
Conference Report

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Arab Uprisings: Challenges during Political Transitions and Comparative Lessons for Civil Societies in the Middle East and North Africa

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INTRODUCTION

The recent wave of popular uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) brought together various societal actors that have since pushed for significant socioeconomic and political transformations in their countries. Amongst these actors, civil society movements (including women's and youth organizations) have been particularly present and active. To a large extent and in varying forms, they have been in the driving seat of these changes all over the region.

Such a development is not unique to the MENA region. A similar key role for civil society (CS) was previously observed on an equally large regional scale during transitions from authoritarian to democratic rule in Latin America in the 1980s and in Central and Eastern Europe in the 1990s. Yet research and experience demonstrate that while CS generally proves to be united by a common goal during the 'revolution' phase, it often loses its decisive role during transitions.

From April 18 to 20 in Amman, Jordan, the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, in cooperation with the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, the Arab Reform Initiative, and the Geneva Centre for Security Policy convened a regional consultation workshop on the role of civil society in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. This consultation was part of a new project of the Institute's Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding (CCDP) on "Arab Spring: Challenges during Political Transitions and Comparative Lessons for Civil Societies in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)" launched in February 2012. This project aims to make systematic use of existing research knowledge to help strengthen the role and sustainable participation of civil society groups in the MENA region.

The Amman consultation drew over 70 participants from the region and beyond, including CS activists, international and regional researchers as well as diplomats and donor representatives. Participants came from eight Arab countries – Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Yemen, Morocco, Algeria, Lebanon and Jordan – and had been involved in key events of Arab uprisings and continue to be implicated in the transition processes, whether in their capacity as activists, journalists, lawyers, researchers and/or citizens. Prominent international transition experts were also invited to discuss the challenges facing the region and to present possible response strategies for civil societies based on the experiences of Latin America, Africa, as well as Central and Eastern and Western Europe. Providing a space for dialogue and reflection, the consultation sought to generate comparative learning from transition processes inside and outside the region.

The present report takes a closer look at the key questions raised and discussed during the consultation, presenting the main findings and drawing conclusions for next steps. Among the main themes that emerged were the changing nature of the current transitions; the tensions between different segments of CS; the relationship between the civil and the political sphere; the

nature and sequence of institutional reforms as well as the potentially problematic nature of external funding in the region.

MAIN TERMS

“Transition”

Transition refers to an evolution from one political regime to another. It generally begins with the dissolution of a non-democratic political regime that is carried out either in a reformist or revolutionary way. Transition processes are multi-dimensional, giving rise to political, economic and social transformations.

Comparative learning shows that transition is a long-term and open-ended process. Though democracy is often the stated objective, the outcome is unpredictable because it is context specific. It depends both on structural factors, including socio-economic factors, institutional setting, class structures, social dynamics, regional environment, international relations among others, and short term dynamics such as elite positioning, elections outcome, early constitutional reforms, degree of violence, and so forth. Therefore, the trajectory of democracy is not linear and can entail setbacks. Importantly, the concept of ‘transition’ has to be used with caution since many assume a teleological perspective, with democracy as the expected end point.

“Transition” in the MENA context

In the Middle East and North African region, the meaning of transition has changed with the Arab Spring. Before the Arab uprisings which began in January 2011, transition referred merely to top-down political and economic reforms led by states in the region since the 1980s. These reforms did not launch a process of democratization but rather enabled the reshaping of authoritarian rule in response to external and internal challenges, known as “up-grading authoritarianism”. With the popular uprisings, transition takes on different meaning since transformations result from pressure by the people. The Arab uprisings have effectively triggered bottom-up demands for thorough socio-economic change and in-depth political transformation, which continue to be heard. At the same time, however, top-down processes have persisted and shaped ongoing reforms.

Civil society

Civil society is generally understood as the arena of voluntary collective actions, taking place around shared interests, purposes and values that are distinct from those of the state, family and market. It consists of a large and diverse set of organizations that are not purely driven by private or economic interests, tend to show civic virtue, and are autonomously organized and interact within the public sphere. While civil society is independent from the state, it is both *oriented towards* it and *interacts closely with* it.

CS groups include a wide array of organizations such as unions and professional associations, interest groups, faith-based organizations, traditional and community groups, researchers and research institutions, service delivery organizations, social and political movements, as well as business networks.

To better understand civil society, it can be seen as the space where the three other spheres (state, business, family) overlap. Such a view of civil society seems closer to reality as actors within each of the specific sectors can also be active in civil society. For instance, entrepreneurs, who are usually part of the business sector, act as civil society when demanding tax exemptions through their business association. Another example are the media. Although they are part of the business sector, journalists can act as civil society with their associations when they demand, for example, freedom of expression. This understanding also helps to identify other actors who have a role in civil society, such as traditional groupings.

Such perspective is particularly important because, historically, the notion of civil society has been mostly a Western concept, tied to the political emancipation of European citizens from former feudalistic linkages, monarchy and the state during the 18th and 19th centuries. It is therefore important to analyze the historical and present understanding of civil society in the MENA region.

