

Getting Transition Right: A Rights-Based Approach to Diversity And Inclusivity *Wednesday, November 6, 2013*

Media content from this session

Throughout the session we've been producing newsletters, conducting interviews and taking photos.

You can access all of these materials online, should you want to share them further with your own network, or simply remember your time here at Schloss Leopoldskron and Salzburg Global Seminar.

Newsletters can be downloaded from the Session Page under 'Session Media': SalzburgGlobal.org/go/508.

Interviews with speakers and Fellows can be found here: SalzburgGlobal.org/go/OurFellows. You can also hear our podcasts from these interviews on our SoundCloud stream: SoundCloud.com/SalzburgGlobal.

All the photos from the session are available to download from Flickr.com/SalzburgGlobal and to view and share on Facebook.com/SalzburgGlobal.

We'll also be publishing a full-length report from this session in early 2014.



Salzburg Global Fellows returned to their home countries with a renewed sense of purpose

Returning With Renewed Purpose

Fellows return home hoping to implement their plans for greater diversity and inclusivity in the MENA region

Louise Hallman

Fellows of the Salzburg Global session 'Getting Transition Right: A Rights-Based Approach Towards Diversity and Inclusivity' left Schloss Leopoldskron on Tuesday, November 6 with a renewed sense of purpose after presenting their plans of how to improve diversity management and inclusion in their home countries of Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Yemen.

Forty-five Fellows from the four focus countries – all currently in transition from authoritarian regimes to more open and participatory systems following the “Arab Spring” or dignity revolutions – and a further ten other countries spent five days at

Salzburg Global Seminar discussing and debating a variety of key issues related to transitions, including the role of law and policy making in diversity management and the general post-revolution landscapes in the four countries. These plenary sessions, led by experts from across and beyond the region, fed into the country-focused working groups, which presented recommendations on the final day.

The four country groups each took different approaches to tackling the issues of diversity, marginalization and improved social and political inclusion, appropriate for each country, as despite all going through similar political transitions, each country has different minority and marginalized communities and different resulting difficulties to deal with.

Yemen

For Yemen, the poorest and arguably the least stable of the four countries, the Fellows chose not to focus on a minority but on a majority group that has long-faced marginalization: women. Despite their role in the protests, many women now feel that they have now been told: “Thank you, you’ve gone out on to the streets, you have protested, your job is over and now it is [the men’s] job.”

Whilst women are not barred from public office, out of the 301 seats in the Yemeni Parliament, only one elected politician is female, and she was only elected thanks to a concerted cross-party effort. Even when women do manage to get involved in political life in Yemen they are most often “delegated to the ‘soft’ issues”.



Outside of politics, women are even further marginalized. According to the Yemeni participants, they make up just over 8% of salaried, formal workers, with most expected to maintain roles in the home and nothing further. Over half of the female Yemeni population doesn't receive even a basic education, with only one third receiving a secondary school level of education. Child marriage is also an issue of great concern in country. According to UNICEF, almost a third of girls were married by the age of 18 between 2002 and 2011, with more than one in ten married by the time they were just 15 years old. To tackle these problems faced by Yemeni women, the Yemen delegation called for a 30% quota for women in the executive, legislative and judiciary, with 50% of the drafting constitutional committee to be women also; affirmative action policies would be needed to help find the right women to fill so many roles.

To help women's access to education, health care and other public services, they called for the formation of a Women's National Commission to address budgetary needs for women's education and provision of free healthcare to women from low-income families.

Since hitting the headlines, and thanks to video advocacy campaigns of groups such as SupportYemen, the child bride issue is now on the table

for discussion as part of the national transition dialog. The Yemeni Salzburg Fellows and their supporters in their working group called for a new age limit on marriage to be set at 18.

The working group for Yemen also called for criminalization of domestic violence, ending the unequal treatment of husbands and wives under legal code, and ending the practice of female genital mutilation.

The hope is for these actions to be completed within the two-year window currently foreseen in the national dialog process. But the Salzburg working groups saw goals to be achieved beyond this two year process.

Within five years, they also planned to work towards "gender mainstreaming", with measures including the adoption of a non-gender bias language in all official governmental policies, laws and educational materials and the creation of incentives for organizations and institutions to fill at least 40% of their positions with women.

Beyond government-led measures the working group also proposed building greater capacity for local and national NGOs through training and micro-financing projects, to avoid reliance on the external groups who have become increasingly interested in the country.

