

**Open Society Foundations  
Arab Regional Office**

**Strategy Extension Memo for 2013**

**Context:**

After the fall of Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali in Tunis over eighteen months ago, the Arab region was gripped by a series of popular uprisings demanding an end to authoritarianism and corruption and respect for personal dignity. The protests upturned the foundations of the political order and resulted in the dissolution of former regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, and Libya at one end, and more cautious and superficial reform steps by entrenched rulers in places such as Jordan, Morocco, Algeria, and Bahrain, at the other. The course of the uprising in Syria transformed from peaceful demonstrations met by violent repression to what can now be described as a deepening civil war that threatens to spill beyond its borders.

The political landscape of the region has been fundamentally altered, creating an environment, even in non-transition countries, where pushing for reform is no longer a futile exercise but a central focus. A number of key milestones have been achieved in the transitions and a new political landscape is beginning to take shape after a frenzied period that followed the uprisings. In Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and, to a lesser extent, in Yemen transitional timelines were adopted, presidential and/or parliamentary elections were held, and legitimate governments have assumed control.

For OSF's work in the region, this means developing a strategy with two separate tracks: First, work on a prioritized block of transition countries that includes Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, and Yemen. And second, a continuation of regional work focused on non-transition countries that include Lebanon, Jordan, Morocco, and Palestine/Israel. In the absence of viable or sustainable opportunities for engaging in the Gulf countries, no expansion there is planned.

The fast-changing transitions now underway will inevitably face continuing hurdles and their outcomes, as far as establishing open, democratic societies, are far from certain. Islamist parties, which swept elections in Egypt and Tunisia, espouse ideals that collide with the open society agenda. Their success has further exposed the weak popular base and fragmentation of progressive and pro-revolutionary groups. Transitional governments are also struggling to cope with myriad socio-economic demands that helped inspire some of the uprisings and that have been exacerbated by scarce resources and stalled economic growth. Furthermore, former regime or "deep state" forces remain entrenched in most countries and represent an impediment to future reform. Therefore, successful transitions will likely require social change, a deeper re-ordering of politics, and the replacement of ideas, practices, as well as elites.

In the "non-transition" countries of Palestine, Lebanon, Morocco, and Jordan, the onset of the Arab Spring has re-energized segments of civil society but with less dramatic results. While no significant political change has occurred in these countries, they provide opportunity to build momentum and expand the political space for local stakeholders pushing for change and open society aims. In Israel, the continued erosion of democratic values poses a threat to open society and democracy while the country's Palestinian minority remains the target of discriminatory policies.

**Update: The Arab Regional Office.**

The Arab Regional Office (ARO) will extend existing strategies for the Arab Transition Fund and its regular program into 2013 with limited programmatic changes beyond those already in place. We anticipate continued deeper engagement in the transition countries of Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Yemen, and possibly Syria.

With an eye towards combining transition and regular strategies in 2014 and beyond, the ARO will build synergies between these two programs. ARO will also continue its efforts to create a sense of community among grant recipients through meetings, consultations, and other joint activities. In addition, an external review and needs assessment of ATF re-granting and technical assistance is underway in order to assess the impact of the model and to guide us in discussing the future of the ATF grantees after 2013 and ensuring elements of sustainability are included in their plans and in OSF's support.

One evolution in our approach worth mentioning is that ARO aspires to build a unique public profile as an international donor with Arab roots. ARO will continue to pursue opportunities to support national-level coalitions to address transitional reforms and ensure local actors assume ownership of the transitions. In the past, such activities have been limited due to our positioning in the region as well as anti-donor and foreign interference concerns, primarily in Egypt. With the changing dynamic in the region and as OSF identifies additional strategies and goals for the next strategy cycle, it will be important to have a profile that allows the option of engaging on issues in its own name. This will also entail developing a strategic communications plan, hiring a communications officer, both in close consultation with the Communications Department in New York.

