

FUNDER LEARNING VISIT TO THE ARAB REGION
TUNIS
8-10 MAY 2012



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Funder Learning Visit to the Arab Region
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LEARNING VISIT SUMMARY

IHRFG and Ariadne collaborated to organize the *Funder Learning Visit to the Arab Region* from 8 to 10 May 2012 in Tunis. The learning visit examined how grantmakers can be most strategic and effective in supporting popular movements and transitional justice in the Middle East and North Africa region and beyond in the wake of the “Arab Spring.”

Initial plans were to hold the visit in Cairo. But due to the volatile security situation in Egypt, IHRFG and Ariadne decided to relocate the visit to Tunis. This enabled us to engage in open debate in a country that has not benefited from donor attention to the same extent as other states in the region. According to one participant, “It was great to do this meeting in Tunis instead of Cairo. Everyone has been to Cairo. We were introduced to new people and very interesting opportunities in Tunisia.”

Objectives of the *Funder Learning Visit* were to

- Examine effective entry points and lessons for grantmakers in supporting social justice movements and human rights work in the Middle East, North Africa, and other regions;
- Deepen funders’ understanding of the human rights issues related to political transitions and social unrest;
- Gain insights from local human rights advocates and activists, and work to integrate these insights into participants’ grantmaking and philanthropy;
- Understand the status and role of indigenous philanthropy in the Middle East, identify opportunities for collaboration, and promote the human rights field; and
- Meet, exchange ideas and experiences, and identify collaborative opportunities with peer grantmakers from around the world.

Highlights

During the three-day study trip, 31 grantmakers representing institutions from the United States, Europe, and the Arab region, met with activists, experts, and government officials in a series of panel discussions and networking events. Opening sessions explored the dynamics at play in the Arab uprisings across the region and focused more closely on the situation in Egypt and Libya. Additional panel topics included lessons learned from other transitional contexts, the changing role of civil society and the dynamics of external engagement in the region, indigenous philanthropy, and political Islam.

The diversity of topics and perspectives, from both speakers and participants, made for lively and engaging debates and learning exchanges. One participant stated that, “The entire set up was brilliant and very well designed. Specifically the two guest speakers on Libya and Egypt [Soha Abdelaty and Elham Saudi] were very meaningful as they were able to combine personal experiences with an analytical overview of the current challenges in both societies.”



On the second day of the visit, participants visited one of six local organizations working to promote human rights in Tunisia or in the broader Arab region. Organizations included the Arab Institute for Human Rights, the Center of Arab Women for Training and Research, the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women, and the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network. Participants had the



opportunity to learn more about the organizations' work and the challenges faced by civil society organizations before and after the revolution, and to discuss their adaptation strategies.

Participants also met with additional locally-based NGOs as well as United Nations and government representatives during an evening networking reception.

The final day of the visit included six “working sessions” on topics or grantmaking strategies proposed by participants. Topics included the practicalities of funding in Egypt in the aftermath of the revolution, lessons learned from those already funding in the region, and sustaining and strengthening a women’s rights agenda.

Inside and outside of formal sessions, participants shared experiences and exchanged lessons learned from their own grantmaking in the region and in other transitional contexts. In the words of one grantmaker participant, “[What I liked most about the learning visit was] having the time and space to really listen, exchange and learn from not only the speakers but also the participants. The whole communication was very positive and respectful - just a very nice group of highly knowledgeable people with great expert resources and seamless organisation to back it up.”



IHRFG and Ariadne staff facilitated sessions for review, reflection, and evaluation after each day of the visit, which emphasized how participants might apply their new knowledge and experience to their grantmaking activities. These sessions gave participants the opportunity to articulate and reflect on their understandings and share observations about the day's activities.

Some Reflections and Takeaways

“Don’t rush. Take your time.” This was perhaps the most important and practical advice that participants received from local activists and advocates. While there is a sense of urgency in all countries facing transition in the region, funders were counseled to take the time necessary to conduct due diligence, engage deeply with “people on the ground,” and understand fully the nuances of the political situation. It is also important to wait and see who among civil society actors (i.e. potential grantees) have been “co-opted” by figures in transitional politics and civil society that do not have the people’s human rights and best interests at heart.

“I was unaware of the support in my country for human rights. This makes me hopeful.” Just about all of the Tunisian individuals with whom we worked – our local coordinator, the translators, our venue hosts – who spoke English were impressed by the interest that foreigners had in the welfare of Tunisia and other countries in the region. Perhaps more surprising to learn from our Tunisian colleagues was *their* surprise at the level of *local* activism for human rights. Two translators who participated in the site visit admitted that their morale and hopefulness about their country’s fate was quite low until they learned – from our site visit – about the bustling activity in Tunisia’s post-revolution civil society.

“Since the revolution, poor people from the rural parts have flooded Tunis’ streets.” While walking through Tunis’ streets toward our conference venues, we observed unauthorized street vendors frantically packing up their displays to evade the approaching police. While the stress in their faces instilled a sense of sympathy, even injustice, in the human rights advocates (i.e. us),

our local colleagues offered a different perspective. They explained the “problems” that these street vendors – who are predominantly poor residents from the rural south – have created since the revolution: theft and other petty crimes are increasing (assuming causality); streets are more crowded and littered; store owners whose store fronts are blocked feel aggrieved; class tensions are more apparent; and resentment between the law-abiding and “those who take short-cuts” is tangible. This experience reminded us that linkages to economic and social rights need to be more central in our discussions.

The [areas outside the capital city] remain neglected and even (when they protest) maligned.”

The experience with the street vendors, and the Tunisia context in general, informed us that future learning visits should include time to travel outside city-centers to gain a more complete and informed understanding of local dynamics. Tunis has become “NGO-city,” as one of our participants noted, and the activists and organizations in the smaller cities – which spear-headed Tunisia’s revolution – are not getting due attention.

“He says many good things. But how he follows with actions is what we should watch.” The role and influence of religion – especially Islam – in the region’s politics may be an obsession in the West. But it is also a real concern for local residents. Our invitation to the leader of a Tunisian Islamist political party received criticism from most Arab intellectuals and human rights advocates. This Islamist leader was seen internally as the voice of “moderate political Islam,” while in external and intellectual circles, his actions were recorded as contradicting his words. They were concerned that he would be further legitimized by addressing this predominantly Western audience that – by virtue of their financial resources – held significant power. But our local colleagues, whose knowledge of and connection to human rights was still developing, were just as aware of the contradiction, and equally wary of the growing influence of Islam and its impact on their daily lives. How to navigate political Islam remains a key question for funders.



Lessons for Funders and Additional Areas to Explore

In addition to the experiences listed above, funders reflected at the close of the three-day learning visit other lessons to keep in mind and issues to learn if funding in the Arab region and/or in contexts in transition.

- Listen, take your time, wait. Stick with the problems and not necessarily the organization. Organizations can gain and lose energy. The same group may not always be the best group to work with at all times. New funds are descending upon the region: waiting can be more beneficial than joining the crowd. We know so little about what happened in the revolutions, and we might know much less about what is going to happen. We need more knowledge, so don’t rush into funding.
- At the same time, in one year, many things will change: constitutions will be adopted, government structure put in place. Then the opportunity and our capacity to influence policy is more limited.
- Be sensitive to rapidly changing contexts. Remember that any money put in to these situations will have an impact, be it good or bad.
- In moments of transition, we need to be in both crisis mode and long-term planning mode.
- Be clear about your grantmaking frame, e.g. regional, national, local.
- Fund processes, not activities.
- Money is an incomplete answer – supplement this with capacity-building, experience from other regions, peer-to-peer learning and support, etc.
- Your grantees may invent new, better ways to do human rights work. Learn from them.

- If funding women's issues in the region: do not be deceived by stereotypes; work with local actors. Look at their long-term vision for change and if that seeks to end oppressive practices and create systemic change, then use whatever entry pt is available.
- Political transitions are an opportunity to support the rights of marginalized groups (e.g. people with disabilities, ethnic minorities). We need to work together to develop knowledge and strategies on this subject.
- Private philanthropy has a particular role – to fill gaps that others can't take the risk to fill; to work with socially and politically risky organizations; and to move more quickly than bureaucratic institutions.
- Donors need to be clear about their own theory of change and test that with the input of grantees. Then we can know what success looks like.