In the short-term, more art-led advocacy projects should be pursued,

drawing on the country's long artistic heritage. Collaboration is also needed, not only between civil society groups, but also other non-state actors, including imams and sheikhs.

Beyond the two-year plan, calls were made for the creation of weekly TV shows dedicated to women's rights, and an advice hotline for women to call.

Tunisia

In Tunisia, the birthplace of the Arab Spring, four marginalized groups were identified in need of greater inclusion: the youth, religious minorities, those living in the rural interior regions, and the disabled.

Young Tunisians, like their counterparts across the region, played an important role in the overthrow of the Ben Ali dictatorship, but how can this political engagement be maintained as the country transitions to democracy?

Traditionally excluded from the political elite, which is dominated by much older figures, whom are overwhelming male, barriers – such as the age at which one can stand for political office – need to be revised to allow the Tunisian youth to be better involved in the new democracy. Besides reducing this limit to 18, the same age as suffrage, the Salzburg Tunisian delegation also recommended a "youth quota" be introduced to the Tunisian Parliament, giving 15% of

seats to those under the age of 30. The remaining 85% of the seats should be shared equally between male and female representatives.

Political exclusion is also an issue for religious minorities in Tunisia. Although anyone can stand for Parliament, Article 73 of the constitution states that the president must be a Muslim, excluding the Jewish minority (as well as the smaller number of Christians and declared atheists) from holding the office.

Outside Tunis and the other major urban areas, the rural interior of Tunisia is poorly represented and political engagement on both a national and local level is low. Increasing the awareness of the local communities of their rights – including the access to information and budgets, and women's rights – aided by pro bono law students travelling across the region, could be one way to help end this marginalization, the Tunisian delegation suggested, as well as generally empowering community-based organizations to prioritize their issues and voice their demands to higher levels of representation.

Civil society groups should also help facilitate the exchange of experience and expertise of smaller, more localized community activists across the regions to help knowledge transfer, the spread of best practices and strengthen individual efforts. Local community actors should be engaged to avoid the continued perception that “this is just Tunis telling them what to do,” added one Tunisian Fellow.

Beyond political exclusion, the Tunisian delegation identified the disabled as a key marginalized group in society. There are many existing laws on disability rights, but these need to be re-enforced, recommended the Tunisian Fellows, as well as new legislation being introduced. Easier access to public institutions, especially schools, and better disabled-access public transport should also be established, along with awareness days and events, involving the government, parents of disabled children and disability rights advocacy groups and NGOs. Civil society actors have a key role to play in acting as a “mediator” between the government and those with special needs and their supporters.

Libya

In the dying days of the Gaddafi regime, disparate sectors of society came together to overthrow the old regime. But since the long-reigning dictator's overthrow and death, the country has seemingly lost its common purpose and has begun to fragment along social, political and regional lines.

The nine Salzburg Global Fellows from Libya came from a wide variety of backgrounds, from youth activists, to teachers, filmmakers and former diplomats, but through their group work they reached a shared vision: a “unified Libyan identity” which found “strength in diversity”.

In an earlier presentation of their ideas, a representative from the Libyan delegation had said that Libya needed to consider federalism, or at least realize that talking about the idea of a federalized state – one country made up of multiple autonomous parts, bound together with a common purpose – was “not a dangerous conversation to have.”

To achieve this unified yet diverse vision, five objectives must be met, according to the Libyan Fellows. Firstly, human rights values must be further integrated into society, through schools, universities, mosques, and public lecture series, as well as through widespread multimedia, multi-stakeholder campaigns to entrench citizen rights and responsibilities in post-revolution Libya.

Secondly, civil society capacity must be built up. Workshops on negotiation skills “tailored to the Libya context” and media skills are needed to enhance and expand the expression of diversity.

The third objective presented by the Libyan team of Fellows focused on developing regional co-operation and collaboration in embedding inclusion and embracing diversity. This could be done, they suggested, through culture festivals and the exchange of experiences of tolerance, acceptance and common purpose between multiple stakeholders. The fourth objective looked beyond the grassroots level, and called for the development and reform of policy and legislation to ensure inclusion and diversity. They proposed creating an “inclusive taskforce” made up of groups including civil society actors, the Libyan youth and law experts, to lobby for articles on inclusion to be written into the new constitution,

the drafting committee for which is currently holding elections.