Civil society in the MENA context

Although the origins of the concept of CS are found in Western political philosophy, the notion is widely used today in the MENA region. In Arabic, CS translates either as *al-mujtama al-madani*, or as *al-mujtama al-ahlî*. The two notions are not etymologically equivalent. While the former refers to civic ties, the latter refers to primordial solidarities. Moreover, the former usually belongs to the “modern” part of CS, in the form of human right and development organizations, whereas the latter belongs to the “traditional” part of CS, in the form of kin-based organizations and religious charities. Religious charities, Muslim and Christian alike, represent a centuries-old tradition in the region, while “liberal” associations, such as professional and rights organizations, only emerged at the turn of the twentieth century during the French and the British mandates. The latter

organizations were involved in political struggles and played a significant role in the move toward independence.

In the postcolonial era, the CS sphere in the region was shaped largely in relation to the authoritarian state, giving rise to contradictory dynamics. On the one hand, authoritarian regimes sought to undermine the potential political role of CS through corporatism, cooptation, legal restrictions and sanctions. In this context, “liberal associations” became weak and marginalized. On the other hand, political dissidents and opposition moved from the political to the CS sphere, effectively leading to a politisation of the CS sphere. For instance, in the 1980s and the 1990s, professional associations became the loci of competition between Islamist and secularist movements. Since the late 1990s, secular political opponents acted through human rights associations, while the Islamist fringe was more active in charities and service provision.

Yet, their meanings vary in contemporary uses depending on national contexts. For instance, in Palestine (Challand, 2009) and in Syria (Ruiz de Elvira, 2010), the distinction between *madani* and *ahlî* reflects political positioning. Beside national differences, one might observe that human rights activists usually define themselves as *al-mujtama al-madani* that entails the connotation of “modernity”. On the contrary, Islamic charities are referred as *al-mujtama al-ahlî* that has the connotation of “traditional”.

As a result, researchers on CS in the region were historically split between relativists who argue that CS does not exist in the region and universalists who assert that there are MENA civil societies. Prior to the Arab uprisings, debates over the definition of “MENA civil societies” revolved around four main issues: religiosity (Are religious associations part of civil society?), class (Is civil society necessarily “bourgeoise”?), primordial ties (Are primordial groups, such as tribes, part of civil society?) and autonomy (Do associations have to be autonomous from the political sphere to be part of civil society?).

THE ARAB UPRISINGS AND ONGOING TRANSFORMATIONS

From a macro-historical point of view, the Arab uprisings represent some of the most tremendous changes in the structures of the region. Despite being a regional phenomenon, the uprisings have evolved into diverging trajectories. They have shifted attention from international politics to domestic issues and have brought about complex and often contradictory dynamics.

Regional phenomenon

During the Amman consultation, participants agreed that the popular uprisings in the MENA region constitute a historic event that has fundamentally changed the notion of governance in the region. Relationships to the ruler and to political authority embodied in leaders and heads of states have been permanently challenged. This change has been variously described as an unprecedented mental revolution, or simply “the end of the fear of the ruler”. In effect, the most popular slogan of the uprisings has been: “the people want the fall of the regime” (*al shaab yourid isqat al nidham*). Moreover, the uprisings have put Arab societies at the centre and forefront of changes and transformations underway. Today, pan-Arabism takes the form of shared democratic principles and values, rather than the historic attention on the Arab-Israeli conflict.

At the same time, the uprisings have been characterized by active regional interconnections and perceptible mimetism. Pan-Arab media, Al Jazeera in particular, and social media have played defining roles in spreading slogans and experiences. People throughout the region have taken to the streets and have ruled through the squares, acquiring increasing initiative, occupying public space and employing multifaceted mobilization tactics and techniques. Cries for dignity and democracy have resounded across every country.

In the aftermath of the uprisings, states and societies are all more likely to be attentive to domestic issues rather than external problems. In effect, participants noted how even the workshop discussions were moving away from the Arab-Israeli conflict to the more pressing domestic questions of putting an end to authoritarian rule and negotiating a new social contract. Participants also raised the concern that the movements started because of severe economic, social, or cultural problems that are now being sidelined by political issues.

Diverging trajectories

The uprisings across the region have not been uniform and have involved diverging trajectories. Rulers have reacted differently in the face of popular mobilizations, and thus different scenarios have played out. Moreover, while presidents have been brought down in the republics of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen, monarchies in the region have, so far, been resilient to protests.

Firstly, the uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen have successfully deposed the targeted rulers and opened up the political spheres to new actors. In less than one month, grassroots protests swept Tunisia and then Egypt, resulting in the overthrow of decades-old regimes and their heads. In Libya and Yemen, however, protests did not immediately result in the overthrow of the regimes and continued over months, turning into warfare and giving rise to foreign intervention. In Libya, armed conflict between rebels and pro-regime forces spread throughout the country, giving way to UN-authorized foreign intervention led by a NATO military coalition,

which lasted until the capture and killing of the regime head, Colonel Muammar Gaddafi. In Yemen, similarly, protests and clashes continued for nearly one year until the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) effectively brokered the president's resignation. Despite these diverging experiences, however, all four countries appear to have embarked on transitions away from authoritarian rule. Moreover, profound debates around society, political institutions and the relation between the political sphere and the CS sphere are now taking place.

