Al-'adalah ijtima'iah **in Transition:**
Social Justice Philanthropy and the Arab Awakening
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The year 2011 marks a watershed moment in the history of the Arab region; successive calls for change were launched across what had formerly been perceived as the most stagnant and change-resistant part of the world. This collective flux had been building up for decades and should be viewed as a continuum that has not yet born its desired fruits – the revolutionary fervor continues in 2013 as well as grievances that set the Arab Awakening in motion. A common denominator across those waves of mass citizen activism was the call for social justice, and the success or failure of the Arab transition seems to be heavily dependent on whether or not social justice is realized. In Yemen, Egypt, Libya and Tunisia, the public discourse had calls for social justice embedded within the more emotionally-loaded term of *karama* or dignity. *Lack of* social justice was a key factor that ignited and continues to fuel those uprisings, and its realization has become the goal for those countries as they struggle their way through an uneasy transition.

An attempt to explore social justice philanthropy within the context of the Arab Awakening can be a challenging task; it is intricately bound to the complex and rapidly shifting political, social and economic contexts within which it operates. Thus, there is a need to unpack the term and explore its multidimensionality as a concept and a practice. To avoid definitional confusion[1], philanthropy is here defined as "the institutionalized pooling and distribution of private resources with the goal of building capacity, sustainable financing and expertise for long-term societal benefit".[2] Individual giving is thus excluded from our analysis but not informal emerging efforts at collective mobilization of assets (through social media, for example) even if not formally registered.

As a concept, the question of social justice has a particular resonance within the region perceptible the most at the level of how social justice is articulated. Literature and documentation of the "Arab Spring" seems to suggest a direct connection whereby social justice is to be realized through democratization which interestingly enough, is not reflected in the Arab public realm. In recent protests in Tahrir Square for example, while "social justice" or more accurately, since there are differences as will be later explained, *al-'adalah ijtima'iah,* remains central, "democracy" is hardly mentioned and the public discourse on social justice does not necessarily see it as an extension of democratization but sees it as connected to a number of other rights that a democracy would guarantee such as dignity, freedom of expression, transparency and equality before the law. The important point here then is that social justice in the Arab Awakening public

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[1] A definitional problem related to terms cuts across the three countries; there are no clear lines of demarcation separating a foundation from an organization or an association for example. While this may be confusing to a Western audience that has more clarity on those terms, to the Arab region, those definitions are still in the making and need to be adapted to the Arab context.

[2] See Ibrahim, Barbara and Dina Sherif. *From Charity to Social Change: Trends in Arab Philanthropy*. Cairo: American University in Cairo P, 2008.

realm is not always articulated as a byproduct of a democracy, and that calls for analysts and commentators on the Arab region to take social justice to its point of departure and undergo a reassessment of what social justice is in today's Arab world based on needs, perceptions and manifestations on the ground.

The complexity of the term gives way to complexity at the level of practice particularly as related to philanthropy. Social justice philanthropy in the Arab world can be approached at two levels: institutional and informal. The Arab Awakening witnessed a restructuring and a spike in informal and non-institutional social justice philanthropy. Institutional philanthropy for social justice, however, seems to have either maintained its pre-Arab Awakening structure or fallen into the mold of "democratization" through the sudden launching of capacity building, advocacy and awareness-raising programs. This "strategic" direction seems to have been the result of unintended pressure by international funders who flooded the donors' market in "Arab Spring" countries while upholding the cause of "democratization". This funding bias seems to have been under the assumption that democracy is the answer to all of the region's economic, social and political grievances and thus, paying little attention to other more pressing and less ideological priorities. Indigenous foundations, especially those that received and directed funds from international donors were immediately pushed in this direction which resulted in a relative failure to meet escalating social justice needs on the ground. *Their attention was directed to where the money was directed*. There are, however, exceptions which will be illustrated in the paper.