The fifth and final objective needed to reach the end vision of a united yet diverse Libya was the finding of “champions” of inclusion and diversity – be they civil society actors, celebrities, politicians or others – and the securing of sustainable funds. This money could come from international or indigenous donors, considering the pros and cons of both options which were explored in earlier discussions during the session.

Egypt

In some ways echoing the story in Libya, the months since January 25 have seen the country begin to divide along the “binary” view of Islamists versus the military/secularists, which needs to be “deconstructed”, urged the Egyptian delegation. In turn, alliances of mutual interests, across these destructive divides, must be identified and built.

Such divides are hindering democratic progress, especially with regards to diversity and inclusion. As had been pointed out earlier on in the week, it is not only minorities in Egypt that face exclusion and marginalization; the fast changing political climate can see one large section of the political landscape in power one day, only to be overthrown and vilified the next.

Overcoming these deep divisions and “deconstructing the binary” could be vastly aided by establishing some form of transitional justice mechanism to stop growing culture of retribution, proposed the Egyptian Fellows. But as to what form this mechanism would take, the Fellows were undecided. Should it be “truth and reconciliation” or “truth and justice”? If the latter, what kind of justice? Retribution or restorative? Regardless, the Fellows agreed, truth is needed if Egypt is to move forward. Although a Ministry for Transitional Justice and Reconciliation exists in Egypt, few at Schloss Leopoldskron had heard of it despite being heavily involved in post-revolution civil society. Space needs to be created to examine the issues relating to impunity, responsibility and accountability, as well as reconciliation. However, warned one veteran Fellow, if transitional justice mechanisms are to be introduced, those involved need to be careful to address the specifics of the



situation in Egypt and not just simply copy another country's model—context is extremely important.

Besides overcoming the false dichotomy of Islamists and the military, and healing the resulting wounds, before Egypt can be more inclusive in its idea of “Egyptian” identity and embracing of its long-established diverse communities, it must also overcome the widespread impression that inclusion and diversity – and human rights at large – are external imports and not indigenous ideals. This view persists despite, as one Fellow pointed out, the revolutionary slogan being “bread, freedom, dignity”. Fellows from the Egyptian delegation encouraged local civil society actors to find a new language to galvanize support for inclusion and diversity, and inspire people in the same way as the chants of early days of the revolution did, to regain the “spirit of Tahrir”.

Like their Yemeni, Tunisian and Libyan counterparts, the Egyptian Fellows had concrete suggestions of how inclusivity and diversity could be embedded in the new constitution, particularly in the form of quotas and affirmative action to ensure representation of women, minorities and youth, as well as exploring proportional representation. More independent oversight of elections was also called for.

Dual strategies of “bottom-up” grassroots engagement, to change the culture of society to one more respectful of diversity, and “top-down” legislative changes, to support inclusion through the rule of law, need to be pursued simultaneously, it was recommended. Civil society actors have key roles to play with both strategies, with specially designated administrative units within existing government ministries also helping guiding the latter.

Next steps

For a region that severely lacked a strong – in some countries, any – civil society two years ago, what became increasingly apparent throughout the four presentations was the number of groups already working towards many of the goals identified by the Fellows. What is needed now, as the Fellows return to their home countries, be they one of the four focus countries or elsewhere in the world, is improved linkages and support between these various groups to amplify their impact. There is a great pool of passion and talent in the region; this now needs to be harnessed through knowledge exchange and capacity building. Participants recognized that while actions need to be focused locally and nationally, regional information-sharing and strategizing helped them to see specific challenges in a new light

and gave them fresh ideas on how to reframe challenges and implement new approaches.

To this end, as the Fellows left Schloss Leopoldskron, the work of Salzburg Global Seminar continues: helping to form in-country taskforces to formulate “roadmaps” of how to achieve greater inclusion and diversity across the region, and working with session partner, the Arab Human Rights Fund, to establish future continuation of the program.

“Please consider us a faithful and long-term partner,” Fateh Azzam Chair of the Arab Human Rights Fund told the Fellows in his closing remarks.

Nancy Smith, Program Director at Salzburg Global Seminar echoed the Fund's commitment, stating, “We will be following up with you to determine how Salzburg can best to facilitate this new work that you are leading. There is no question that these transitions will continue to be challenging and we want to do what we can to support your efforts in meeting the promises of the revolutions to create more open and inclusive societies.”

The revolutions started nearly two years ago, and whilst the dictators might have been removed from the session's four focus countries, the hard work of building inclusive and diverse democratic society will not be over any time soon.