Secondly, popular mobilizations in Syria and Bahrain have been met with a clamp down and violent repression. These countries continue to be embroiled in ongoing revolutionary violence, often verging on civil war, and broader geopolitical conflicts. In Syria, CS activists have been caught in the crossfire and are losing their lives. Although the uprising in Bahrain has not taken as violent a turn, CS activists continue to be imprisoned, often facing life sentences.

Finally, Morocco, Jordan and Lebanon have been experiencing peaceful protests and pressure for reforms. In these countries, protests borrow and draw on the legitimacy and defining cries of the Arab uprisings. At the same time, workshop participants from these countries sought to lay claim to the roots of the Arab uprisings by describing their own countries' reform processes that have been underway since the 1990s. On the one hand, Lebanon has experienced various reformist thrusts following the end of the civil war in 1990, the withdrawal of Israeli troops in 2000 and the withdrawal of Syrian troops in 2005. On the other hand, monarchies such as Jordan and Morocco have been putting social, political and constitutional reforms cautiously into place in order to avoid revolutions. Such slow and piecemeal reformist processes vary among the three countries, presenting opportunities for new transformations or simply the continuation of former ones.

Complex dynamics

Far from being linear, transitions also include complex dynamics, particularly where countries have experienced revolutions. Effectively, with more democracy and globalization in the region, have come more religiosity and conservatism. Current debates oppose two main political projects, a secular and liberal model on the one hand, and a political Islam model on the other hand. The outcome of these combinations has yet to be seen. Former comparative experiences show that transition from authoritarian to democratic rule may allow for the emergence of competing and often antagonistic projects, which renew normative designations of "good guys" and "bad guys".

Contradictory dynamics in the aftermath of the uprisings have generated mixed reactions and ambiguous feelings towards the Arab uprisings and their evolution. Accordingly, participants diverged in their interpretation of the Arab Spring as a metaphor of renewal. While some see greater opportunities for freedom of expression, political freedoms, participation and inclusion, others fear that the so-called Arab Spring will bring forth the "winter". These latter recognize that

transition is inherently fragile. They fear regression in terms of human rights violations, intolerance towards cultural diversity and societal fragmentation.

In sum, while the Arab uprisings share a common agenda of social justice, dignity and the overthrow of authoritarian rule, their unfolding has been neither similar nor linear. In Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen, the overthrow of the regime happened relatively quickly and transition away from authoritarianism is underway. In Syria and Bahrain the uprisings are protracted and have involved widespread violence and bloodletting. In contrast, monarchies, such as Jordan and Morocco, remain resilient to the ongoing protests until today. With people power now a force in the transitions, and with the opening up of the political sphere, competing and conflicting trends are emerging, mainly opposing a secular and liberal political vision on the one hand, and political Islam on the other.

CIVIL SOCIETY BETWEEN INCLUSION AND FRAGMENTATION

Civil society mirrors societal fragmentation

While there is an ideational vision of CS as a sphere built above social, economic and cultural divisions, and an assumption that CS represents the so-called public interest, empirical findings show that CS more likely mirrors cleavages found in the wider society. CS actors are organizations that reflect their own interests and those of particular social classes, professions, religious or political affiliations, among others.

In the region specifically, cultural and religious diversity of the societies and their cumulative cleavages have given rise to deep, complex and variegated fragmentation lines that continue to define civil societies: religious / secular, urban / rural, democratic / undemocratic, paternalistic / egalitarian, universal / fundamentalist, grassroots / elitist, and pro-regime / opposition.

Moving between inclusion and fragmentation

During the uprisings, CS groups and society at large tended to put their differences aside for one common purpose – the fall of the regime. Previously organized CS groups did not take part in the protests as such, but rather as individual people including youth and women. Islamists tended to join the mobilizations belatedly. Once the fall of the regime occurred, however, deep social cleavages gradually emerged, particularly a divergence in values and visions.

This is not uncommon as comparative international experiences show that CS generally unites around a common goal during revolutionary periods, but then tends to lose its decisive role and become fragmented in the aftermath. In Poland, for instance, the *Solidarnosc* social movement was

extensively supported and backed up by the Catholic Church during the revolution, but the Church became more partial and closed in on itself in the transition phase.

In the aftermath of the uprisings, and with the opening up of the political sphere, differences between religious and secularist activists are becoming more salient. During the workshop, secularist activists expressed resentment against religious groups, in particular those representing branches of political Islam. Bushra Al Maktari, a Yemeni feminist activist, explained her frustration about the belated mobilization of the Muslim Brothers. While she had marched from the south of the country to Sanaa, along with nine other women out of 600 people, thousands of men and women affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood joined the protest only as it neared Sanaa, days into the march. Such narratives lead secularist activists to fear their uprisings are being hijacked and used by Islamist groups for political ends. Youth activists and women in particular feel such highly organized groups as Islamist groups are sidelining them.

Effectively, while Islamists were among the last to join the mobilizations, they have registered the biggest political gains in the aftermath of the uprisings because they are better organized and enjoy a genuine social basis. As they work in rural and urban poor areas, providing such services as health and education, Islamist movements are considered more legitimate by people living in those areas. Secularist CS groups tend to have a small membership base, and as such, are often perceived as elitist, donor-compliant and Western-oriented.