That said; there is a need to problematize both conceptual and practical/functional dimensions of social justice philanthropy while paying attention to the specificity of experience in each transitioning country in the region. Examples provided here are not representative but illustrative and based on the author's fieldwork in three countries of the Arab Awakening; Egypt, Libya and Tunisia. This paper poses questions more than it provides conclusive answers to the state of social justice philanthropy in the Arab region; it is intended to question definitions that are taken for granted in an effort to gain a better understanding as well as advance practices of philanthropy at such a critical juncture in the region's history. There are general trends across the region that we will touch upon but it is important to be cognizant of the role played by the historical, political and social specificities in determining the "why" and "how" of social justice philanthropy in countries within the region.

Definitional Confusion and *al-'adalah ijtima'iah*

While much analysis has been produced on definitions of social justice philanthropy, there is a failure to reach a consensus on what it is. There are, however, popular definitions that have been used to provide a general framework of understanding of the term but even those remain debatable and open for discussion. We will be using those definitions and exploring their relevance - or irrelevance thereof - to the region in the hope of developing better insight into social justice philanthropy in an Arab context.

The National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy[3] links social justice philanthropy to distribution of power; it defines it as involving "giving to create *a more equitable distribution of power …* to truly reform institutions so that the need for chronic charity is eliminated" (my italics). In its report titled "Real Results: Why Strategic Philanthropy is Social Justice Philanthropy" (January 2013),[4] it adds another dimension by arguing that for philanthropy to be strategic and impactful, it should adopt a "social justice lens":

> Philanthropy contributes a fraction of the needed monies to ameliorate great socio-economic inequities, but grantmakers have an opportunity to maximize the impact of their dollars by adding a "social justice lens" when developing their strategies. Unless grantmakers intentionally prioritize and engage underserved communities and invest in various forms of advocacy, organizing and civic engagement to effect change, they are unlikely to achieve their goals, regardless of their mission or program focus. *The future of philanthropy lies in bringing together justice and strategy*. (My Italics, 1)

The 2005 Foundation Center report titled *Social Justice Grantmaking: A Report on Foundation Trends*[5] defines it as "the granting of philanthropic contributions to non-profit organizations based in the United States and other countries that work for structural change". According to this report, the goal of social justice philanthropy would be to "increase the opportunity of those who are least well-off politically, economically and socially".[6] Ford Foundation's *Evaluation Frameworks for Social Justice Philanthropy: A Review of Available Resources*[7] presents examples of social justice philanthropy activities include: administrative advocacy, civic engagement activities, community organizing, infrastructure development, judicial advocacy and litigation, leadership training, legislative advocacy, mass communications, movement-building, policy analysis, public educational efforts, and research and information dissemination.

All definitions mentioned above seem to highlight various interconnected aspects of social justice philanthropy; linking it to values of justice or to effectiveness and impact through equitable distribution of power, providing opportunities and bridging the gap between the haves and the have-nots. Those interconnected aspects, while they inform understandings of philanthropy in the region, fail to be perceptibly visible at the level of practice; "structural change" remains to be addressed at the conceptual rather than practical level. A transition is yet

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[3] More information is available at http://www.ncrp.org/about-us

[4] Jagpal, Niki and Kevin Laskowski. "Real Results: Why Strategic Philanthropy is Social Justice Philanthropy." *A Philanthropy at Its Best Report*. National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy. January 2013. http://www.ncrp.org/files/publications/Real_Results_Why_Strategic_Philanthropy_is_Social_Justice_Philanthropy.pdf

[5] Complete report is available at http://foundationcenter.org/gainknowledge/research/pdf/socialjustice.pdf

[6] Cited in Hafid, Molly-Schultz. "Emerging Trends in Social Justice Philanthropy in Egypt." *Voices on Arab Philanthropy and Civic Engagement*. Cairo: John D. Gerhart Center for Philanthropy and Civic Engagement, American University in Cairo, 2009.

[7] Niedzwiecki, Max. *Evaluation Frameworks for Social Justice Philanthropy: A Review of Available Resources* http://www.p-sj.org/files/Evaluation%20Frameworks%20for%20Social%20Justice%20Philanthropy%20-%20A%20Review%20of%20Available%20Resources.pdf

to be made from the traditional philanthropy of old; mainly in the form of charity and handouts, to strategic sustainable philanthropy that would bring about structural change.