While recruitment for a new ARO director is currently underway, a plan is already being implemented by ARO staff to enhance the operating and organizational capacity of the ARO to meet the needs of further geographic expansion and more hands on engagement. Elements of this plan include an enhanced role of the ARO advisory board, first through rotation of inactive members and by increasing the overall number of board members and the frequency of consultation with them. ARO also seeks to benefit from board member networks and expertise as part of the office's public profile-building. Last but not least, we are opening a sub office in Tunisia that would support ARO engagement in the country, help build ARO's regional profile, and assist in building the groundwork for greater engagement in the Maghreb region.

### **Program Areas and priorities for 2013:**

Through its different programs, ARO's overarching goal remains to strengthen civil society actors and foster strategic partnerships that promote open society values and serve as a bulwark against anti-democratic forces in the medium and long-term. The aim is to foster a solid foundation of NGOs, think tanks, universities, and broad-based citizen-led initiatives that will be able to protect against the reproduction of authoritarianism in transition countries while enabling knowledge sharing and informing locally led reform movements in non-transition countries. The main priorities and changes (where applicable) are presented here by ARO program:

#### **A. Rights & Governance:**

The goals of this program fall under three priority areas: protection and promotion of human rights, the expansion and cementing of the rule of law, and the support of transparency and accountability.

Changes: In 2013 rule of law and transparency and accountability programming in the transition countries will increase, where new openings for civil society capacity building and national level advocacy are emerging. In addition the focus on civil society advocacy before the League of Arab States will be further developed after initial mappings and consultations in 2011-2012. A similar scaling-up of efforts will target development of a regional platform for research and networking on public interest law and capacity building.

The Rights and Governance program will maintain the lead, on behalf of the ARO, to re-launch a multi donor initiative to support capacity building of civil society organisations. The initiative was interrupted by the revolutions but had aimed to create the opportunity for civil society and human rights organisations in the Arab world to reflect on organisational sustainability and effectiveness and to work on organisational

strengthening on a tailor made basis to address the four components encompassed in the term sustainability: Organizational Viability, Program Effectiveness, Financial Security, and Enduring Impact.

**B. Media & Information:**

The principal goals for the Media and Information portfolio in the 2010-12 ARO strategy and in the ARO Transitions Action Plan of 2011 will remain in effect in 2013: to foster an informed and engaged public by strengthening new alternative forms of media content that challenge government monopolies on information; to encourage active citizenship through the use of new media and technology; and to support an enabling media environment for freedom of expression. The ARO Transitions Action Plan includes support to large-scale, local re-granting activities in the areas of hyper-local news content and support for digital activism. It also seizes upon new political openings in transitional countries to strengthen the capacity of representative bodies and training centers to develop a new generation of media leaders who operate in accordance with ethical standards and to promote the adoption of new regulatory frameworks that have long been exploited to restrict freedom of expression, a diversity of voices, and access to information.

Changes: Within this framework, a greater emphasis will be placed in 2013 on grant making, technical assistance, and peer exchange designed to strengthen the financial sustainability of the emerging constellation of independent community media outlets that have been engendered and supported by ARO. An emphasis will also be placed on grant-making to build capacity of the nascent freedom of information movement in the region, particularly in Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Jordan, and Yemen.

**C. Women's Rights:**

The Women's Rights and Gender Development portfolio's overarching goals for 2013 will remain largely the same focused on combating violence against women, protecting women in conflict countries, promoting women's participation in governance, and reducing gender-based socio-economic disparity. The program will continue its new work related to transition countries focusing on enhancing women's participation in the political transitions; combating newly emerging forms of violence against women, and supporting new initiatives for improved gender equality. The program will also tackle emergent challenges and concerns of women through research and analysis of new phenomena, development of programs and projects to address them, contribution to knowledge production in the field, and consolidating regional coordination.