Yet, even among the Islamist groups, there exist cleavages. In Egypt, for instance, Salafi groups are perceived as more grassroots and egalitarian, since their leaders are to be found among many rural villages and share similar backgrounds as their constituents. Muslim Brothers, in contrast, are considered as belonging to another socio-economic class and as being politically manipulative.

Towards inclusion?

While fragmentation after revolutionary periods is a general trend, a historical overview of transition processes in other regions demonstrates that inclusive processes have higher chances of achieving democratic governance. Collaboration among CS actors is an important asset for successful transition processes. It is necessary to include all relevant parties in the debate in order to create common space and build consensus around a new social contract. In Colombia, for instance, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and the Catholic Church were key in bringing together trade unionists and entrepreneurs, political opposition and government parties, and human rights activists and military officials, thus generating confidence and trust among them. This paved the way for the emergence of a group of young politicians who played a very important role in the peace negotiations with guerilla groups during the 1980s and early 1990s, culminating in the writing of the constitution in 1991.

In response to the fears and antagonisms expressed by secularist activists during the workshop vis-à-vis their Islamist counterparts, regional and international researchers invited participants to

reconsider their understanding of political Islam and to acknowledge the various currents therein. Such reflection enables the recognition of shared values among secular and Islamist CS groups. Researchers effectively explained that Islamization of mainstream society has been underway for over three decades, and that this historical trend cannot be overlooked. Researchers further suggested that CS and Islamist movements have been construed as “antinomies” by Western donors and policy-makers.

In sum, the CS sphere reflects wider societal fragmentation. In the aftermath of the uprisings particularly a deep cleavage between religious and secularist activists has become accentuated. Historical knowledge from transition processes in other parts of the world shows that inclusion and collaboration among CS actors are important assets for successful transition processes. Accordingly, transitions from authoritarian to democratic rule in the region may provide an opportunity to generate inclusive debate among CS actors, as well as between the CS sphere and the political sphere.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POLITICAL SOCIETY AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Comparative learning highlights the relationship between the CS sphere and the political sphere as one of the key factors during transition processes in Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe. This relationship includes CS linkages with political parties, CS relation to the state, as well as individual trajectories from one sphere to the other. Dynamics between these two spheres change through time, especially during transition processes. In the current MENA context, it depends on the nature of political changes undertaken – whether revolutions or reforms. It also depends on the authoritarian heritage since activists expressed a general mistrust toward the political sphere.

As noted, revolutions happened only in four out of the eight countries present at the workshop. Where ruling systems survived the Arab Spring – Jordan, Morocco, Algeria and Lebanon – there are arguably narrower opportunities for a radical redefinition of the relationship between the two spheres. Yet, CS organizations can pressure political reforms by monitoring government activities, lobbying for specific reforms, and leading protests. In Morocco, for example, CS representatives have been fully involved in democratization reforms initiated by the ruling regime in the 1990s. In Jordan, CS organizations will be able to exercise greater influence in the coming period due to the urge for political reforms in the aftermath of the uprisings and the failure of political parties to lead that process.

The uprisings were primarily spontaneous and massive social movements. While the participants acknowledged that CS organizations, including human rights organizations, professional

associations and trade unions, paved the way for the revolutions by organizing protests before 2011, these actors did not lead the revolutions. Yet, they supported the social movements. In Egypt, for instance, they played an important role in monitoring human rights violations. Comparative learning actually shows that well-established CS organizations are often surprised by and taken by the movements that bring down autocratic regimes, and their role becomes more important after the autocratic regimes fall.

In the aftermath of the uprisings, one can observe a polarization among CS actors between those who distance themselves from the political scene, and those who become political activists. Those who lead the revolution are not necessarily those who will lead the transition process. Groups actively involved in the revolution, especially women and young activists, complain of being marginalized in the current political scene. In contrast, Islamist movements tend to dominate the political scene, although they were among the last to join the popular uprisings. These features seem to be in line with the main findings from the experiences of Latin American and European transitions. In those regions, most of the social movements disappeared after the revolution. Some became political parties and lost their revolutionary spirit. Others became more formal and professionalized organizations under the influence of foreign donors.

Civil society sphere and partisan politics

In the aftermath of the uprisings, groups from the CS sphere can choose to get involved in partisan politics. In the MENA region, because of the control and the constraints previously imposed by authoritarian regimes on the political sphere, political opponents moved to the CS sphere. In this way, CS actors came to represent the actual political opposition to the regime whereas legal political parties were co-opted by the regime. For these reasons, many CS activists today have been reluctant to engage with political parties because they continue to mistrust them.

Workshop discussions suggested that the situation is reversed since 2011, with CS actors now trying to create their own political parties, even in countries where uprisings did not take place. Islamist movements have been the most successful in negotiating their transition to institutional politics in Tunisia and Egypt, where they won the elections. Nevertheless, electoral success is not necessary for CS actors to enter the political sphere. In the new political climate, political parties are being created to represent the political opposition. In Tunisia, for instance, among the wide range of CS actors that enrolled in the Tunisian elections, those who lost became organized into political parties and moved into the political opposition. They are now monitoring government activities. New political parties are also being created in Jordan, where young activists are becoming aware of the need to engage in partisan politics in order to promote their interests and influence political reforms. However, instead of becoming members of the already established political parties, which they do not trust, Jordanian young activists are now seeking to establish their own.