Failure to make this transition has led to a failure at the conceptual level, a relative sterility of ideas as a new cadre of Arab philanthropists struggled to bridge past with present with the absence of a vision for the future. The Arab region has not evolved its own definitions because while philanthropy is historically and culturally rooted in the region, institutional philanthropy as implemented in the West remains relatively new, and while it has plunged headlong into an effort to follow the Western model, it has not completely broken with its troubled past.

Practices of philanthropy have always been influenced by the politics of the times – the more strict the politics, the more limited the scope for institutional strategic philanthropy to flourish. Under Qaddafi, Bourguiba and Nasser, the historical faith-based philanthropic institution of *Waqf* was nationalized and brought under the control of the state. This was the beginning of the death of institutional philanthropy in the region because with state control came lack of trust and the credibility of philanthropic institutions has been severely damaged since then. Institutionalized philanthropy was controlled by the state in the same way the state sought to control its citizens. It was also to be used as part of the symbolic machinery that sought to project a progressive and democratic image to the world while retaining and expanding autocracy at home.

With the institution of *Waqf* left behind in the past, the 21st century witnessed a fledgling movement that called for the revival of strategic philanthropy through the adaptation of elements from Western models; the general attempt has been to copy those models with little, if any, customization to the region. Dysfunctional copying without adaptation under repressive states did little to help build an infrastructure for strategic philanthropy in the region; social justice philanthropy included as an integral part of it. It is the case, nevertheless, that certain elements of the activities mentioned above in the Ford Foundation report are very relevant to the region's philanthropic landscape, especially at a critical moment of transition. *Their relevance, however, as will be demonstrated is aspirational rather than factual*. The need for redistribution of power, eliminating chronic charity, pushing for structural change and providing opportunities to those least well-off, all ring true within the context of the region, *as goals*. The radical and most significant difference is the "how" and not only the "what".

The Long Slumber and the Path to the Awakening

The politics of social justice philanthropy are related to the power dynamics around it. Social justice within the Arab region is political as is philanthropy and that may have been one of the reasons why its realization has been thwarted and forced into a long slumber. The period leading up to the Arab Awakening reveals a dysfunctional philanthropic landscape that was slowly feeling its way towards change and struggling for integration within the global philanthropic realm, albeit staying locked in the past and facing the challenges of the repressive politics of the

time. There were promising examples, but those were engulfed by a majority that was not and were not enough to achieve sweeping impact and solve mounting social and economic problems. There were a number of concerted efforts to build a solid infrastructure of strategic philanthropy in the region; the birth of the Arab Foundations Forum[8] is an example. Voices calling for strategic philanthropy, structural change, impact investing and bringing up questions of sustainability were gaining ground in the Gulf – which afforded a platform for cross-pollination of ideas between the West and the Arab region while remaining relatively disengaged from critical political stances. Those platforms seemed to be insular, often capable of preaching to the converted than actually converting and widening the scope of champions in the region.

Philanthropy for social justice, in that sense, was very broad and vague, now even less clear as it gets engulfed in the "democratization" discourse. The term *al-'adalah ijtima'iah* resonated within the public space as charity and solidarity rather than equity and structural change or distribution of power; the sustainability factor that is at the heart of the Western definition of the term was missing. In general, one can infer philanthropy was limited to charitable acts of giving and suffered all the malaise that were planted by decades of aging autocracies and was seeking to shake off those limitations as needs around it continued to expand; facts and numbers further highlighted the need for strategic philanthropy to meet development needs; in 2010 leading up to January 2011, unemployment had reached 9% in Egypt, 26% in Libya (IMF Report 2012, 14) and 13% in Tunisia.

The Wings/TPI report (2011)[9] on global institutional philanthropy which covered the Arab region confirms this image. According to the report, philanthropy was to a large extent informed by religious and charitable impulses. There were new institutional models getting developed that sought more impact on a regional level but that strategic philanthropy still had its challenges. Most of the challenges mentioned were related to government interference; tax and financial policies, problems with registration and regulation, or had bearings on religious traditions that may curtail strategic philanthropy. Philanthropy that seemingly existed at the fringes of the political realm was often times at the very heart of it; it had political implications as a tool of either propaganda or dissent. Hence, an arena that needed to be controlled by the state, even as it consistently sought to be perceived as apolitical and to escape the close and distrusting scrutiny of the state.

