TRANSFORMING SELF AND SOCIETY?
VOLUNTEERISM, WOMEN AND PATHWAYS TO GOVERNANCE IN THE ARAB REGION

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Abstract - This paper is a qualitative study of the changing landscape of Arab women’s volunteerism in the period between 2011 and 2014. Based on a review of existing literature on women in the “Arab Spring” and 10 in-depth semi-structured interviews with women and men volunteers from five Arab countries, analysis addresses the different pathways of women volunteers towards governance, herein defined as influencing the production of norms, laws and other forms of organizing, institutional and informal. It also explores how women volunteers define their presence in the public space within the context of the Arab uprisings. To address the different dimensions of the research question, the concept of intersectionality borrowed from feminist studies and Black feminist movements in the 1970s and 1980s will be employed to examine complex linkages on how the experience of women volunteers manifested itself within other spheres such as the workplace or the home and to what degree they sustained values inherent in volunteerism.

Introduction:
Arab Women Volunteers: Pathways from Volunteerism to Governance

The scarcity of literature on pathways of women volunteers from volunteerism onwards into the public space presents a challenge to program development and policymaking. It assumes that volunteerism is horizontal and continuous, and neglects to examine vertical contributions as well as challenges to volunteering. According to the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) definition of volunteerism, it “includes civic action and work that is carried out freely and without coercion, where financial gain is not the main motivating principle, and where there are other beneficiaries beyond the volunteer”\(^2\). Different forms of volunteering “include mutual or self-help, philanthropy or service to others, participation and advocacy or campaigning”\(^3\). The lifeblood of volunteerism remains to be a space within which concepts, values, aims and practices are all linked to one another but within a context that may or may not be hospitable towards them. How and whether or not volunteerism manifests itself in influencing the production of norms, laws and other forms of organizing, institutional and informal, or, in other words, governance remain to be known.

The landscape of volunteerism in the Arab region, especially as related to women, has been directly influenced by the political scene; undergoing a number of changes during

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3 Ibid.
the past four years — both good and bad. Arab women volunteers have had their volunteerism heavily bound to their political activism; their dedication to serving others was intertwined with wanting to serve their countries, and their successes and failures have, thus, been bound to the political realities within which they live. The linkages between the activities of Arab women volunteers and the sociopolitical context are yet to be tackled in analysis. The attempt here is to present a preliminary overview of the gains and losses reaped during the period between 2011 and 2014 for ten Arab volunteers. More in-depth empirical research should be conducted on country-level to deepen our understanding of those changes.

The regional context cannot be overestimated. The Arab region continues to make headlines announcing massive political changes that are, at times, aligned and, at others, overtly clashing with demands voiced in 2011. Those changes are prompted by constantly evolving forms of internal mobilization as well as external geopolitical considerations. The spread of weapons and the crisis in Libya have enforced the agenda of Egypt’s president to defeat terrorism and may have played a role in his sweeping victory with a 96.1 percent vote in 2014. Similarly, the election of an Egyptian president with a military background enforced General Khalifa Haftar’s fight against the Islamists in Libya. Those linkages are essential to our understanding of ongoing shifts in the Region. The struggle for democracy, social justice and freedom is still emphatically articulated in multiple circles but has, otherwise, been engulfed in more pressing economic and security priorities that are interlinked both locally and regionally.

This paper will explore the changing landscape of Arab women’s volunteerism since 2011 and through 2014. Based on a review of existing literature on women in the “Arab Spring” and 10 in-depth semi-structured interviews with women and men volunteers from five Arab countries, analysis addresses the different pathways of women volunteers towards governance, herein defined as influencing the production of norms, laws and other forms of organizing, institutional and informal. It also explores how women volunteers define their presence in the public space within the context of the Arab uprisings. To address the different dimensions of the research question, the concept of intersectionality borrowed from feminist studies and which could be traced to Black feminist movements in the 1970s and 1980s is particularly useful in studying and analyzing those complex linkages. This “paradigm” (Hancock 2007) rejects essentialist

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approaches to analyzing the position of women in a community and opts for a more sophisticated approach that takes into account both individual as well as structural and contextual considerations. This approach will inform analysis in this paper; the current historical juncture in the Arab world could benefit from an eclectic approach to understanding the following: How has the experience of women as volunteer/activists manifested itself within other spheres such as the workplace or the home. To what degree are the values inherent in volunteerism sustained?

Methodology and Sampling

This paper is based on purposive sampling which included women and men who took part in the popular uprisings: representatives of political parties, civil society organizations and development programmes. The researcher conducted 10 interviews with eight women and two men between the ages of 21 and 30 who had volunteered for a minimum of three years and a maximum of ten.

The sample included interviews with men in order to determine to what extent they believed that women volunteers had either regressed or progressed with respect to their ability to participate in the public space. The researcher covered five countries—Egypt, Jordan, Libya, Tunisia and Yemen—four of which have undergone major sociopolitical upheaval, and one that remains relatively stable but has nevertheless been indirectly influenced by the changes taking place in neighboring countries. This is to understand the wide range of influences that volunteerism had within the Arab Region within and beyond the context of major transitions.

A number of the respondents had volunteered in other—mostly Arab—countries. Interviews were semi-structured in order to allow respondents to tell their story and reflect on their past experiences as whether those have continued to inform the present. The research explored the learning aspect of volunteerism. Respondents were asked if they had managed to sustain their values and how. Special attention was given to the particular challenges that women face and suggestions as to how to overcome them.