Whereas Western donors tend to advocate a strict separation between political parties and CS organizations, comparative historical experiences show that these two types of organizations can benefit from each other. Reasons for Islamist movements' electoral success have been extensively discussed in one of the working groups. Besides the fact that they are better organized, Islamist movements benefit from a higher degree of legitimacy. Their involvement in the CS sphere contributes positively to their legitimacy. As a matter of fact, Islamist CS organizations are considered to be aware of people's needs since they usually provide services to them and are closer to their values. The recent Islamist experience echoes major findings on transitions in Latin America and Eastern Europe with regards to the mutually beneficial interaction between the CS sphere and the political parties after a revolution. In former transition experiences, CS organizations have played the role of 'anteroom' for partisan politics. They have provided resources for political parties (social base, legitimacy, visibility) and for activists who have moved into politics (skills, networking).

Finally, the case of Lebanon reveals the influence of funding in the decision to get involved in partisan politics. In Lebanon, CS organizations were part of the opposition to the political status quo during Syrian tutelage. Yet, only few CS organizations tried to make the transition to the political game after the withdrawal of the Syrian army in 2005. Besides the domination of older political parties on the political scene, one of the main reasons is the fact once they become political parties they can no longer access foreign aid as easily.

Civil society sphere and the state

CS organizations can also play a role in strategic thinking by being part of the debates on key issues regarding political reforms (constitutional, electoral and legal reforms, socio-economic reforms, etc.). Groups do not necessarily have to move to partisan politics to do so. In Tunisia, for example, CS representatives are fully involved in the writing of the new constitution and new laws. However, some human rights activists prefer to keep at a distance from the state and to limit their action to their monitoring activities. For instance, Egyptian human rights activists reject any compromise with the political sphere since it remains under the influence of the military. Hence, they believe the best way not to slip back to authoritarianism is to remain vigilant of human rights abuses.

Building trust between the CS sphere and the state is one of the major challenges since such engineering requires overcoming fears inherited from authoritarian rule. According to international researchers, CS involvement in negotiations with the state on the ongoing reforms might help to develop positive interactions and build mutual trust. One major challenge in this respect is related to time lines, since CS operates on a shorter temporality than the state and CS activists work for immediate change whereas state reform can take more than three decades, as the Latin American and European experiences of transition show. During the conference, activists

expressed a general mistrust toward state institutions and the rulers. Since independence, the political sphere – through cooptation, administrative, legal and security means – has heavily controlled the CS sphere. In this respect, one extreme case is Yemen, where the so-called “CS organizations” were actually among the corrupted constituencies denounced by the people, along with the state, political parties and the tribes. Hence, for the activists the priority is to assert their autonomy from the state by reforming association laws in order to maintain the freedoms gained during the uprisings, rather than building a reliable state.

Individual trajectories from one sphere to the other

CS activists can get individually involved in partisan politics to facilitate the transition. In Poland, for instance, Lech Walesa emerged as the uncontested leader of the social movements. He benefited from a high degree of legitimacy that enabled him to move into the political sphere. CS activists can also serve as civil servants to contribute to political reforms from inside.

In sum, the relation between the CS sphere and the political sphere in the current MENA context depends on the nature of political changes. In countries where changes are conducted in a reformist way, there are narrower opportunities for a radical redefinition of the relationship between the two spheres. Yet, CS organizations continue to pressure for political reforms through protests, monitoring and lobbying activities. In countries where revolutions occurred, changes can be observed at three levels: linkages with political parties, the relation to the state and individual trajectories. First, CS groups are moving from the CS sphere to the political sphere by creating political parties and competing in the electoral process. In this respect, Islamist movements have been the most successful because they benefit from the legitimacy and the visibility of activities conducted in the CS sphere. In contrast, groups that lead the revolution, especially youth and feminist activists are under-represented in the electoral game. These observations echo previous experiences in Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe. Second, comparative learning shows that CS organizations can usefully contribute to the debates on key issues regarding state reforms (constitutional, electoral and legal reforms, socio-economic reforms, etc.). However, the establishment of a fruitful relationship between the CS sphere and the state faces two main challenges in the present context. Not only is there a general mistrust between the two spheres inherited from authoritarian rule, but also state and CS operate along different time lines. Finally, individuals can move from the CS sphere to the political sphere, either as political leaders or civil servants, in order to implement political changes.

INTERNAL CHALLENGES OF CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS

Comparative experiences show that CS organizations' ability to influence political, economic and social transformations effectively depends on three main internal factors: 1) the efficiency of their decision-making process, 2) the coherence and impact of their activities, and 3) their legitimacy vis-à-vis the wider society. Regarding these three points, the consultation highlighted several challenges for CS organizations in the region.

Organizational challenges

Among the internal challenges identified during the consultation were the lack of strategy and leadership and the risk of scattered nature of many civil society activities.