In Egypt, mandates of unions, professional syndicates and NGO legislation in 1952 were changed to give the government complete control over the sector which restricted the social justice philanthropy in two ways; on the one hand, it restricted the freedom to have a long-term vision for civil society, thus preventing its growth and in turn, limiting the philanthropy that

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[8] More information on the Arab Foundations Forum is available at http://www.arabfoundationsforum.org/

[9] Johnson, Paula D. *Global Institutional Philanthropy: A Preliminary Status Report* (2011), Complete report is available at http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.wingsweb.org/resource/resmgr/files/institutional_phil_parti_ove.pdf

would be fueling its path forward. On another front, it damaged the credibility of the sector as well as the money that was allocated for it – if civil society was to be controlled by the corrupt state apparatus, then the money allocated to it would be an accomplice in this cycle of corruption. Direct hand-outs were thus more trustworthy and certain to reach the beneficiary instead of the state. According to Marwa El Daly, the amount of giving in Egypt per year is around $1billion, mostly directed to charity. This has little impact when it comes to solving social justice problems which requires a long-term vision for change.

In Libya, representations of social justice philanthropy glaringly collided with the term; it actually meant a violation of social justice at home and the projection of a more "democratized" image in the West. Saif al-Islam's emergence came hand in hand with the establishment of the Gaddafi International Foundation for Charitable Associations (GIFCA), a foundation that was primarily funded by the state, and under its umbrella, many other civil society organizations were born. The Foundation had little impact on the ground in Libya but it was through the charity, "that Saif al-Islam was able to broker a deal in 2000 for the release of the western hostages being held by the Abu Sayaf group in the Philippines".[10] GIFCA had a mission statement that clearly endorsed social justice philanthropy but this was used to help the survival of a regime that did not endorse social justice in the public realm. Social justice philanthropy was thus devoid of its meaning; it became a tool of control rather than justice.

In Tunisia and under Ben Ali, philanthropy had a cultural flavor which in its own way demonstrates a deliberate avoidance to address social justice problems. The flare that started the Arab Awakening would later come on December 17, 2010 from Sidi Bouzid, one of the marginalized and underdeveloped areas in Tunisia. Mohammed Bouazizi, a street vendor, sets fire to himself after the seizure of his goods by the authorities. At a time when unemployment in Tunisia was at 13% with extreme concentrations outside the capital, Tunisian civil society did witness an expansion in philanthropy that had a more cultural and artistic focus rather than a developmental one. Alzidi underscores how development organizations did not exceed more than 11% of the number of existing associations in 2010-2011.[11] A percentage of the meager 11% was actually run by the first lady – Laila Ben Ali who headed the Arab Women Organization and founded the Basma Association for the Promotion of Employment of the Disabled which was established with the mission to "back up the state's efforts in the integration of the disabled, particularly by contributing to enhancing their employment" (Alzidi 2013).

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[10] Pargeter, Alison. "Libya: Reforming the Impossible?" Review of African Political Economy 33 (2006): pp. 219-235. Web.

[11] Alzidi, Monji. "Tunisia." *Philanthropy in Transition: A Preliminary Scan of Philanthropic Practices in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia.* Cairo: John D. Gerhart Center for Philanthropy and Civic Engagement, American University in Cairo. February 2013.

The Arab Awakening: Citizen Activism and Shifts in Social Justice Philanthropy

By bringing the question of *al-'adalah ijtima'iah* to the center; the Arab awakening fused new energy in practices of philanthropy. Tahrir Square, thus, became the place where chants for social justice reverberated; but it was also the place where tools to make social justice happen were used and experimented by citizens and for citizens. It is within this space that the question of social justice was addressed beyond the bureaucracies of policy, and through philanthropy and community mobilization. Philanthropy was fueled by ongoing and escalating waves of citizen engagement and, in turn, was shaped after it. Social justice philanthropy followed the rhythm of the people's mobilization, was structured after the structures of citizen engagement and used its tools; social media, community solidarity, make-shift hospitals and so on. As Arab nations were reborn, *philanthropy was citizen engagement* – and out of this new paradigms evolved, in structure and content.

