?
- Create dialogue spaces – challenge for both NGOs and funders

Nadia, who works with awareness raising about women's rights in Tunisia, opened by describing the origin of her organization. It formed after the Tunisian revolution to ensure that all of the rights women enjoyed before the revolution weren't stripped away.

- In 1956 women were given a lot of rights
- October 25<sup>th</sup> assemble elections. The assembly's main task is to write the constitution. It is important for that rights that women had before be written into this new constitution
- Her concern is that women be involved with all of this, have a high voter turnout
- You do not solve unemployment by having women stay at home while men take their places
- Revolution in January. 1<sup>st</sup> election constituent assembly in October, had to act very quickly.

Their approach:

1. Grassroots level work to help women understand what rights they have (divorce, alimony, reproductive) and what constituent assembly is – education and awareness raising
2. Media campaign

Constituent assembly elections:

- 104 parties, people were confused, who should I vote for? Should I even vote? Created film – pulled down photo of Ben Ali and underneath it said "Beware, dictatorship can return. Go vote on Oct 23" and circulated the film through social media
- 86% voter turnout. Had transparent free elections after 40 years of dictatorship and prior colonial power

Post elections. What do we do now?

- Constituent assembly is drafting constitution. Civil society is not involved in drafting. Have to establish space for civil society to express views. Want civil society representatives in every public meeting and explain any articles have issues with via radio and other media (two way dialogue)

What donors can do:

- Work directly with local initiatives
- Doesn't always have to be large initiative, can be small
- Need to work in partnership with local teams
- National capacity building and ownership

Sabrina, a lawyer in England, originally from Zambia and has been working for 7 years on access to justice in Sierra Leone, shared about her work:

- Ten years since the end of the war; 50% of women are victims of sexual violence

- Special Court for Sierra Leone and Truth and Reconciliation Commission
- Forced marriage and sexual slavery – now crimes v. humanity
- More than \$150million to try 9 individuals (could money have been used more effectively to support women's rights or victims?)
- Now reconstruction. 2012 3<sup>rd</sup> election since end of war. Election violence. GBV increased
- Many recommended policies have not been implemented 13% of women in parliament

Women in conflict with the law: challenges in addressing justice

- Poverty – underlying cause, many charged with theft, unable to pay fines
- Difficulties accessing legal representation (500 lawyers in Sierra Leone and 7 in provinces)
- Weak state institutions and corruption (poor investigations, easy to bribe, police harass sex workers money or sex or end up in prison)
- Mental health. Lack of medical (only 1 trained psychiatrist and he is now retired)
- AdvocAid. Economic empowerment, family reunification, legal aid, law reform, capacity building (training law students), legal education initiatives via popular media

Sabrina's insights:

- Transition is long process and needs sustained commitment
- Combined focus on development of state institutions and strengthening of civil society (i.e. 9 worst perpetrators access to legal services via UN trials, across the street women who stole a phone no access to legal aid)
- Include women on the margins
- Avoid duplicate funding and overemphasis on one issue
- Support holistic initiatives
- Focus on individuals (danger of numbers based approach. Training for 200 women vs. work with small groups over long period of time)
- Capacity building, long term funding, flexible core support)
- Open dialogue
- Video: worlds behind walls

### Question & Answer:

*Q: How in your work have you created communities of support for women going into political leadership?*

A: We don't assume that women in parliament will necessarily advocate on behalf of rural poor women. Have criteria for selection for future candidates (two networks that support each other) create transformative agenda together then create reputation and visibility and run her campaign and create partners.

*Q: All mentioned capacity building, what is the influence of what's happening in other countries and best practices for sharing capacities across countries?*

A: Sabrina: West Africa behind in social media so technical capacity building helpful and dialogue within region, but that can be challenging as almost all countries have been in conflict. More useful capacity building lessons in East and South Africa

*Q: How do we deal with international industrial transition complex? What can we do collectively beyond bringing in money, not to have another Balkanization of the Middle East?*

A: Sad reality of Middle East, what are the strategies to respond to Islamization?

A: Nadia is a bit more optimistic. What else were we expecting? Only opposition that had existed prior was Islamic. Too early to draw conclusions. Process. Don't go from dictatorships to thriving democracies over night. How can we make democracy work in Islamic environment? Ex: brainstorming with female theology students, very surprised, they said they wouldn't vote for anyone who challenged their rights.

Libya is more difficult, fewer institutions exist than in Tunisia or Egypt. This is the 1<sup>st</sup> time that civil society played a role and will be hard to take it away from them. People now realize that taking to the streets can be successful and new rulers will know that. Enable partnerships at country level and with the world.