Changes: The program strategy remains in place for the regional work as well as the Arab Transition work with two minor amendments:

1. Addition of "Discrimination" in the first strategic goal to include work on marginalized groups within the women's sector and issues that do not necessarily fall under violence.
2. The program will drop the fourth strategic priority in 2011-2012 strategy, "Gender Development for Improved Socio-Economic Conditions." In the past year and a half it proved to be challenging to realize a discernible impact in this area as the only tool used in the region is micro-financing of women's project which has very limited impact in terms of changing economic realities. Other related issues under this strategic priority can be easily addressed using the first goal and utilizing the discrimination angle entailed in the goal.

**D. Youth & Knowledge:**

Initial consultations and planning steps were taken in 2011-2012 with the aim of re-orienting this program area to focus primarily on higher education- freedom of expression on university campuses, support for liberal

faculty activities and university governance reform. However, with no dedicated program staff, and interrupted by developments in the region, these plans are now on hold pending further consultation with network programs and hiring of program staff for this portfolio. In parallel, consultations will continue with senior management and network programs to address the gap in handling the increasingly important youth-oriented work and associated staffing needs.

**E. Arts & Culture:**

The Arts & Culture portfolio's overarching goals for 2013 will remain largely the same with continued commitment to the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (AFAC) as a sustainable model for philanthropy in the region and the creation of a substantial funding pool for arts and culture. The management of AFAC is monitored by an independent board composed of reputable culture promoters and practitioners from various parts of the region who have successfully engaged in re-granting funds to hundreds of projects in the performing and visual arts. AFAC continues to play a leadership role in convening major donors in the arts field in the Arab region. In 2012 they are on track to match our financial support as their fundraising strategy begins to take clearer shape. At the same time we hope to assist them continue to grow as an organization, looking at their board and particularly staff development needs. Continued support to Al Mawred Al-Thaqafy in Egypt is anticipated as the combination of technical assistance and funding provided to emerging initiatives continues to gain recognition and have a strong effect in the country and across the Arab world.

## **Annex I: ARO Programmatic Priorities**

### **A. Rights & Governance**

The three priority areas and main goals pursued by the Rights & Governance program focus on:

Human Right: The overarching goal of OSI's human rights work in the Arab region is to ensure accountability for human rights violations through documentation, monitoring, and international advocacy. A second goal is to promote equality and non-discrimination and increase access to justice for minorities, non-citizens and other vulnerable groups and foster a debate over the underlying causes. To achieve this goal, direct provision of legal services and legal empowerment of the poor are two main strategies for increasing access to justice. Lastly, human rights work involves support for efforts towards transitional justice and addressing past violations.

Rule of Law and Legal Capacity Building: Towards development of proactive measures to promote equality before the law, separation of powers, and the independence of the judiciary, the program aims to develop and pilot programming to promote due process and equality before the law, separation of powers, and independence of the judiciary. This is pursued through court monitoring projects, analysis of jurisprudence, advocacy and grassroots campaigning for reform also further substantive reforms as well as empower members of the judiciary to press for change from within and take more progressive positions in their rulings. Public Interest litigation and strategic litigation would further complement this approach by putting the institutions and legislation to the test.

Transparency and Accountability: To further democratic accountability and good governance, citizens and civil society must be free to engage in public matters, including the fight against corruption. Governments systematically undermine attempts to introduce checks and balances, and lack the political will to fight corruption, and civil society and the general public suffer from weak grasp of anti-corruption, transparency and accountability concepts. The goal is to promote respect and protection for the freedom of citizens and civil society to engage in public matters, including the fight against corruption. As a secondary focus, the program aims to promote civil society monitoring and advocacy with relation to foreign donors including International Financial Institutions and government donors the program aims to increase the ability of domestic non-governmental stakeholders to participate in decision making, increase aid effectiveness, address development concerns, and human rights implications of multilateral and inter-governmental donor funded projects.

### **B. Media & Information**

The goals pursued by the Media and Information program in the 2011-2012 strategy and extended into 2013 fall within three main categories for grant making:

1.) **Quality Content** for media will be strengthened through direct assistance and capacity building to independent media outlets with an emphasis on broadcast media that have the ability to reach mass audiences and also on outlets producing community news. This focal area seeks to engender sustainable news outlets that provide public interest news on local affairs thereby filling a key deficit area for regional media. The capacity building component of this area seeks to build quality skills for journalists on investigative news and in-depth long-form journalism.