Comparative learning shows the need for internal strategic capacities and an efficient decision-making process, two prerequisites for enabling the implementation of a clearly defined agenda. These conditions depend on the structural congruence of the organization. In a given organization, hierarchic decision-making arrangements and the presence of a leader tend to be more efficient than fully democratic ones, especially with regard to facilitating decision-making, but this is not always the case. In the region, the "virtual" movements that emerged during the uprisings have been very successful in mobilizing the masses. However, their capacity in terms of decision-making is weak due to their fluidity and lack of organisation. According to some participants, the lack of "physical" places to meet and act, that characterized virtual social movements emerging from the uprisings, might also undermine the ability to make decisions. Hence, it is more difficult for such movements to influence ongoing reforms. During the consultation, Libyan participants in particular expressed deep concerns regarding their lack of skills to set up strategic plans, self-organize and mobilize resources.

Comparative historical experiences from other regions show that unfocused and dispersed activities undermine CS contributions to transitions. During transitions, CS organisations are often moved by new circumstances to take on different kinds of activities in order to address newly emerging and changing needs, including monitoring human rights, lobbying political reforms, providing services, etc. During the workshop, CS activists mainly discussed this issue in relation to political activities. On the one hand, women and human rights activists perceive two alternatives: to monitor human rights and/or to participate in political reforms. On the other hand, the "new-comers" to CS, the Yemenis and the Libyans in particular, feel the need to train the new political elite through capacity-building and empowerment activities.

Ensuring legitimacy

Comparative learning regarding CS legitimacy shows that while revolutionary movements benefit from a high level of legitimacy in the short term, their level of legitimacy tends to decrease in the long term when they struggle to meet the expectations of the population.

During the consultation, the human rights activists discussed the reasons for their lack of legitimacy. Among the main issues raised were the lack of social base, elitism as a result of professionalization, as well as the lack of transparency regarding their funding sources (see below).

Several participants stressed the need for CS groups to 'occupy spaces' in order to maintain their legitimacy. First, there is a need to occupy physical spaces. Effectively, CS groups benefit from greater legitimacy when they are present not only in urban and rich areas, but also in rural and poor areas. In the region, there is significant difference between human right organisations and Islamist movements in terms of physical space occupation. The Egyptian revolution provides a good illustration in this respect. Whereas *Kifaya* and the *6 April* movements could only be found in Tahrir square, Islamist movements could be found in the rest of the country.

The second space to occupy is the one of the media (national TV channels, newspapers, Internet). Communication has been a key instrument in the Arab uprisings. On the one hand, social media facilitated the mass mobilization of people by creating a social space to exchange information. On the other hand, mass media, such as Al Jazeera, disseminated the revolutionary spirit from one country to another. In the aftermath of the revolutions, communication continues to play an important role in building legitimacies. In this respect, social media are able to mobilize people, they allow for diverging opinions, and provide a space for freedom of expression. For human rights activists, social media can help to monitor violations and disseminate information. However, social media do not reach illiterate people and remote areas. According to one of the participants, legitimate CS actors are those who are able to capture the imagination of the urban and rural poor. Hence, the revolutionary spirit should move from social media towards popular TV channels in order to reach a broader audience and inform political debates.

In sum, civil societies' influence in the aftermath of popular uprisings depends greatly on their internal ability to respond effectively to the new situation. During the consultation, three main challenges were discussed. First, CS groups that emerged during the uprisings, namely virtual social movements and CS groups in Libya and Yemen, have weak organizational settings that may impair their strategic capacities and decision-making processes. Second, CS organizations are stretched between different priorities to meet new expectations in the aftermath of the revolution, further undermining their impact and efficiency. Finally, CS organizations' influence depends on their legitimacy toward the wider society. In the region, CS organizations' legitimacy varies

depending on their ability to be present in popular areas and in the media. In particular, Islamist associations, which are well represented in rural and poor areas, benefit from greater legitimacy than human rights organizations, which are often located in urban and relatively wealthy areas.

NATURE AND SEQUENCE OF INSTITUTIONAL REFORMS

Political transformations usually materialize through institutional reform processes. In this respect, elections and constitutional reforms are key steps to secure regime change in the aftermath of revolutions while transitional justice is rather a long-term process. There is no ready-made recipe to achieve these reforms, but the CS sphere can contribute positively by facilitating the attainment of a general consensus.

Elections

Elections are essential to keep the political space open after the revolutions. However, they are ambivalent instruments and phases, especially in fragmented societies, as they might exacerbate divisions. Moreover, the sequence of constitutional reforms and elections matters. If elections are held before the main actors have approved a number of issues, they can make negotiations even more difficult to the point that it becomes impossible to agree on a new social contract. The recent Egyptian experience emphasizes the importance of timing in the electoral process. According to one of the workshop participants, Egyptian counter-revolution forces sought to hold elections before any agreement was reached with their opponents in order to isolate the latter from the political sphere. As a consequence, it has been very difficult to establish a constitutional assembly. Moreover, the Polish and other East European experiences show that the first elections do not necessarily reveal the actual political forces at stake. They serve rather as a plebiscite allowing a frustrated and previously silenced electorate to express its rejection of a discredited regime. Finally, the first elections often favour those who benefit from pre-existing organizational settings (Bulgaria and Romania), although in some East European contexts (Hungary and Poland) the organized institutions of the past, such as the (reformed) Communist Parties, may have to wait for the plebiscitary wave to pass to return victorious in the second round of elections.