Advisory Committee

The development of the learning visit was guided by

- James Logan, Oak Foundation
- Regan Ralph, Fund for Global Human Rights
- Steve Riskin, United States Institute of Peace
- IHRFG and Ariadne staff
- locally-based experts and practitioners

Sponsors

- Arab Human Rights Fund
- Fund for Global Human Rights
- Global Fund for Women
- Oak Foundation

OBJECTIVES

- To examine effective entry points and lessons for grantmakers in supporting social justice movements and human rights work in the Middle East, North Africa, and other regions.
- To deepen funders' understanding of the human rights issues related to political transitions and social unrest.
- To gain insights from local human rights advocates and activists, and work to integrate these insights into participants' grantmaking and philanthropy.
- To understand the status and role of indigenous philanthropy in the Middle East, identify opportunities for collaboration, and promote the human rights field.
- To meet, exchange ideas and experiences, and identify collaborative opportunities with peer grantmakers from around the world.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. What are the characteristics and factors that have led to the current political transitions and social movements in many countries of the Middle East and North Africa?
2. What role did local and foreign funding and philanthropy have in those causal factors?
3. What role can local and foreign funding and philanthropy have in sustaining movement toward democratic governance and greater respect for human rights?

AGENDA

Please note:

Events will be held in English, with translation from French and Arabic provided where necessary.

MONDAY, 7 MAY

6:00 pm	Informal get-to-know-you dinner with Learning Visit participants (<i>at participants' expense, approximately TND30</i>) <i>At Le Dôme Restaurant, Tunisia Palace Hotel, 13 Avenue de France</i>
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TUESDAY, 8 MAY

Until 8:15 am	Breakfast at hotel
8:15 am	Assemble in hotel lobby (<i>Tunisia Palace Hotel, 13 Avenue de France</i>) and walk to venue (<i>Youth Hostel Saida Ajoula, 25 rue Saida Ajoula, in the Medina</i>)
9:00-10:00 am	Welcome · Introductions & Expectations · Agenda Review Jo Andrews , Director, Ariadne—The Human Rights Funders Network Michael Hirschhorn , Executive Director, International Human Rights Funders Group Regan Ralph , Executive Director, Fund For Global Human Rights
10:00 am-12:00 pm	From Tunis to Manama: The Dynamics at Play in the Arab Uprisings What are the roots of rebellion in the countries currently facing transition and/or unrest in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)? What are the causal and resultant, internal and external, historical and present-day factors at play in social movement-building and democratic transition in the MENA contexts? Fateh Azzam , Regional Representative, Middle East Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights; Co-Founder and Chairperson, Arab Human Rights Fund Session Facilitator: Regan Ralph , Executive Director, Fund For Global Human Rights
12:00-1:00 pm	Lunch

TUESDAY, 8 MAY continued

1:00-2:30 pm	<p>The Story of Revolt and Movement-Building in MENA</p> <p>Through personal testimonies and visual media, human rights defenders from the region will share their experiences of building a movement for change.</p> <p><i>Confirmed speakers include:</i></p> <p>Soha Abdelaty, Deputy Director, Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights</p> <p>Rami Jarrah, Co-Director, Activists News Association (Syria) CANCELLED</p> <p>Elham Saudi, Director, Lawyers for Justice in Libya</p> <p>Session Facilitator: Shalini Nataraj, Vice-President for Programs, Global Fund for Women</p>
2:30-3:00 pm	Break
3:00-4:30 pm	<p>Transitions in MENA and Abroad: What Do They Teach Us?</p> <p>With the dynamics at play in the region, what are the priorities, opportunities and challenges for human rights? What lessons from transitional contexts elsewhere inform the important considerations and caveats that grantmakers should bear in mind as they explore opportunities to work in the region? What are viable entry points and funding areas for grantmakers?</p> <p>Abdelbasset Ben Hassen, President, Arab Institute for Human Rights</p> <p>Mark Freeman, Founding Director, Institute for Integrated Transitions</p> <p>Session Facilitator: Hanan Rabbani, Senior Program Officer, Women's Rights and Gender Development, Open Society Foundations-Arab Regional Office</p>
4:30-5:00 pm	Review and Reflection
5:30-7:00 pm	<p>Tracing the Path of Protest</p> <p>An on-the-ground tour of important sites related to Tunisia's revolution <i>(The tour will begin at Place du Gouvernement in the Medina, walking distance from the day's venue)</i></p>
Evening	Dinner on own

WEDNESDAY, 9 MAY

Until 8:15 am	Breakfast at hotel (<i>Tunisia Palace Hotel, 13 Avenue de France</i>)
8:30 am-10:00 am <i>Sessions will take place at the hotel (<i>Tunisia Palace Hotel, 13 Avenue de France, 4th Floor</i>)</i>	<p>Human Rights and Civil Society Pre-, Peri- and Post-Transition</p> <p>Participants will examine the present and changing role of civil society and the dynamics of external engagement in the Arab region.</p> <p>Elie Abouaoun, Executive Director, Arab Human Rights Fund Yousry Moustafa Hussein, Advisor, German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ)</p> <p>Session Facilitator: Sevdalina Rukanova, Senior Officer, European Foundation Centre</p>
10:00-10:30 am	Break
10:30 am-12:00 pm	<p>The Culture of Giving in the Middle East</p> <p>What are the traditions associated with philanthropy in the MENA region? What does the current and shifting landscape of philanthropy look like? What is the scope for a human rights approach to giving?</p> <p>Barbara Ibrahim, Director, The Gerhart Center for Philanthropy and Civic Engagement, American University of Cairo Atallah Kuttab, Co-founder, SAANED Philanthropic Advisory Group (Amman) CANCELLED Elie Abouaoun, Executive Director, Arab Human Rights Fund</p> <p>Session Facilitator: Michael Hirschhorn, Executive Director, International Human Rights Funders Group</p>
12:00-1:00 pm	Lunch at the hotel (<i>Tunisia Palace Hotel, 13 Avenue de France, 4th Floor</i>)
1:00 pm	Assemble in hotel lobby (<i>Tunisia Palace Hotel, 13 Avenue de France</i>)
1:00-5:00 pm	<p>Travel to and visits with local and regional human rights groups</p> <p>Participants have their choice to visit one of several organizations. These organizations focus on promoting human rights domestically or regionally.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Association for Families and Children (AMAL) • Arab Institute for Human Rights (AIHR) • Center of Arab Women for Training and Research (CAWTAR) • Tunisian Association of Democratic Women (ATFD) • Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN) • Euro-Mediterranean Foundation of Support to Human Rights Defenders (EMHRF) • Forum for Economic and Social Rights (FTDS) • Tunisian League for Human Rights (LTDH)

WEDNESDAY, 9 MAY continued

6:00 pm	Networking Reception
<i>Tunisia Palace Hotel, 13 Avenue de France, 4th Floor</i>	With participants, guest speakers, and local civil society representatives

THURSDAY, 10 MAY

Until 8:00 am	Breakfast at hotel (<i>Tunisia Palace Hotel, 13 Avenue de France</i>)
8:00	Assemble in hotel lobby (<i>Tunisia Palace Hotel, 13 Avenue de France</i>) and walk to venue (<i>Centre d'Etudes Maghrébines à Tunis (CEMAT), 19 bis, rue d'Angleterre</i>)
8:30-9:00 am	Debriefing: Review and reflection of the day before
9:00-10:15 am	<p>A View from the Outside: European Perspectives on Middle East Transitions</p> <p>The Representative of the European Union in Tunisia will share his thoughts on the events in the region of the past 18 months and the immediate period ahead.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Adrianus Koetsenruijter, Head of Delegation, European Union</p> <p>Session Facilitator:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Fulco Van Deventer, Policy Advisor, Cordaid</p>
10:15-10:30 am	Break
10:30 am-12:00 pm	<p>Political Islam</p> <p>Islam in Middle Eastern politics is an important, influential and inevitable factor in the region's path toward democratic governance. Questions about secularism and religion in politics, foreign engagement, and Islam's compatibility with women's rights and individual freedom reveal the complexity of the role of Islam in a transitioning Middle East. Participants will engage with a prominent, formerly exiled, politician-scholar who has been described as the voice of moderate political Islam.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Sheikh Rached Ghannouchi, Leader, Ennahda Political Party of Tunisia</p> <p>Session Facilitator:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Jo Andrews, Director, Ariadne—The Human Rights Funders Network</p>
12:00-1:00 pm	Lunch