In Egypt, faith-based social justice philanthropy is one of the trends noted during and after the intense days of the Revolution. Al Qaed Ibrahim mosque in Alexandria, Omar Makram mosque in Cairo, Martyrs' mosque in Suez were all centers for humanitarian aid as clashes broke out in the areas surrounding them. Make-shift hospitals were established within to provide assistance to wounded protestors. With the rise of need, there was a rise in the mobilization of resources to those mosques. Social media and word-of-mouth were the main means of passing on requests for money, medicine and food. The flow of funds to the Omar Makram mosque was so much at one point that it was suggested to allocate the funds to other areas. In a recent report (April 2012) by the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies on the role of religion in the Revolution,[12] the author describes how "Egyptian mosques, as is the case now in Syria and earlier in Yemen, were places for organization and mobilization" for the "disaffected and angry, places to assemble and protest" against the regime. To mobilize the "silent masses", Friday prayers were used as an incentive to get people to midans and squares around the country (6). As hundreds, sometimes thousands gathered for Friday prayers, a unique solidarity was born that extended beyond prayers to keep the revolutionary fervor alive with some, and ignite it with many others.

A Gerhart Center report on shifts in practices of philanthropy in Egypt[13] noted a temporary shift from strategic programmatic philanthropy to humanitarian. The starting of new programs was also noted as an effort to meet escalating needs on the ground; those programs may not be sustained in the long term but were essential at the time. The *Egyptian Food Bank,* for example, established a program targeting workers in the months following the start of the revolution through which daily meals were packaged for workers whose livelihoods were adversely impacted by Egypt's economic instability. Mansour Foundation for Development (MFD)

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[12] Al-Anani, Khalil. "The Role of Religion in the Public Domain in Egypt after the January 25 Revolution." Qatar: Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies. April 2012.

[13] El Taraboulsi, Sherine, Mahi Khallaf and Naila Farouky. "Egypt."*Philanthropy in Transition: A Preliminary Scan of Philanthropic Practices in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia.* Cairo: John D. Gerhart Center for Philanthropy and Civic Engagement, American University in Cairo. February 2013.

demonstrated responsibility in a twofold capacity; as an institution, on the one hand, and as individuals, on the other. The five main staff members voluntarily took a 25 percent salary cut in the six months following the revolution in order to stretch the resources of the foundation further and ensure the sustainability of its activities. MFD witnessed a shift towards humanitarian aid immediately following the start of the Revolution. It contributed funds to the treatment of 25 critically injured citizens as well as supported some of the families of the martyrs who died in clashes with state security during the first 18 days of the revolution. Social media was also used as a means to mobilize resources; *TahrirSupplies* is an example. It is an online community established in 2011 on Twitter by a group of youth. Their mission is to "communicate the needs of the field hospitals in Tahrir to the public - as requested on Twitter or over the phone. With donor generosity and effort, field hospitals and their storage rooms have grown from ruins into some of the well-equipped field hospitals". The philanthropic landscape was thus diversified; new models were developed to meet citizen needs; non-institutional informal philanthropy was far more creative and versatile. Institutional philanthropy, in general, faltered except for some instances.

In Libya, a perceptible effervescence of different forms of citizen mobilization which later started developing into more structured civil society organizations unfolded; around 250 new organizations for examples were established in the period during and immediately after the revolution in the East, those numbers have increased one year after the revolution. In a country with a population of six million across a wide expanse of land, those numbers are significant and indicate the centrality of philanthropy to the future of a democratic Libya, maintaining the philanthropic spike in institutionalized form in the period post-Qaddafi is perceived as a means by which the revolutionary fervor can be maintained and revolutionary hopes realized. At the outset, the main focus of those organizations was humanitarian aid to provide food and shelter as well as medical aid during the war against Qaddafi's forces but those constituencies are now shifting focus, and exploring ways to shift strategies towards a more sustainable presence. Media has a very important role to play in raising funds as well as awareness; radio stations are particularly popular. In the East, there are many radio stations, in areas that have a population as small as 1000 people.