Constitutional and legal reforms

Regarding the role of CS, the Central and Eastern European experiences suggest that CS actors can successfully participate in so-called roundtable discussions, through which a general consensus is built on defining the mandate or frame of a constituent assembly, or on deciding the modalities of the first elections. Elections and constitutional reforms are political projects, and not solely technical issues. Hence, the input of CS representatives into these institutional issues helps to build

a wide consensus and to legitimate the new political system. In this respect, Tunisia has been the most successful example in the region so far. After the revolution, meetings have been held with wide representation. Elections have been run, in a fairly transparent way, to establish the constitution assembly. CS representatives are now involved in the elected assembly and have proposed new draft laws. In contrast, the Jordanian reform process is narrower. Wide consultations have been held, but the writing of the electoral law has been limited to the government. Independent legal scholars have not been called upon to draft the new law.

Transitional justice

The issue of transitional justice and impunity were not widely addressed during the conference. Nevertheless, participants acknowledged that dealing with the past contributes positively to transition processes in the long run. In Morocco, for instance, the national transitional justice initiative is regarded as one of the key steps in the democratization process. Activists discussed the different models of transitional justice and the role of the state in that process. In the region, we find very different approaches to transitional justice, from the sole 2006 amnesty law in Algeria to the government-driven 2004-2005 initiative “Instance Equité et Réconciliation” in Morocco and more recently to the trial of Hosni Mubarak.

In sum, the CS sphere can play a decisive role in the institutional reform processes, including elections, constitutional and legal reforms, as well as transitional justice. Not only does the CS sphere push for reforms, but also the input from CS representatives into these institutional issues helps to build a wider consensus and to legitimate the new political system. However, comparative learning shows that elections are ambivalent instruments in the immediate aftermath of popular uprisings. Since elections can exacerbate existing divisions, agreement on constitutional reforms is often crucial prior to the holding of actual elections.

FOREIGN AID

Is foreign aid needed?

In the aftermath of the uprisings, the need for foreign aid, understood as including both financial aid and technical assistance, is under revision. While the need for financial aid is not obvious, given that the region is middle income and enjoys a majority of the world’s oil reserves, CS actors from Libya and Yemen in particular are requesting non-financial support in the form of capacity-building and technical expertise.

Regarding financial aid, while some participants called for a new “Marshall plan” to support the transition processes, others retorted that countries such as Libya have extraordinary oil resources that could finance the entire region’s economies. Hence, the issue is rather how to use those resources.

The need for technical assistance was similarly met with mixed reactions during the workshop discussions. On the one hand, some Lebanese CS activists observed that foreign aid has partially realized its goals of opening up and democratizing the political sphere in the region and thus is no longer required. On the other hand, newly emerging CS activists in Libya and Yemen called for more aid in the form of capacity-building and expertise in order to realize their newfound missions and help ensure their autonomy from the political sphere.

Politics of aid

Foreign aid can act as a double-edge sword, at once a blessing and a curse for the region. It is not simply a question of technical cooperation but involves strong political dimensions. It serves as both a pretext and an opportunity to intervene in the national and international affairs of the region. Activists and researchers throughout the region are aware of the conditionalities attached to aid and the various normative agendas that donors pursue through aid. More recently, criticisms of aid in the region are shifting from Western actors to regional actors, including actors in the Gulf region. Foreign aid is being employed by the latter to influence the ongoing mobilizations in Syria and Bahrain.

Foreign aid programs and foreign policy more broadly affect the agenda and priorities of recipient countries. Over four decades in Latin America, foreign aid priorities have shifted from the developmental paradigm to the political transition paradigm and finally to the security paradigm. As a result, in Colombia, funding priorities have moved from democratization programs to counter-insurgency and drug trafficking while the transition to democracy has not been realized yet. In contrast, the possibility of accession to the European Union (EU) constituted the greatest incentive for political integration and transition to democracy in Eastern Europe. In particular, the EU “carrot-and-stick” approach and substantial financial support enhanced transition processes in the region.

Aid and its beneficiaries

Foreign aid affects CS priorities, practices and legitimacy. Firstly, comparative learning shows that CS priorities tend to change along the transition process and that foreign donors have a strong influence on the kind of priorities endorsed by CS actors. As previously mentioned, shifting foreign aid paradigms hamper efforts made by CS groups to address issues that become irrelevant for donors.

Secondly, foreign aid affects CS practices by simultaneously giving rise to NGOization and professionalization. To access financial aid, CS organizations professionalize their practices to meet donors' expectations in terms of transparency and bureaucratic efficiency. In the process, however, their legitimacy is affected. Since CS organizations are traditionally volunteer-based, professionalized NGOs are perceived as donor-oriented and cut off from grassroots activities. Moreover, problems of excessive funding are possible. Comparative experience from Latin America shows that excessive funding in one country or on one specific issue prevents the emergence of CS accumulation, integration and cooperation.