THURSDAY, 10 MAY continued

1:00-2:15 pm	U.S. Government Funding in MENA: Its Legacy and Future In response to the removal of autocratic regimes and political uprisings, what is the current direction of U.S. government funding? Are the approaches to engagement adapting or static? How will the history of foreign funding inform its future commitments, if at all? Richard Johannsen , Tunis Regional Office Director, Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), U.S. Department of State Session Facilitator: Steve Riskin , Special Assistant to the President for Grants, U.S. Institute of Peace
2:15-4:00 pm	Strategic Funding in Transitional Situations in MENA: Working Sessions Participants will learn from and exchange with each other at a practical level about existing and potential funding strategies and possible collaborative opportunities.
4:00-4:30 pm	Debriefing, Evaluation
Evening	Dinner on own or depart

**GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS TO
ALL OUR GUEST SPEAKERS AND THEIR INSTITUTIONS
THE INSTITUTIONS REPRESENTED AT THE SITE VISIT**

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Tunis

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From Tunis to Manama: The Dynamics at Play in the Arab Uprisings

What are the roots of rebellion in the countries currently facing transition and/or unrest in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)? What are the causal and resultant, internal and external, historical and present-day factors at play in social movement-building and democratic transition in the MENA contexts?

Speaker: **Fateh Azzam**, Regional Representative, Middle East Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights; Co-Founder and Chairperson, Arab Human Rights Fund

Moderator: **Regan Ralph**, Executive Director, Fund For Global Human Rights

- The first question we should ask is: Is this really an Arab spring?
- The story and nature of the revolution is not a simple one – it is not simply a “youth movement”, for example – and we have to look at the region’s and each country’s history to understand the dynamics at play.
- The Arab region has been a hotbed of political instability and conflict. A sense of insecurity prevails among its citizens, and a deep sense of injustice, particularly for the Palestinians in the West Bank. This sense of injustice and oppression has been further exacerbated by widespread economic insecurity.
- Note also that the region has also seen the flow of millions of refugees across its borders for decades.
- There was a dominant perception in the region that the world had a ‘different’ view of the Middle East, that it did not expect Middle Eastern citizens and societies to fight for democracy and human rights.
- The region has failed to find political responses that can give region sense of pride to its people and foster change. Arab nationalism as promoted by Former Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser and the Arab Baath Party has not been able to offer a viable alternative to existing power structures. Leftist movements have also failed to win over majority support.
- Democracy now offers a new chance. However, in the past George Bush’s Middle East policy of “showing the Arabs how to do democracy” did not find support, with the invasion of Iraq being highly unpopular amongst the people in the region.
- There is now hope in the growing civil society movement in the region; those calling for a fairly Western style of democracy, with an emphasis on women’s rights and minority rights among other issues, in the past never had enough power to become political and were squashed effectively in many countries.
- The average citizen is politically disenfranchised at every level, whether under the Gulf monarchies or the Arab republics, such as Syria. There is no room for participation: If you try

to object, the result is often arbitrary detention and severe human rights violations. The space for public objection to state policy is extremely limited.

- There has been a positive development of a growing number of open spaces in the last 15 years, with a growing civil society in Egypt, Jordan, Palestine and Morocco. However, none of the laws changed and the environment stayed unfavourable because the style of rule did not change. People were allowed to speak out to some degree as long as it had no real impact.
- Development policies failed too at most levels; policies focused on macro- instead of micro-development. They often ignored regional disparities and rural divides. Often the level of general health is declining even when the GDP is rising.
- The financial crises of 2001 and 2008 also had their impact on the region, with rising food prices which became hard to afford for those with low incomes. This has grave consequences for a country like Egypt, where half of the population lives on two dollars a day or less.
- Youth unemployment adds to insecurity – often 20-29% and higher for university graduates.
- Corruption is endemic in the region. Even in countries with natural resources, profit often stays in the hands small elites who are tied to the international financial elites. Thus the money earned is not invested to create jobs and productivity.
- These policies, beneficial for a few and harmful for the majority, were fully supported and encouraged by the global economy; hence, the Arab revolutions should also be seen as revolutions against a neoliberalism which prevented their societies from prospering.
- Examples:
 - Tunisia was held up as a positive example of economic growth in the region, with 7-8% of GDP growth; but at the same time, unemployment was increasing.
 - Egypt was named “Top Performer in Doing Business 2008” by the World Bank, despite corruption, nepotism and unemployment.
 - A former foreign minister was named leading minister of a developing country; just a few months after, he was sentenced to 30 years in prison for corruption.
- The uprisings were primarily about dignity, a sense of self, and about having a say; it started with the young people, even though it was not solely a youth movement. It is also questionable whether it was actually a “facebook revolution”, as many in Egypt do not have access to the internet.
- In Tunisia and Egypt, the revolutions were supported by a broad part of the society, the most organised of which were the Islamic movements.
- We have to remember that every revolution was different – it was not just one “Arab spring”
 - Libya different gone through an armed conflict (and is still doing so).
 - Yemen is now more fragmented than ever before; Abdullah Saleh is removed from power, but is still powerful and controls much of the economy and army. Yemen’s future is uncertain.
 - In Syria, we are looking at a protracted conflict for the next 3-4 years.
 - In the Gulf, signs are not encouraging in terms of increasing democratic and human rights standards.
- It is easier to bring down a bad regime than to create a proper system of government. The question is, what do we build now? How do we build?

- Attention should be paid to the rising power of the Islamist movements. They do deserve a position in the process of building new governments (as many other options have failed) and they are an ascending force to be reckoned with.
- Women played a very important role in the revolts as part of the youth movement and of the mass demonstrations in Egypt. However, women are now under serious threat to lose the few rights they had before the revolutions.
- Pay attention to the following:
 - “Easy” ideas about capacity building etc. need to be combined with institutional reform.
 - Bodies to implement policy and rights need to be set up. [We should not just talk about human rights, but focus on implementation.]
 - Focusing on women’s rights is crucial.
 - There is a need for policy research.

Discussion

Q: You talked about “economics of desperation”. If so many young people are out of work, where do the few dollars come from that people live off per day?

- They are earned through the informal economy, e.g. selling goods in the streets or begging (which is a recent phenomenon in Lebanon and Palestine).
- Remittances often constitute a big part of the GDP.

Comment: The problem of Tunisia’s economy is a lack of structural choices. Many areas lack infrastructure, and there is a big debate about territorial management vs centralisation. The future of the revolution will be influenced by localism.

Q: Can we expect a stronger bond between the military and Islamist parties, once they are in power?

- The relationship between Islamist movements and the military is not a comfortable one in Egypt. A showdown between the Muslim Brotherhood and the military is expected.

Comment: If we want to build a strategy for intervention, we have to ask whether the revolution is a result of the power of democrats or of the weakness of the dictatorship. If the revolution happens as result of instability, we should ask ourselves what caused that. There are three levels which we should take into account: (1) The reality: What happened? (2) The constructed revolutions: the images conveyed by the media. (3) The imagined revolution: the narrative of the activists. If I want to build a strategy, I have to ask what the relationship is between the real and the constructed revolution. To do this, we need to conduct more research. What is the impact of the revolution on freedom and democracy (e.g. on women)?

Q: In Tunisia, Islamists do not seem to focus on structural change. What is the scope to speak about transparency, corruption, housing rights? In Egypt, housing rights are addressed by the Salafists, not by the Muslim Brotherhood.

- It is difficult to predict who will take which position. The Islamists in Egypt might know what they do not want, but we need to see whether they have a policy too. It is a development in flux.
- The Islamist movement in Egypt has been involved in charity, with an eye on recruitment, for decades.