2.) **Social Innovation through Media and Technology** entails supporting innovative uses of media and technology to encourage active citizenship on behalf of open society aims while focusing on the region's young population. This aim is pursued by supporting the emergence and building the capacity of alternative Internet-based platforms, citizen media initiatives, and digital activism broadly that would allow the active and

ambitious segment of young people across the region to contribute to shaping societies along the lines of open society values.

3.) **Freedom of Expression.** In order to foster an enabling environment for the independent content providers in categories 1 and 2 above, grant making in this category seeks to encourage robust freedom of expression defence. Grant making will couple support for local freedom of expression monitoring and campaigning along with efforts to advocate with governments on media policy in order to improve legal frameworks related to media law, electronic media regulation, and freedom of information.

The goals and objectives of the ARO Transitions Action Plan devised in 2011, also remain in effect for 2013. In addition to ATF re-granting, complementary grant making for transitional countries will seek to: 1.) strengthen the capacity of representative bodies and training centers such as journalists' syndicates and universities that will develop a new generation of media leaders who operate in accordance with ethical standards; 2.) promote the adoption of new regulatory frameworks that have long been exploited to restrict freedom of expression, a diversity of voices, and access to information; 3.) support local initiatives to advocate for the adoption of legal safeguards and strengthen civil society actors to bring transitional countries on par with democratic countries and systems; 4.) strengthen the capacity of local CSOs that advocate and defend the right to free expression and to support new coalitions of nontraditional societal actors who can establish grassroots movements to campaign for media reforms; 5.) in the area of information, strengthen the growing public sphere by supporting innovative uses of technology to encourage grassroots mobilization and coalition building on behalf of transitional issues. This entails building capacities for alternative Internet-based media outlets, citizen media initiatives, and digital activism, and online informational resources.

### C. **Women's Rights and Gender Development Program**

The Women's Rights and Gender Development portfolio's overarching goals for 2013 will remain largely the same as previous year with minor changes. Strategic priorities for 2011-2012 address four categories; combating violence against women, protection of women in conflict countries, promoting women's participation in governance, and reducing gender-based socio-economic disparity. The program will continue working on areas related to transition countries as per the Arab Transition Fund work-plan and will focus on newly emerging challenges and concerns by women on the grounds.

**Combating Violence and Discrimination against Women:** Violence against women is common in all countries of the region. Domestic violence and sexual violence including sexual harassment have witnessed a rise in most countries of the region. Women in transition countries are complaining of intensified sexual harassment practices on the streets depriving them from the sense of security and safety. "Honor related crimes" which are widely practiced in the region have increased in recent years in Iraq, Yemen and Palestine. Legal protection from violence is absent in nearly all Arab countries. Increasing trafficking in women has also become an area of concern in some countries including Egypt, Iraq, Yemen, Jordan, Morocco and Syria. The general goal in this work area is therefore to contribute to decreasing violence against women through legal reform to Personal Status Laws, and provision of psycho-social and legal services for women victims of violence in addition to capacity building for NGOs to increase their capacity in addressing such challenges. For 2013, this goal will include combating Discrimination against women in order to allow for wider work on issues related to discrimination but can't generally be classified as violence against women.

**Protection of Women in Conflict Countries:** Women in conflict countries face double marginalization, one originating from society itself and the other perpetrated by the occupation and/or conflicting parties. Women lack both the proper legal mechanisms necessary for their protection from external forces and survival mechanisms in relation to internal social dynamics. Advocacy efforts at the national, regional and international levels will allow the voices of women to be heard and action to be taken to provide protection.

The general goal in this area will be to empower women in conflict countries to properly monitor and document the effects of war on women and use the information to advocate for their cause regionally and internationally. In 2013 ARO will continue to work on its developed program dealing with the Palestine case and will expand to incorporate other conflict affected countries in the region to this program.