Finally, foreign aid remains a contentious subject as it can serve to delegitimize beneficiaries, particularly in the aftermath of the uprisings. In Egypt, for instance, CS groups and activists have come under attack and are being investigated for receiving foreign funding. Such groups are further accused of pursuing foreign agendas and are delegitimized especially vis-à-vis one of the crucial goals of the uprising, that is, to put an end to foreign tutelage. In this way, CS groups struggle between the need to benefit from international resources and expertise and the desire to maintain a degree of autonomy from donors.

Donors' approach in the aftermath of the Arab uprising

In the aftermath of the uprisings, donors are confronted with their own undermined legitimacies. In effect, they are aware of the contradiction that has defined their role in the region, as one of propping up illegitimate regimes and authoritarianism more broadly while promoting distinctive values and principles, such as civil liberties and universal human rights. This contradiction between interests and values has undermined their legitimacy among CS groups. Moreover, donors' understanding of the nature of CS and its actors in the region has tended to be narrow and restrictive. Historically, Western donors have engaged those CS actors they consider as the acceptable "other," sharing supposedly similar values, and not including Islamists.

During the workshop, donors expressed recognition of the homegrown and indigenous nature of the uprisings and a realization that it is time for a new conception of, and approach to, aid. Moreover, they recognized the need to cultivate relationships with "alternative" actors, such as Islamists, despite the difficulties in doing so and perceptions of certain Islamist groups as being "closed off". They responded to calls for a more inclusive definition of CS and expressed a new will for working together and engaging in common purposes. Diplomats similarly reiterated this new approach to foreign aid in terms of reacting to homegrown and domestic needs, rather than imposing what is considered "needed" *a priori* by CS actors working in the various countries of the region.

In sum, foreign aid has come under new scrutiny in the aftermath of the uprisings. On the one hand, there is awareness that financial aid may not be necessary. On the other hand, emerging CS

actors and groups are making new demands for aid in the form of training and capacity-building. Yet old and new CS actors alike are attentive to the politicizing role that aid plays, and the effects it carries into their priorities, practices, and legitimacy. Similarly, donors are coming to terms with their own legacy of contradiction vis-à-vis the CS sphere in the region. They recognize the bottom-up transformations that are sweeping the region and thus the need for a new approach to aid, and in particular, the need for engaging new actors.

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The Arab uprisings constitute a historic event and represent fundamental changes in the structures of the contemporary region that can neither be overturned nor reversed. Individuals and social movements alike have gained increased initiative and leverage for bottom-up mobilization and have overcome the old fear of the ruler. In parallel to the growing force of people power, the political sphere is opening up to various societal forces. At the same time, transitions from authoritarian to democratic rule are not linear, presenting opportunities and challenges alike for CS.

On the one hand, CS groups are moving from the CS sphere to the political sphere by creating political parties and competing in the electoral process. In this respect, Islamist movements have been the most successful because they benefit from legitimacy and visibility of activities conducted in the CS sphere. Moreover, CS organizations are contributing to the debates on key issues regarding state reforms (constitutional, electoral and legal reforms, socio-economic reforms, etc.).

On the other hand, the opening up and democratization of the political sphere has accentuated and brought to the fore old fragmentation lines, namely those between secularist and Islamist CS groups and activists. Groups that participated in the popular uprisings, particularly youth and feminist activists, are not necessarily those that profit from the changes. Rather, it is the various Islamist groups that seem to register the biggest gains. Many secular civil society groups harbour resentments against religious groups, in particular those representing branches of political Islam. Moreover, the establishment of a fruitful relationship between the CS sphere and the state faces two main challenges in the actual context. Not only is there a general mistrust between the two spheres inherited from authoritarian rule, but the state and CS also operate along different temporalities. Accordingly, civil societies' influence in the aftermath of popular uprisings depends greatly on their internal ability to respond effectively to the new situation.

The Arab uprisings are casting new light on foreign aid. Newly emerging CS actors are eager to engage donors and benefit from technical assistance. At the same time, CS actors are still reeling from the politicizing and delegitimizing effects foreign aid has had on their countries and their

activities alike. As a result, donors find themselves in uncharted territory and are reconsidering their customary approach to aid.

FOLLOW-UP

Follow-up events are currently being discussed and are scheduled to be held between the autumn 2012 and spring 2013, including a policy briefing in Europe for policy-makers and donors, and a second regional consultation workshop. The second workshop aims at deepening the discussions of the Amman consultation and enlarging the span of participation to ensure adequate representation of religious civil society actors and researchers close to these groups.

A research project is also being explored in order to draw together the research of transition experts and regional experts, and to delve more deeply into the main themes that emerged from this first consultation workshop.

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The CCDP is the Graduate Institute's focal point for research in the areas of conflict analysis, peacebuilding, and the complex relationships between security and development. Its research projects focus on the factors and actors that are implicated in the production and reproduction of violence within and between societies and states, as well as on policies and practices to reduce violence and insecurity and enhance development and peacebuilding initiatives at the international, state, and local levels.

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This Conference Report was prepared by Claudie Fioroni and Zina Sawaf, CCDP assistants to the Amman Conference. Both are currently pursuing their doctoral studies at the Graduate Institute.

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