Q: Terminology matters: “dignity revolution” would be a more suitable term than “Arab spring”. We don’t know the outcome yet: the uprisings could lead to chaos, to partition, to fragmentation or to democracy. [Question about democracy promotion]

- If there is a proper democratic process, then there is a possibility of change. A society has to find its balances. It is maybe too early to call the current movement a revolution, because the systems have not changed yet. One can instead call it an uprising.
- The most important aspect is that people have found their voice. An Arabic newspaper wrote: “The Arabs have entered history” – this shows that there was a perception of being “outside history” before. Today, the face of the Arab region is changing quickly, with the majority of the population being young people. Their voices need to be heard.
- What should be promoted is participation and debate; the term “democracy promotion” carries a lot of baggage (and not all of it positive). *Discussing* democratic processes is more valuable than promoting them.

Q: Religion plays out in different ways, and it has been a force in the revolution. It will also play a role in the efforts of democratic development. In separate country contexts, what should we as outsiders know about this ascendant democratic discourse?

- One has to be careful not to debate everything in sectarian terms. This is encouraged by some international analysts and regional actors, like Saudi Arabia. But it should not be the basis for the new discourse around governance. The focus should be on institutions rather than on sectarian divides.

Comment: A young Libyan student said to me, “the revolution just started. We just removed one obstacle.” There is a big disparity between international and domestic perceptions of the revolutions. There is a difference between countries where state structures existed (e.g. Tunisia), and those where there was no state before, and institutions are being built up now. We are talking about “transitions”, but we should really talk about institutions and state building.

Comment: The economy will be our biggest challenge. People in Tunisia and Egypt are focusing on the constitution, on the scope of liberties, on freedom of expression and women’s rights. Questions about what kind of economy we want to have are not yet being addressed. The “Islamic economy” has not yet proven to be an actual policy; a focus on *zakat* (Islamic charity) is not a policy.

- People are being impatient, they would like to see change and, importantly, employment opportunities *now*.

Comment: The political ideologies have failed. These uprisings have focused on domestic issues, not on Palestine, Pan-Arabism, or a general ideology. Instead, freedom of speech and other core rights

issues were at the heart of the uprisings. However, the role of informal civil society groups has not yet been evaluated, and this should be a focus of support.

- The old forces are still very powerful in Egypt: We are seeing vicious attacks on the press and on civil society organisations. There is a counter-revolution, and it will hit women, the media and civil society harder than everyone else.
- The idea of networking and exchanging ideas is very important for the progressive movements in the region.

Q: Will the next tsunami of unrest come from the Gulf? Saudi Arabia has stopped the movement in Bahrain. Minorities and women's issues are creating enough pressure to cause fundamental changes in the Gulf.

- Political changes in the Gulf are not foreseeable in the near future. There could however be a movement of migrant workers, who in the United Arab Emirates constitute 80-90% of the population and around 40-50% in Kuwait.

Comment: In the area of housing, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt envisages a model of charity and reduced state involvement. This is positive for the human rights sector, as we have more options to influence charity. The greater section of the population is concerned about their economic and social rights.

Comment: Libya is very different from other states that have recently experienced a revolution. Libya has to build a state from scratch. And in terms of identity, Libyans are not all Arabis; we should focus on creating open societies where minorities are allowed to come to the forefront.

Q: What is required to enable a more professional civil society in the region?

- What is our concept of professionalising NGOs? Maybe they just need a space to sit together and think. We need to think out of the box and we have to contextualise what we are doing. We cannot use one blueprint for every social and national context. We need to listen to actors on the ground and find out from them what the needs are.

Funder Learning Visit to the Arab Region
Tunis
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The Story of Revolt and Movement-Building in MENA

Through personal testimonies and visual media, human rights defenders from the region shared their experiences of building a movement for change.

Speakers:

- **Soha Abdelaty**, Deputy Director, Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights
- **Elham Saudi**, Director, Lawyers for Justice in Libya

Moderator:

- **Shalini Nataraj**, Vice-President for Programs, Global Fund for Women

Soha Abdelaty began by speaking about how, in 2005, Hosni Mubarak put forward amendments to the Egyptian constitution regarding elections. Civil society groups boycotted the referendum and the Mubarak regime responded by hiring thugs who sexually assaulted some of the women. In this instance, the International media was present, but the regime didn't seem to care. We didn't think this type of situation would ever happen again.

Six years later, we are working on a similar case of sexual assault by the state. In March 2011, the Egyptian military arrested 17 women and other protesters at demonstrators in Tahrir square. The arrested women have said that the virgins among them were all subjected to virginity testing in an open space by a military doctor.

Mubarak's tactics and violations are still institutional and she remains cautiously optimistic. Ms. Abedelaty never thought she'd see Mubarak resign in response to people taking to the streets.



December 2004 saw the first anti-Mubarak demonstration in Egypt. There had been previous protests, but they were focused against United States foreign policy or against Israel. This change, from focusing on external issues to internal issues, was very significant. A group of largely apathetic young Egyptians formed the April 6th movement. From 2007 onward, it became apparent that there were more than just a few hundred demonstrators who utilized unconventional weapons, such as social media.

One incident that garnered a lot of attention was the killing of a man who was beaten by security forces in front of bystanders. Social media played a big role in bringing this to light by circulating before and after photos quickly.

Ms. Abedelaty feels as though letting the military take control over the transitional phase was a great mistake. Currently all of her work is reactionary - monitoring and documenting military

abuses. Egyptians didn't know that much about the military before the revolution in 2011. In just one year, 12,000 citizens stood trial by tribunal. Not one single military officer has yet been found accountable.

On the positive side, Egypt has had some free and fair elections. There is an executive (Supreme Council for Armed Forces), and legislative and judicial processes. This is a start for a balance of powers, but they need to be institutionalized.

If the governing body of Egypt has functioning institutions and proper oversight, the more extreme Islamist suggestions will not become law. There is a need to reach out to female constituencies on the ground that voted for the Muslim Brotherhood and ensure that they don't support setbacks in women's rights.

There is also a need for reform of state institutions with result based accountability. Reform of the judiciary needs attention, which is made clear by the fact that in all of the investigations led by the prosecutors office, not 1 military person has been found accountable for all of the violence.

They brought both the 2005 and 2011 cases of sexual assault to the prosecutor's office. The 2011 case went to military tribunal, yet even with lots of evidence and 4 eyewitnesses, no one was found accountable.

Elham Saudi spoke about three specific turning points in Muammar Gaddafi's rule, all of which impacted the people of Libya.

- April 7, 1976: Gaddafi stared university killings. People were forced to watch the hangings of dissidents on university campuses. Also, Libyans living outside of Libya were targeted and killed.
- June 26, 1984: Killing of Sadik. In the midst of a comedy show, Gaddafi televised the killing of a young activist who had attempted to depose him. He was hung at sunset in Beghazi public stadium on national television.
- 1996: Abu Salim prison massacre. Abu Salim was the main prison in Tripoli where political dissidents were taken (including a lot of Islamists). Many prisoners died of malnutrition and various illnesses. The prisoners rose up and demanded that ill persons be taken to the hospital, sparking an altercation between prison guards and prisoners. Following a negotiation, the prison agreed that ill prisoners would be taken to the hospital. Instead, everyone on the bus to the hospital was killed. Other prisoners were brought into the courtyard and killed by snipers. 1,270 people were killed. For years, the massacre wasn't made public and Libyans didn't know what happened, thinking that their loved ones were still living in prison.

February 15th, 2011: Gaddafi went to Benghazi and pre-empted revolution by arresting all those he saw as threatening or revolutionary, including a lawyer representing the families of victims of the Abu Salim massacre. In response, all of the judges and lawyers went to the streets to

demand his release. The lawyer was released the following day, but 153 people were killed in the square. Protests then broke out in Tripoli and Misurata. Three points about the revolution:

- 1) The revolution belonged to the Libyan diaspora as much as to those in Libya
- 2) Lawyers were some of the leaders of the revolution. Dentists were actually the number one profession among the rebels
- 3) It was different than Egypt or Tunisia, Libya didn't have institutions or civil society

Many members of the diaspora went to fight in Libya (even if had never been to Libya before). As many Libyan lawyers had no knowledge of international law or human rights law, they brought lawyers out of Libya for training and then sent back to investigate and report on the situation. In order to communicate with each other, they would draft an email and save in the draft folder and then ask others to log in to read it.