Nawla: threat is not only Islamic, it is also a patriarchal society. Cultural change should happen more broadly. Coptic church is not very different. Trying to interact with many initiatives now – constitution writing, lobbying with parliament, address political parties and pressure to put women's issues on the agenda

#### **Table discussions**

- Not an expert, don't need to rush into context
- Identify unlikely allies (i.e. male feminists)
- Share experiences and learn lessons from elsewhere
- Engage with local allies, keep dialogue at local level
- Continually rethink strategy as a funder
- Have holistic approach, ensure presence of women
- Challenge: religion. Storytelling at local level, space for dialogue at community level
- Consider risk in portfolio and see what staff and board is comfortable with. Take risks!
- Look outside capital cities to rural areas. Once find groups, provide non financial resources as well. Keep grantees safe first and foremost (sometimes funding can draw damaging attention)
- Don't jump into thing you don't know, sweet spot of doing homework and not stuck in analysis paralysis. Split portfolio – rapid assistance and longer term strategy and perhaps risk portfolio
- Balance between long term engagement and responsiveness
- Do not do: pull activists out of what doing to speak at conferences "objectify activists" remove from community. Or continually go to same trusted partners and turn into funders (change how they are perceived)
- Funders need to be as flexible as groups they fund
- What is added value we can bring? Cross movement building
- Lens of access and needs specific to women and pay attention to margins
- Exploring sustainability – institutional, that of defenders
- Knowing role and knowing strengths
- Role to play at home
- Adaptive capacity of grantees and long term resilience
- Support before and after transition and/or crisis. Be proactive about those discussions about safety

- Recognize our work is political and role of corporate money in philanthropy and where we can advocate
- More holistic interventions with funder collaborations
- Remember that countries where many women in parliament doesn't mean that is pervasive throughout country
- Disability! Often that disability programs operated from charity perspective, not rights perspective and do more harm
- What type of funding in need of resources and attention?
  - General support
  - Work with political parties, strengthen state institutions that are corrupt
  - Regional networking
  - Defenders at risk

How do we know what we are each doing and share that information? – mapping!

### **Closing Remarks**

Nawla: Pay attention to political parties, who is running for power.

Conrad: Do need to look at contracting in transition areas, monitor foreign assistance “Publish what you Fund”, ways in which transition efforts include women.

Nadia: Regarding funder portfolios, pay attention to the changing situation on the ground. Invest in long term projects but also be flexible to respond to immediate needs and timely opportunities. Need to be able to count on funders who will respond rapidly.

Would be interesting to get funder feedback – you fund in other countries – idea exchange, want to know what is being done in other region and learn from those experiences and approaches.

Sabrina: Same monitoring and evaluation standards in countries in transition may not work. In Sierra Leone a big problem is that a lot of contractors coming in and international staff are paid a lot and there is not enough use of local consultants. Funders could put more pressure on these issues.

Zeina: Where do we go from here?

- Importance of capacity building – for what and in what context? Often it has been bringing “professionals” from north and west to the south and east. Need for south/south exchanges, east/east
- Don't rush, think and learn but groups got really overwhelmed with donors asking how do we support you and doing lots of visits. Their time spent on providing information, etc. what are other ways of doing this learning without putting too much burden on activists (How can a group put together a proposal while demonstrating in Tahrir Square every day?)
- Re-think concept of democracy: taking it back from co-optation by governments. Democracy meaning elections, without rebuilding of institutions and practices. Democracy must include women's rights, minority rights

## **FLIPCHART NOTES**

What needs funding/support

- General support
- Pay attention to political parties
- Regional networking
- Defenders at risk

Don't rush into context—find local experts and at local level, dialogue

Identify unlikely allies

Share experiences (e.g. look at both short and long term gains and how made)

Always rethink strategy by working with local actors

Holistic approach—in any human rights grantmaking, make sure women involved as well as women taking on HR

Religion → storytelling to dialogue and break down top down model

Support grantees BEFORE a crisis and after

Dialogue with grantee about needs-risks- sustainability beyond \$

Be aware our role is political

Move toward holistic donor collaborations

Good grantmaking in conflict situation similar to non-conflict → good practice is good practice; funders need to be as flexible as groups need them to be

Movement building: cross-movements and cross regions as a key donor role

Charity does not equal rights based approach

Take risks

- Look outside capital cities
- Accompaniment and support beyond \$
- Don't endanger local partners → keep grantees safe
- Mental and other health issues

Transitional industrial complex issue

Have split portfolios

- Short term
- Long term

Less of access; pay attention to the margins (especially women)

"Sustainability" = vision, leadership, activists beyond financial

Know your role with grantees and at home as donors