**Women's Role in Governance:** Participation of women in the political sphere is very low in the region, though has seen slight improvement in some countries. Engaging more women in the public sphere can be realized through training women in leadership and promoting women's role in governance through awareness raising campaigns at the community and decision makers' levels. The general goal in this area is to empower female candidates in elections and to provide women with leadership skills through training. ARO will intensify its efforts in transition countries to address the pertinent question of women's participation in all stages of political transition.

#### **Strategic priorities for Transition Countries:**

Work on transition countries in the past 18 months has been challenging and educational with many lessons learnt in the process. The Women's Rights Program will continue to support women's efforts in Egypt and Tunisia and will explore opportunities of engagement in other countries going into political transition. Despite the varying socio-political contexts in different countries, women tend to be faced with the same challenges. The Women's Rights program approaches will include dealing with emerging challenges to keep up with the speed of developments on the grounds; build good regional cooperation and coordination models where women in new transition countries can benefit from the struggle of women in Tunisia and Egypt and vice versa; contribute to knowledge production related to women and transitions through consultancies, research and policy analysis and support advocacy efforts on women's rights at the national, regional and international levels.

1. **Enhance Women's Participation in the all Stages of Political Transition:** This includes participation in the elections as candidates and voters, playing a role in the constitution drafting process, legal reform, transitional justice processes, , and in decision making in bodies created to address transition.
2. **Combat Newly Emerging Forms of Violence against Women:** New forms of violence targeting women have emerged during and after the revolutions. Perpetrators of this violence include government apparatuses, unidentified persons and other elements of society. Women affected include female demonstrators and activists in addition to female human rights defenders, ARO will continue supporting NGOs seeking to provide protection for female human rights defenders and addressing cases of violence against women in general.
3. **Support Newly Emerging Initiatives for Improved Gender Equality Work:** The program will continue to support new organizations working on women's issues as well as organizations focused on youth, human rights and democracy work in order to strengthen their understanding and application of women's rights concepts and tools in the work they do.

#### **D. Youth & Knowledge:**

The focus on knowledge production and dissemination encompasses the entire chain from kindergarten to university levels. The Arab region still overemphasizes the role of higher education, while elsewhere it is generally accepted that early learning is highly significant for later developmental outcomes of children and adolescents. At the level of general education, i.e. in both primary and secondary schools, social origins have an almost deterministic impact on personal development and schooling results. In higher education, lack of opportunities and lack of quality becomes an obstacle of wider ramifications.

Across the Arab region a high degree of socio-economic discrimination in terms of access to education is coupled with a sub-optimum quality of education. Thus the system in its current form replicate existing social power relations in which economic wealth and political control remains within rather closed circles. The

underlying assumption is that this can change inasmuch as quality and equality in education improves and becomes more relevant for achieving upward social mobility.

The general goals in the areas of early childhood and general education can be summarized as (a) improving the professional development of educators, (b) strengthening the role of parents, (c) testing and subsequent rolling out of child-centered approaches, (d) creating regional networks of educators and education administrators, and finally (e) rooting education advocacy in public life outside professional circles.

The second set of issues is of particular importance for higher education, where general goals include (a) upgrading teaching and knowledge transfer skills of faculty, (b) connecting academics regionally and internationally, and (c) supporting the development of key disciplines conducive to underpin efforts in promoting good governance, human rights, civil liberties, and professionalism in media, youth work, and education itself.

#### **E. Arts & Culture:**

Arab countries have long been in need of an independent support structure to promote creativity outside the often closed circuits of projects run by ministries of culture or foreign embassies across the region. The establishment of the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (AFAC) by OSF aimed at networking among some private international donor institutions (such as the Ford Foundation) as well as reaching out towards individuals in Arab countries in view of creating a substantial funding pool for arts and culture. The management of AFAC is monitored by an independent board composed of reputable culture promoters and practitioners from various parts of the region who have successfully engaged in re-granting funds to hundreds of projects in the performing and visual arts. In addition, cultural exchange across the Arab region has improved, as has the access of creators and curators to the international arts scene.