Facts about Libya:

- Libya has a small population so transmitting information is relatively easy. The drawback of this is that everyone knows everyone else, so they know who supported Gaddafi and it will be harder to forgive.
- Young population – courageous, reckless. 70% of the population was born under Gaddafi regime.
- Libya has lots of natural resources: tourism (longest coast on Mediterranean), agriculture, gas
- There is no public transportation system and no systematic healthcare.

Key issues in Libya currently are: legal reform, elections, long history of torture, sexual violence during conflict

Recently passed laws:

- Law against the glorification of a dictator (One cannot speak positively about Gaddafi and cannot criticize the revolution)
- Total amnesty for anything done in the name of making revolution a success

Discussion

Q: Do you have one “don’t” do this and one “do” do this for funders?

Please, don't rush to fund. Libya has had no civil society in 60 years. NGOs are only just starting to crop up now. The worst thing that could happen would be for Libya to be flooded with money. Funding must be responsible, and must be done with proper due diligence.

In Libya, you see the same faces at all human rights conferences and workshops. We need to engage with local NGOs that aren't at these conferences. A lot of money to date has been distributed from the top down. More attention must be given to bottom up work.

Q: How can we support women's rights in the region?

In the collective thinking of the Egyptian population, women's rights are mixed with Mrs. Mubarak, and were utilized by the dictatorship to manipulate the regime's image. One reaction from the population was to remove women's rights in order to get rid of the regime. Ms. Abdelaty does not think that the Mubarak regime achieved much in terms of women's rights. Her organization had great issues with the quota system. The government would say that it was able to push down maternal mortality rates, but this is only true in Cairo, and rates are still high across Egypt. The government launched a huge program to combat female circumcision, but the numbers are still quite high, as it is a culturally embedded practice. Instituting new policies will not affect change. Work must be done with women on the ground.

Libya is a country where everything needs to be restarted from scratch. There is a misconception in Libya that women had rights because Gaddafi had female bodyguards. Libya is a very culturally conservative society. People are fed up with people being told that Islam is negative force, and there is danger in politicizing Islam. Religion has helped to keep communities together, and so one shouldn't approach women's rights from position of criticizing faith or Islam. Women first started wearing hijabs to distinguish themselves from Gaddafi's bodyguards. Gaddafi banned beards, so men grew beards in protest, not for religious reasons. You must look beyond the image. 60% of Libyan university graduates are women.

Q: Advice for those on the outside in supporting higher education in Libya, Egypt and Tunisia? Role of universities in the next generation of human rights activists?

Regionalism is an issue in Libya. Politically, Gaddafi disenfranchised the east. There is a very strong movement for the creation of an autonomous state in the east and a movement for decentralization across the whole country. Libya is comprised of 6 million people spread over a large area. All of these divides resulted from Gaddafi's propaganda. Revolutionary studies is central to the current curriculum, but the entire educational system and curriculum needs restructuring. For example, teachers still lead students in singing Gaddafi anthems, because that's all they know. Libya does have a large population of younger generations and it is encouraging to see student-led movements.

Comment: It is important for donors not to think that one project is going to solve all of the problems. Instead, think about specific activities that might be of support, coordination is key. This does not mean forming a grand plan together, but identify one piece to work together on.

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Transitions in MENA and Abroad: What Do They Teach Us?

With the dynamics at play in the region, what are the priorities, opportunities and challenges for human rights? What lessons from transitional contexts elsewhere inform the important considerations and caveats that grantmakers should bear in mind as they explore opportunities to work in the region? What are viable entry points and funding areas for grantmakers?

Speakers: **Mark Freeman**, Founding Director, Institute of Integrated Transitions
Abdelbasset Ben Hassen, President, Arab Institute for Human Rights

Moderator: **Hanan Rabbani**, Senior Program Officer, Women's Rights and Gender Development, Open Society Foundations - Arab Regional Office

Welcome & Introduction

- Are revolutions bound to create change? Where is social justice in the change? This session will address (1) what transition actually means and (2) what the risks and opportunities are for grant-makers when funding in the MENA region.
- Marc Freeman will set the general framework and Abdelbasset Ben Hassen will speak about lessons for funding in Tunisia and more generally in the Arab region.

Funding in Contexts of Political Transition

- The past four decades have seen waves of democratic transitions and post-conflict transitions – examples being South Africa, South-eastern Europe and East Asia.
- It is important to bear in mind that every country and every political and historic context is unique. However, there is a huge range of common dilemmas and methods that are useful to explore when starting to think about funding in transition contexts.
- Transitions are the leap moments of history: Great opportunities arise where countries can leap forward or backward, with an equal amount of risks and opportunities involved.
- Transitions are singular moments. A society evolves through different transitional moments rather than through continuous change.
- Transitions are moments in which social contracts are reshaped. This includes the social contracts (1) among citizens, (2) between citizens and the state, and (3) between the state and its neighbour countries.
- Common challenges:
 - Having to operate in a crisis mode and do long-term planning at the same time. As there is not much a state can deliver in the short run, it will be crucial for its leader and society as a whole to have a long-term vision (an example being Nelson Mandela's vision of a "rainbow nation" – or, more pragmatically thinking, the possibility to join the European Union). Generally, there will be pressure to get things done as quickly as possible.

- Knowledge and capacity deficits: There will often be a lack of knowledge of international law, of how to run a country, etc.
 - Dysfunctional state institutions: Existing state institutions can be ridden by corruption, nepotism and generally not do the job the populace expects them to do. In this case there might be a need for consultation, dialogue and training about what it means to have a civil service, a parliament, etc.
 - Non-state institutions might turn out to be more superficial and hollow than it seemed.
 - The local media might not be used to operate in a free and democratic environment.
 - The corporate sector might not know how to function in competitive markets.
 - Often there is a legacy of past violence which needs to be addressed.
- There is a risk in putting pressure on a domestic context through an international assistance machine that arrives from the outside. Experts and organisations moving into transition contexts often arrive with pre-existing ideas of “how to do transition”. More time should be spent building knowledge and perspectives.
- A common bias is that organisations primarily speak to English-speaking individuals who had access to education; or simply to whoever they get access to. One should bear in mind that consulting less “accessible” groups and stakeholders might be crucial for making a successful contribution.
- The world of expertise is highly sectoral and very specialised; what often matters most is knowledge of how different things connect, but we do not necessarily have this knowledge.
- Dialogues tend to happen in separate silos (civil society, business, governments); we should think more about spaces where state and society meet, such as school boards (civilians and state officials) or ad hoc commissions (truth commissions, policy reform commissions). Finding those points of contact is an important part of managing a successful transition.

Lessons for Funding in Tunisia (and the wider region)

- The Tunisian revolution was a revolution against fear.
- It is now important to re-visit the relationship between social justice and political justice; these are complex issues and need to be treated in relation to each other.
- We need to look not only for answers, but also for the right questions.
- The Tunisian people have shown that they can shape their history. After the revolution, we formed a commission composed of CSOs, political parties, syndicates, consultants, etc. to draft the six laws of the transition, which human rights are a crucial part of. This was a positive example for cross-sector cooperation and it worked because the commission was a space for negotiation and dialogue where ideas of “how to live together” could be jointly explored. This demonstrates the importance of creating spaces for discussion and dialogue and – for donors – supporting processes rather than just specific activities.
- State institutions need to be reformed. Our (Tunisian) experience of consulting foreign experts was a positive one, we did not perceive those helping us as patronising.
- Another important step in transition is to reflect on this process with locals. In our case, training was provided to civil society organisations to respond to this need.
- The following needs should be addressed:
 - Introducing human rights into the public discourse and into practice.
 - Increasing citizen participation and strengthening the civil society movement to challenge any attempt at re-installing authoritarianism and repression.
- This can be achieved by:
 - Supporting creative initiatives for participation.
 - Supporting links between human rights and education, as well as human rights and culture.

Discussion

Q: What do the Arab revolutions have in common?

- Even though the historical and political contexts Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, etc. were all different, all revolutions were civil and fought for social justice and dignity; it was a revolution of values.

Q: Support processes – why processes?