This need to make the transition from meeting a humanitarian need to more strategic philanthropy was highlighted in a conversation with Dr. Ahmed Keweidy, Director of Tadamunn for Human Rights. Tadamunn (solidarity in English) is an organization that was established in 1999 in Switzerland by a Libyan surgeon living abroad having failed to establish his organization in Libya under Qaddafi. When the revolution broke out, Keweidy immediately moved the activities of his organization to Benghazi, leveraging both financial resources and rallying a large number of young volunteers from Libya to provide food and medicine and respond to a humanitarian crisis on the ground. The organization's mission since its inception was to document human rights violations in Libya especially the Abu Salim prison massacre of 1996 (Salah and El Taraboulsi 2012) and continues to perform that role post-Qaddafi. It has also

moved completely from Switzerland to Benghazi and is now registered as a Libyan non-profit organization. Keweidy is now a member of a coalition of non-profit organizations in East Libya which is a platform to develop synergies and linkages among existing organizations to avoid duplication of effort and to ensure that certain strategies and measures are adopted collectively to ensure sustainability and impact.

Nedaa el Kheir was established in Benghazi by a Libyan businessman called Salah Al Beera who founded the organization and opened offices in both Egypt and Tunisia during the revolution to help bring in assistance to Libya as well as spread the word about violations happening inside. The organization has now developed its own paradigm of strategic giving post Qaddafi by establishing a waqf called Al-Wafaa for the families of martyrs. A more open Libyan civil society law has facilitated the process of establishing the waqf.

In Tunisia, informal philanthropy boomed during the revolution: "This was manifested in the great surge of solidarity shown during the security breakdown afflicting the country's streets. Popular committees were formed to protest neighborhoods. This coincided with fundraising campaigns to collect donations and food…" This was also evident post-Ben Ali especially during the wave of refugees that fled into Tunisia from Libya (Alzidi 2012). Out of this solidarity to meet humanitarian needs witnessed during the revolution, around 1044 new associations were established from January to end September 2011. Those numbers are, as Alzidi puts it, a "record" if compared to the annual rate of associations in the past 20 years which did not exceed 220 associations annually; this rate had also declined significantly to 82 in 2012 and 148 in 2009. Thus, an expansion in numbers took place but this, more importantly, was accompanied by a shift in focus; those associations may be divided as follows to: "453 cultural and arts associations, 182 charitable and social associations, 129 development associations, 144 advocacy and citizenship associations, 63 cooperatives, 58 sports associations and 15 feminist associations" (Alzidi 2012). This shift responds to escalating economic needs as well as a continuation of the citizen mobilization that had unfolded during the revolution. The location of those associations is also significant; under Ben Ali, the majority of associations were located in Tunis, the capital but now a substantial increase has been witnessed in newly established associations in deprived areas: "the bedrock of the Tunisian revolution, namely the mid-west which includes the governorate of Sidi Bouzid, the north-west and the south-west regions" (Alzidi 2012).

The Arab Awakening has brought to the foreground the nexus between social movements and resource mobilization; the mobilization of funds for social justice was heavily influenced by the mobilization of citizens in both form and content. In form, philanthropy followed the informal structures that were developed to meet humanitarian needs on the ground. Institutional philanthropy did attempt to come through but to a large extent, failed to be agile and flexible enough to respond to the shifting environment around it, except for a few examples. Creativity and innovation continue to flourish within the informal realm. In terms of content, *al-'adalah*

ijtima'iah continues to be located at the crossroads between a past of unsustainable philanthropy and a present of new ideas and tools developed within the public realm.

