

The changing political economy of community philanthropy in the Middle East and North Africa: Are community philanthropy organizations emerging as winners or losers in the wake of the Arab transitions? An initial comparative assessment of Egypt and Tunisia

Heba Abou Shnief, Senior Fellow, International Fellows Program ~ 2014

Abstract

Heba Abou Shnief's research considers the relationship between community philanthropic organizations and government in the immediate aftermath of the Arab Spring. Specifically, Abou Schnief periodizes political change in both Egypt and Tunisia beginning in early 2011 until mid-2014. The author compares the Egyptian and Tunisian experiences against a backdrop of philanthropic attempts globally and historically to foster community in greatly divided localities. The author then proceeds to suggest potentially useful adaptations designed to insulate the existing community-building programs from drastic socio-political changes.

Abou Shnief chiefly identifies difficulties in regulating community philanthropy after the Arab Spring given the fierce competition between the forces of secular government and political Islam. Because most philanthropic aid in Egypt and Tunisia originated from religious organizations and political Islam carried with its religious giving a distinct political platform, Egyptian courts restricted and froze the assets of many organizations for their "links" with the Muslim Brotherhood. Consequently, private sector donors felt the need to carefully consider donations for fear of potential political fallout and millions of dependent beneficiaries suffered. The author argues that in Tunisia, oversight continued in a far less confrontational manner because the military was less powerful and politicized yet had a longer and more firmly established history of consensus-building political decision-making.

In light of these circumstances, Abou Shnief recommends that foundations self-regulate by clearly defining and distinguishing between political and philanthropic activity (and the activity of its members). Transparent internal charters and careful monitoring of foreign funds are ways in which philanthropic organizations might facilitate a beneficial maturity of law and policy.

For the full version of the paper, please click [here](#).