- Processes enable us to study the needs of people and build knowledge about the reality of a society and space.

Q: Transitional justice or amnesty?

- Throughout those societies affected by the Arab spring, there is an expectation of seeing justice for crimes that happened under the rule of dictators. Many communities are traumatised and the mothers of those who were murdered or taken to jail and never came back are now asking for justice.
- Historically, amnesties have often been the starting point for reconciliation, rather than transitional justice. Truth commissions can be used as a solution “in between” justice and amnesty.
- Sometimes the term “transitional justice” itself is the problem - instead one can speak about “facing the past”.
- Pursuing transitional justice in Tunisia would be a difficult long-term process. Currently, 33 organisations are pushing for creating law on establishing a truth commission.
- Transitional justice is about creating knowledge (about the number of cases, those affected, etc.), how to lobby the government and build alliances.
- Transitional justice processes often lack the participation of victims. And victims’ grievances are very different from place to place. Experience of Libya: Those who died in the revolution are seen as martyrs, but people want to see justice for deaths occurred under Ghaddafi. Collective, community-based reparations are important here.

Q: What can philanthropy contribute?

- What you choose to fund should advance the transition, not jeopardise it.
 - More politically sensitive forms of human rights funding required during transitions. If you push too hard, this might hurt the process.
- Philanthropy can help this region to document what has happened
 - Retrieving not only crimes and casualties, but also history of achievements.
 - An example for an under-explored issue are the results of last elections in Tunisia: under-researched, few papers published, not enough analysis.
 - Generating knowledge to understand differences and commonalities between different countries who are experiencing a revolution as part of the Arab Spring.
- The people should be helped to develop a vision and strategy for their country, as well as better knowledge about the communities.
- Helping communities to mobilise around issues to achieve progress.
- Transforming the deep civil culture in Tunisia and beyond into citizen education and human rights education.

**Funder Learning Visit to the Arab Region
Tunis
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Human Rights and Civil Society Pre-, Peri-, and Post-Transition

This session explored the state of civil society in the Arab region and examined the specific challenges human rights organizations are facing and the ways that donors can be of support.

Speakers:

- **Elie Abouaoun**, Executive Director, Arab Human Rights Fund
- **Yousry Moustafa Hussein**, Advisor, German Society of International Cooperation (GIZ)

Moderator:

- **Sevdalina Rukanova**, Senior Officer, European Foundation Centre

Elie Abouaoun opened by stating that years of autocratic regimes have left scars on all levels within countries in the region. Before 2011 autocratic regimes existed on one side, with civil society on the other. A third actor is a highly organized Islamist movement.

Challenges for Civil Society and Transition

- Access to resources vs. capacity
 - Brain drain
 - Technical capacity
 - Actors don't necessarily know what's happening on the ground
 - Political urgency felt by urban based/top notch NGOs to quickly spend money from western donors.
- Local actors do not enjoy as much legitimacy/acceptability as they deserve, because seen as business minded, and money driven (widened gap between constituencies and NGOs)

Accountability – Many NGOs are only being held accountable to their donors. The concept of being held accountable to one's constituency is underrated. A lack of legitimacy hinders the ability to mobilize that constituency.

- Inappropriate legal environment: political changes have not improved this environment
- Concern: Being able to provide programming that is relevant to people's desires. Most civil society organizations are operating based on the assumption that people want a democratic regime, but it is not clear whether or not their constituencies actually endorse these values.
- There is a lack of funding aimed at long-term support for popularizing human rights from international donors. Instead, donors often fund short-term projects with very clear, immediate outcomes.
- Relations with the government. Previously, these relationships were rife with mistrust, and it was traditionally understood that civil society always stood in opposition to the government. It is now time to challenge that assumption.

- For example, in Lebanon, the strong vertical divide between people affected civil society since 2005. Since then, some organizations have been perceived as being closer to one political party than to another.
- An important challenge over next few years is triggering a trust building process between civil society and the government.
- Religion is a core element of individuals' identity within the region. Civil society cannot deny this fact without isolating itself further. How can civil society use religion to promote certain values while keeping a critical distance from religious groups so as not to become too involved?

In conclusion, the role of civil society has been the subject of intense debate over the past few decades. It is seen negatively by the government, because it seems to occupy space that could exclusively belong to the government. Public perception has moved on to become more positive, and civil society's role is now being acknowledged. Civil society's first priority must be to assert human rights and freedoms.

Clarifying questions

Q: The laws governing NGOs in each country are key issues for the functioning of civil society. Can you explain the state of play further?

A government's first priority is to control NGOs, and laws reflect this. NGOs are just beginning their battle to have equal and appropriate environments. The laws governing NGOs in Iraq and Kurdistan seem to be the best in the region, and his model could be used as a model for others to follow.

Q: Can you elaborate on the vertical divide?

There are a few elements: actors, priorities, dynamics, and challenges

Actors

Virtual Civil Society has no institutional identity. How will governments deal with a Facebook group? Online communities? There are many new things happening in terms of actors.

Post-revolution: trade unions, associations – didn't use Human Rights language before revolution but do now.

Dynamics

- The 1980's NGO Human Rights movement focused mainly on civil and political rights.
- During the 1990's, diversity increased. International United Nations conferences introduced a wave of new actors interested in a variety of topics. This was a period of building an identity of human rights.
- Then development actors adopted results based accountability and moved from service provisions into human rights based organizations that were well connected with the grassroots.
- Political actors started to become a part of Human Rights movement, and human rights groups became more and more political actors. Around 2000, talk about democracy and change began to circulate, and actors became more willing to leave civil society and move toward politics. The Invasion of Iraq was a turning point. Before the Invasion, demonstrations were usually about Israel, rather than about internal issues. The invasion really started to change the focus of demonstrations.
- Many people were not against idea of human rights but resisted the idea of "all human rights for all". For example, the Muslim Brotherhood encouraged political rights but not LGBT rights.

- The NGO movement had a low capacity to absorb high levels of activism. Where are the spaces to contain this new momentum? In new political and social movements.
- Human rights are gaining new activism but is losing its identity. NGO movement uses international covenants as guideposts, and now political actors are using human rights language as a guidepost within a political background, and the two are not always in line.

Rights-based transition

- Equality and non-discrimination
- Cultural diversity –absolutism is a major problem
- Social justice (Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights and work to prevent social exclusion). Major issues with philanthropy for social injustice, i.e. Saudi money
- Citizenship and rule of law: impetus to merge human Rrgths education and citizenship education
- Institutional reform

As Islamist groups are not integrated into the political system, he foresees political violence. Will receive more refugees, Human Rights NGOs still don't have the capacity for these types of issues.

Challenges:

- Gaining spaces for human rights activism but losing human rights theology. Human rights can be useful as a language, but there are wide variations in understandings regarding what human rights actually mean
- How to make state institutions accountable?
- Unknown new actors – new NGOs, trade unions, youth organizations. There are currently no comprehensive studies on who these new actors are.
- Legal restrictions. Use of emergency laws to attack human rights. There is a gray area between politics and law, and this means that the law can often be used for political reasons.
- Cultural resistance: How do we have a new generation of human rights actors and develop discourses to communicate with other actors,(i.e. marginalized communities, rural tribes)? We should avoid the debate between human rights and sharia.

Discussion

Q: What strategies for grantmaking can we develop to overcome restrictive laws?

One strategy is to establish a law firm. Make consultancy contracts with individuals (only if people trust and know). This can work within international umbrella organizations. Continually try to get approval from ministry for grants to come through.

Q: Is there any exchange between salafists and human rights groups?

Salafists are opportunists. They don't believe in human rights, or even political rights. If they come to power, they will be against human rights. However, there are groups now emerging who do believe in the importance of human rights. Development organizations managed more than human rights organizations to deconstruct discourse on universality and relativism because they work with people's daily lives.

Q: How can we stick to the universality of human rights aspirations without imposing our own ideas and morality on others?

Q: In 2009 Egypt and Tunisia were ranked best in world regulating financial transactions. What can we do to make these measures that are constraining civil society more visible, or to show that these laws are damaging?