The Way Forward: From *al-'adalah ijtima'iah* to Social Justice Philanthropy

The Arab awakening set in motion dramatic shifts in both the political and philanthropic realms. The changes that have been set in motion however have the potential of going wrong, or going right. What is certain is that there remains to be lack of clarity of vision on both fronts and in order to bring more clarity a concerted effort needs to be made on different levels. As this brief overview of shifts in philanthropic practices demonstrates, a number of programs are currently underway by both indigenous and foreign philanthropists. The impact of those programs and whether or not they will be successful in acting as conduits for this transition are yet to be seen. A transition needs to be made from our fluid understanding of *al-'adalah ijtima'iah* to the more structured social justice philanthropy – albeit with much effort to adapt those definitions as well as the practice to the Arab region.

Here are some ideas to start thinking about how this transition can be made possible:

Providing Thought-Leadership and Evidence-based Strategies

The region needs to evolve its own definitions and terms. There are several platforms that network foundations and philanthropists with civil society organizations but those networks have failed to provide a long-term vision for the sector or evolve region-based definitions. There is a need for a platform that would take on this mission of providing thought-leadership to building an infrastructure of strategic Arab philanthropy – emanating from and directed towards the region with active synergies with other successful examples from the West. It is critical to have definitions anchored within the region to allow new models to emerge that are better suited to a shifting Arab context.

Understanding the Landscape – Informed Social Justice Philanthropy

Each Arab country has a historical and geographic specificity that needs to be taken into consideration before embarking on building an infrastructure of philanthropy. This is not a one-fit-for-all situation, and certainly not for ready-made programs that had been implemented in other parts of the world and then suggested for implementation in the region. There is a need to fill in critical information gaps to better understand the landscape within which philanthropy takes place, as well as analyze the impact of rapid sociopolitical changes on defining priorities and needs for philanthropy to have long term impact.

An Asset-based Approach to Culture

Culture is a critical component that is often overlooked or, at best, acknowledged as a problem. An asset-based approach to culture as a space within which practices of philanthropy, in general, and social justice philanthropy, in particular, can be maximized may prove useful. A revisiting

and a fresh understanding of cultural paradigms; roles played by families, tribes and communities for example is needed. Grantmaking programs are advised to enlist the support of cultural brokers; people who are familiar with the ins and outs of the culture to play a role in such programs and to make sure that philanthropy is well-informed of the needs and expectations on the ground.

Policy Advocacy and Self-regulation

There is a need to develop vehicles for the regulation of philanthropic practices at the national level as well as at the institutional level. Without policy change and maintaining an autonomous civil society, long term and sustained impact from philanthropy will be curtailed. Advocating for policy change can happen at both regional and country levels in order to guarantee a democratized philanthropic realm. In addition, lack of self-regulation is the primary pretext used to account for state intervention and restrictions on civil society. Codes of ethics and measures that ensure transparency need to be instituted to regulate foreign and indigenous philanthropy, as well as safeguard their autonomy.

Effective Advocacy, Building Platforms and Networking for Impact

There are similarities and differences across all the transitioning democracies in the region. Developing strategies to institute sustainable and outcome oriented philanthropy thus needs to be approached at country level and may also benefit from a regional lens. There is much potential for synergies and joint programs that cut across those budding democracies which may allow for exchange of expertise, ideas and joint implementation for the benefit of all parties.

The Regional Partnership on Culture and Development (RPCD), a program run by FHI360 is launching the Partnership Forum (PF) in Amman, Jordan in May 2013. Based in Cairo but operating in seven Arab countries: Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, Morocco, West Bank/Gaza, and Yemen, RPCD produces and disseminates applied research on development in the Arab region. The Partnership Forum is a regional network on development research in the Arab region. RPCD is currently housing the Partnership Forum, a network of 150 institutions and experts, mostly indigenous, actively engaged in developing research on Democracy and Governance, Natural Resource Management and Youth Engagement within the Region. It aims to establish a community of scholars dedicated to development efforts through exchange of knowledge and expertise across RPCD's geographic scope.

The John D. Gerhart Center for Philanthropy and Civic Engagement at the American University in Cairo holds an annual Takaful Conference on Arab Philanthropy and Civic Engagement, an attempt to forge such a platform for ideas. There is also a need to maintain a regular stream of communication with key stakeholders such as the diaspora and the corporate sector. Both of which have come through as important agents of change in the transition.

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