An amendment to NGO law that would make all foreign funding illegal has been proposed. I don't expect it to pass, but the world is unpredictable. In 2008, Mubarak proposed an amendment to make NGO laws more restrictive, but dropped the amendment after receiving pressure from organizations working with EU countries, etc. We should ensure that countries raise this issue bilaterally within their government. The amendment has been proposed by transitional SCAF-supported government, but there is huge backlash. NGOs have drafted an alternative amendment and there is a third draft coming from Islamist groups within the government.

Q: What was it about the Invasion of Iraq that sparked a change within Civil Society?

Identity nationalism reasons that 'we are good because others are bad.' Saddam Hussein was a last separation of Arab nationalism, there are no more "big brothers". Young groups have became even more aware of nationalism. The first Invasion of Iraq was one Arab country invading another Arab country. Then the entrance of the United States acted as a major reminder of the humiliation of colonialism.

Q: Are labor unions potential grantees for US and European donors?

Trade unions and political parties cannot receive funds. We need to think about an approach to technical assistance for new actors who cannot receive foreign funding. Suggest best not to support labor unions as there is a lot of corruption.

FUNDER LEARNING VISIT TO THE ARAB REGION
TUNIS
8-10 MAY 2012

THE CULTURE OF GIVING IN THE MIDDLE EAST

What are the traditions associated with philanthropy in the MENA region? What does the current and shifting landscape of philanthropy look like? What is the scope for a human rights approach to giving?

Speakers:

- **Barbara Ibrahim**, Director, John D. Gerhart Center for Philanthropy and Civic Engagement, The American University of Cairo
- **Elie Abouaoun**, Executive Director, Arab Human Rights Fund

Facilitator:

- **Michael Hirschhorn**, Executive Director, International Human Rights Funders Group; President, Jacob and Hilda Blaustein Foundation

Michael opened the session by introducing Barbara Ibrahim of the John D. Gerhart Center for Philanthropy and Civic Engagement at the American University of Cairo, and Elie Abouaoun, Executive Director of the Arab Human Rights Fund. Barbara started by giving a presentation which was followed by a brief discussion.

Barbara recalled the experience of having her own partner being imprisoned for criticizing the Mubarak regime in the past. This experience was a triggering factor in making her decide to found the John D. Gerhart Center for Philanthropy and Civic Engagement, which was officially set up in 2006.

The presentation emphasized the strong tradition of giving in the Arab world – much of it is religion-based, some originates from Bedouin culture. The predominant idea is that those who are blessed with wealth should give to those who are not. At the time of the ‘Arab spring’, many people decided to give spontaneously, just like many decided to help their communities on a volunteering basis.

Islam generally embraces personal wealth as long as it is not acquired at the expense of others’ wellbeing. The basis for ‘giving’ in Islam is the pursuit of social justice. However, it is important to note that traditional philanthropy does also exist among non-Muslim religious minorities. Challenges faced by Arab philanthropy at the time of the upheavals were:

- Secrecy in giving inhibited transparency, documentation or sharing of best practices.
- Tax incentives to donate were absent.
- Wealthy Arab families were not allowed to set up institutions of higher education.
- Severe legal constraints: assets can be seized by the state.
- Field of work focused on Quranic categories: orphans, widows, the poor, etc.
- Ongoing discussion whether ‘zakat’ can be used to fund non-Muslim beneficiaries.

Barbara said that one of the key issues now is to shift the boundaries between political and civic activism. Being aware of the role played by religion and faith-based organizations remains important. The Muslim Brotherhood has formed a political party and put forward a presidential candidate; many

new organizations are motivated by faith, even though this does not necessarily always show in their work. Furthermore, philanthropy needs to become more open to innovation – much giving comes from the royal families or those being close to governments, which can inhibit the use of donations to further human rights. The upheavals have provided a space for creativity and innovation – using this momentum is important to tackle social problems. Lastly, there needs to be a debate about appropriate responses from the international donor community.

Barbara briefly talked about how even within the Arab world, different countries face different challenges: Whilst Egypt has a large number of civil society organizations (CSOs), it has a relatively low literacy rate (66%). In Libya, the literacy rate is higher (89%), but the number of CSOs is low.

As mentioned previously, Egypt has seen a rise in philanthropic giving, mainly sparked by the Arab revolutions. Much of this happens on the community level, often in the form of volunteering, but donations are also made across borders (e.g. to Libya, Palestine) and increasingly social media is used to raise funds. Political candidates hoping to win votes have also been giving cash handouts.

Looking ahead, it is crucial to focus on regulatory reform to move away from NGO laws towards enshrining basic freedom, including freedom of assembly, in the constitution. International donors are advised to find Arab funding partners rather than contacting CSOs directly and thereby potentially putting them in danger (this has been practices successfully in the area of technical assistance). Building knowledge platforms and strengthening collaboration rather than duplicating work is equally important. Appropriate external support is needed for this, with international organizations being willing to visit, learn and listen, and partner with local philanthropy organizations.

One participant mentioned that her organization has been making grants in the region. Their approach is to start from a perspective of consultation and contextualization, to understand the needs of CSOs and the environment they are operating in. They always ask organizations what else they need besides money – i.e. strategic planning or bringing in new partners. The Fund has increasingly invested in providing technical assistance through local agencies. The focus is on funding institutions and activism rather than projects. They do not normally set a time limit.

A participant from Cordaid highlighted that they were planning a youth consultation in Tunis two months after the learning visit. The aim of this will be to ask young activists and other stakeholders what support is needed to take activism forward. Cordaid is planning to share the outcomes of the consultations with the wider donor community.

A participant noted that there is real distrust of foreign funding in the Arab region, with conspiracy theories frequently being used to discredit international donors.

Panelists were asked the following question: discussions around philanthropy in Muslim countries often focus on ‘zakat’ (religious giving) and ‘waqf’ (religious endowment). Is it possible for organisations like the Gerhart Center to use more liberal models, e.g. businessmen supporting democracy?

Barbara replied that the Gerhart Center’s previous publications focused on business leaders, but that the majority of donors were found to be motivated by faith. This can be effective, from a human rights perspective, when faith-based motivations do not translate into religious giving, i.e. not only members of the same sect benefit. The language used is often about service, moral and ethical societies and

communities, and fairness. These linguistic differences should be taken seriously when thinking about what motivates people to give money and time.

Elie Abouaoun emphasized that current developments in the Arab world offer a unique opportunity for human rights groups to mainstream human rights into the language of regional donors. The main challenge thereby is not only to encourage people with financial resources to give, but also to provide them with mechanisms to do so.

One of the chronic impediments to human rights philanthropy are the weaknesses at the level of civil society: There needs to be a shift from groups being service providers to them shaping the political process. The link between field activism and policy making is often weak or non-existent, which has had a negative impact on the perceived sustainability of CSOs. In reality, service provision often absorbs all capacity of these organizations.

There is a perception that foreign funding is 'distorting' the work of CSOs. To gain credibility, organisations ideally receive funding from constituent donors. In the past, repressive laws in many countries of the region often led to disengagement of resource holders in supporting human rights. The Arab Human Rights Fund (AHRF) is one of the first organizations to focus on cultivating a culture of human rights philanthropy in the region. The Fund's resources have increased considerably in recent years, partly because of the upheavals and the environment they have created.

AHRF is currently focusing on engaging the private sector in human rights philanthropy. At the moment, Corporate Social Responsibility strategies in the region include microcredits and environmental schemes. AHRF uses the UN Policy Framework for Business and Human Rights to show businesses that there is a dimension of rights to be supported, and that this creates a win-win situation for domestic civil society as much as for the private sector.

Elie's key message to international donors is that they should try and build effective partnerships, also beyond funding. Often concepts are designed elsewhere and then implemented on the ground. Instead, local actors should be involved in programme and project planning. Finally, international donors should share their experience with philanthropists in the region to enable them to learn.

Question & Answer Session:

One participant highlighted the following two issues:

- Building partnerships is essential to avoid feeding into conspiracy theories about foreign money manipulating the political process.
- Structures and accountability are weak. Very few CSOs have a proper structure with changes in leadership – often, it's one person who makes the decisions, without any institutional process.

One participant from a women's fund stressed the importance of recognizing that donors normally identify grantees with similar aims and values. Their fund looks at grantees as experts and aims to build peer-to-peer partnerships with local women's funds.

Another participant said that her organization gives out activist-led small grants, focusing on environmental issues, human rights, empowering the youth. She emphasized that human rights and social justice cannot exist without environmental sustainability.

Another participant stated that the European Foundation Centre in cooperation with other organizations is supporting a process to find out whether there is a collaborative manner in which transitions in the MENA region can be supported.

One participant voiced the impression that youth organizations most urgently need tools to communicate effectively.

A participant noted that her organization allows grantees to use funding in a flexible way to benefit their constituencies. As a re-granter, the foundation finds that donors are increasingly imposing more restrictions and reporting requirements which can be a burden for grantees. Corporate funders often have pre-conceived notions of what funding should achieve. She said that, being a women's fund with a broad agenda, they need to remain open to supporting multiple strategies (micro-finance, education, advocacy, etc.).

A participant from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund reported that RBF has recently worked on how to bridge policy making and grassroots voices. Investments were made to enable local groups to travel to important meetings. The participant offered to share more information about RBF's work in this area.

Another participant stated that it is important to note that contexts differ from country to country. In Libya, there is much less hostility towards foreign funding than in Egypt, partly due to the constructive role that foreign powers played in overthrowing Ghaddafi. In Tunisia, this relationship is more difficult as there was a perceived lack of international support for the revolution.

One participant noted that a big problem in Libya is not foreign funding but that donations are given by a limited number of businessmen. Libyan NGO law does not restrict foreign funding - the only requirement is to disclose it.

Barbara stated that funders need to understand local contexts, otherwise funding can be hurtful. NGOism is a big problem in this regard, and donors should remain open to supporting other entities such as youth coalitions. What revolutionaries in all countries of the region were dreaming of is a new kind of leadership: collective and inclusive. These ambitions need to be strengthened.

Elie responded that unfortunately, CSOs have little legitimacy in many parts of the region. There was an example of a group in Lebanon which tries to unite people against the sectarian system – they were not able to gather more than a few hundred people together. Recommendation to encourage your partners to improve legitimacy in their own constituencies.

Final recommendations:

- Understand the local context.
- Strengthen intermediaries.
- Look beyond capitals and big cities.
- Explore what support is needed other than money.
- Provide long-term institutional support where possible.
- Hold multi-stakeholder conversations to find out how movements can be supported.
- Try to integrate the human rights into the language of local donors.
- Provide local donors with mechanisms to give.

- Help to achieve a shift from CSOs delivering services to involving them in policy-making.
- Share philanthropic practices across borders.
- Fund flexibly.

Funder Learning Visit to the Arab Region Tunis 8-10 May 2012

A View from the Outside: European Perspectives on Middle East Transitions

The Representative of the European Union in Tunisia shared his thoughts on the events in the region in 2011-12 and on the immediate period ahead.

Speaker: **Adrianus Koetsenruijter**, Head of EU Delegation to Tunisia

Moderator: **Fulco Van Deventer**, Policy Advisor, Cordaid

- Adrianus Koetsenruijter introduced himself and his work for the European External Action Service (EEAS). He said the EEAS is Europe's only unified political voice in the region; however, the EEAS under Lady Catherine Ashton is not completely independent but is in continuous consultation with the EU member states.
- The EEAS has an office with more than 50 staff in Tunis. Two important areas of cooperation are the economy and education. Since the revolution, the European Union decided to increase support for democratisation, the constitutional assembly, independent media, and civil society. Environmental issues and rural development only play a minor role.
- It was claimed that before the revolution, there were 9,000 NGOs in Tunisia – but most of them were sports clubs.
- What were the main characteristics of the Tunisian revolution?
 - Dynamics of globalisation played a major role: a growing middle class, a growing sense of the world, and a well-connected young generation.
 - The people felt desperate, left with high unemployment and no options, no independence, no freedom to choose.
 - Throughout the region, political power centres were not able to renew themselves; its leaders were aged (ex. Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, Muammar Ghaddafi in Libya, Zine Ben Ali in Tunisia) and there was a general feeling that something needed to change.
 - The revolution in Tunisia was a leaderless and a popular revolution, supported by the majority of Tunisians. The transition government which followed when the President and the Prime Minister stepped down was widely accepted by the population.
 - The current government is a democratic one. However, the election results were weak for liberal parties, and the two smaller parties which form part of the government troika are not strong enough to challenge Ennahda, which won 37% of the vote in the elections.

Discussion

Q: What was the role of the Tunisian army before and during the revolution? Can we start thinking about serious institutional reform anytime soon?

- The role of the army has been very limited – the police were much stronger. The army decided not to shoot its own people.
- If democracy ought to grow in Tunisia, then civil society will have to grow and centralised power will have to decrease. Power must be distributed at different levels. If the country is ruled only by the Parliament, then we will again see a small group dominate the country.
- Ennahda is a local movement – it is good that it exists, as long as there are checks and balances.

Q: What is your aid strategy?

- The overall amount of money available to support civil society organisations in Tunisia is about 10 million Euros.
- Supporting civil society is not the “natural” role of the European Union; the Tunisian government provide more structured support to CSOs.
- What is important is that the activity come from below. People have to take their own destiny into their hands, get used to freedom of speech and being able to take initiative.

Q: There is criticism about the double standards of the European Union regarding migration and economic development. Can the EU really make a difference in the next two years?

- Tunisia needs to be offered partnership to foster economic development and stability.

Q: After the revolution, the world is talking about conditionality [of support]. How can we address this with an Islamic government?

- What matters in the eyes of the European Union is the rule of law. Are we giving Tunisia the same guarantees that we have offered Spain and Poland? No, because we are not in the position to do so. Our support to Tunisia is about 160 million Euros, not a huge sum.
- Half of entrepreneurs of Tunisia are European
- Tunisia would be a good addition to the European Union. Half of Tunisia’s entrepreneurs are Europeans. Including Tunisia in the EU would not cost much money. However, Europeans are hostile to the idea of including Maghreb countries in the EU.
- Europe is not doing enough in Tunisia. And the EU is not actually spending more money overall, but it is redirecting money away from countries where no transition is happening.

Q: What are the key human rights challenges and how is civil society equipped to tackle those?

- The human rights challenges are still the same as before the revolution. Women for example are suffering more today than they were before; the society is conservative, and women are not treated as equal. Freedom of speech has improved though. Yet, all rights are on the agenda.

Q: What is the role of Qatar and other Gulf states for post-revolutionary Tunisia?

- Qatar is not a progressive state and not a democracy. There is no cultural connection between Tunisians and Qatars or Saudis. The Gulf monarchies also seldom make long-term commitments, unless there are chances for attractive investment.

FUNDER LEARNING VISIT TO THE ARAB REGION

TUNIS

MAY 8-10, 2012

Political Islam

Thursday, May 10, 2012

10:30-12:00 pm

Facilitator:

- Jo Andrews, Director, Ariadne—The Human Rights Funders Network

Panelists:

- Sheikh Rached Ghannouchi, Leader, Ennahda Political Part of Tunisia
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Session Description:

Islam in Middle Eastern politics is an important, influential and inevitable factor in the region's path toward democratic governance. Questions about secularism and religion in politics, foreign engagement, and Islam's compatibility with women's rights and individual freedom reveal the complexity of the role of Islam in a transitioning Middle East. Participants will engage with a prominent, formerly exiled, politician-scholar who has been described as the voice of moderate political Islam.

No notes available for this session.

FUNDER LEARNING VISIT TO THE ARAB REGION

TUNIS

MAY 8-10, 2012

U.S. Government Funding in MENA: Its Legacy and Future

Thursday, May 10, 2012

1:00-2:15 pm

Facilitator:

- Steve Riskin, Special Assistant to the President for Grants, U.S. Institute of Peace

Panelists:

- Richard Johannsen, Tunis Regional Office Director, Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), U.S. Department of State

Session Description:

In response to the removal of autocratic regimes and political uprisings, what is the current direction of U.S. government funding? Are the approaches to engagement adapting or static? How will the history of foreign funding inform its future commitments, if at all?

No notes available for this session.

Funder Learning Visit to the Arab Region Tunis 8-10 May 2012

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

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