This paper is exploratory and should serve as a basis for further research while, at the same time, recognizing that within the Arab region the definition of “political” is quite fluid includes the following:

- **Institutionalized entities** such as political parties in addition to civil society wherein most political issues are debated.

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- Informal/non-institutionalized entities such as tribal groups (Libya) and political religious parties (i.e. the Muslim Brotherhood followers and Salafis in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Yemen)

The following section features key themes that emerged out of the study as related to how volunteerism can transform individuals and the communities and countries where they reside.

All respondents have had extensive experience as volunteers and it is in this capacity that they provide insight into the impact of volunteerism on the role of women in public life as well as the long-term impact of volunteerism in the Arab region. A more extensive longitudinal study could provide further insight into how to maximize the scale and influence of volunteerism throughout the region.

The Context: What is beyond “Transitions”?  

Analysis on the continuous mobilization in the Arab Region has emphasized “transitions” as its quintessential feature. In what was considered the site of enduring autocracies, that emphasis has itself transitioned from an excited exploration of sudden sociopolitical shifts to a complacent escapism; it has been the overarching lens through which academics, donors, multi-laterial and other stakeholders perceive and analyze various dimensions of the Arab awakening, while, at the same time, forming the basis of development strategies. The widespread espousal of this approach has engendered a discourse that has failed to lead to progress. On the contrary, it appears to have resulted in a deadlock in transitions—at least with respect to development.

This emphasis constitutes a problem for two main reasons; the first is related to what Thomas Carothers describes as the “sequencing fallacy” which holds that for a country to carve out a path to democratization, rule of law and a functioning state need to be instituted first. This sequence is a fallacy because it seems to suggest a very ordered “transition” to democracy; reality has proven to be otherwise, it has demonstrated that the path is quite messy and iterative, and has built an argument for abandoning the sequence in favor of more flexible strategies that take into account the context within which those changes are implemented. According to Migdal, “Both state and society are mutually transforming” and that state of flux presents a counterargument to the sequencing paradigm; examples from Eastern Europe, South Africa and Nigeria are instructive in that regard. The second problem is that the discourse on transitions seems to be lacking in a long-term vision, which is very much needed to establish sustainable changes or transformations that the movements from 2011 until today continue to strive to realize.

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By employing the intersectionality approach and with a focus on the nexus between gender, governance and volunteerism, this paper will thus cast aside “transitions” in favor of exploring transformations—those that have been successful, are contested or have been impeded in some way. The underlying rationale here is that a wave of transformations has been unleashed, with 2011 as a turning point; cultural, political and social, and there is a need to examine the entire trajectory via a *longue durée* approach rather than focus on short-term shifts and changes. The aim is to better understand how the shifting role of women volunteers have influenced or otherwise addressed inequities in political governance within the Arab Region across that trajectory.

Integration ensures that, “such concerns are integrated in the analysis of obstacles to development and that these concerns inform the formulation of policy, programmes and projects.” Transformation on the other hand, “aims to move beyond integrating women’s concerns relating to the demands of their daily lives, to focus on improving women’s position (status), and thereby transforming the agenda” (Mukhopadhyay 45). This paper will focus on transformation as opposed to integration. It will examine how or whether volunteerism as it pertains to governance facilitates transformation.

Finally, the relationship between volunteerism and gender within the context of a succession of sociopolitical change requires further analysis concerning the shifting role of women volunteers as they translate their experiences into the political realm. What are the values of volunteerism that they choose to keep? And how? A bottom-up approach that highlights personal narratives as well charting the relationship between volunteerism and gender within the context of governance will be used.

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**The Body Politic(s) of the Revolution (2011-2014)**

Initially, revolutionary fervor brought with it a wave of volunteers: youth of both genders filled city squares, streets and other public meeting places demanding change: The cycle of “waithood”, it was thought, was broken. At that time, the dominant discourse was rights-based and there was an effort made to make it gender-neutral. This signaled a massive win for women and ignited hopes of the more equitable distribution of power between the two genders. Because of this, protestors and civil society did not articulate a gender-based agenda at the beginning of the uprisings. In Egypt, the case of the “virginity tests” that took place in March 2011 when the army cracked down on a sit-in in Tahrir did cause a stir but it was interpreted through a lens that was hopeful, one that emphasized the empowerment of women as a potential gain not oppression. Samira Ibrahim went to court and, as a result, a court order was issued in December 2011 to stop the practice of those tests. However in March 2012, Dr. Adel El Mogy was exonerated by a military trial from charges laid in connection with the virginity testing of Ibrahim. And so as 2012 rolled into 2014, it became clear that the gains women made in 2011 were

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unraveling and slowly gender-related concerns were voiced. The gendered discourse and debate came to the forefront when the fruits of women’s participation in 2011 were threatened and in instances, even taken away, within a very heated political landscape.

Those threats were manifold but mostly related to violations of the body; a link here can be made between the body of the woman and the body of the nation; and both seem to have become deeply political during that period. In Libya, violence against women who are active within the public space continues to be the most serious threat posed to women’s participation in any activities. The murder of human rights lawyer Salwa Bugaighis in her home in Benghazi on June 25th is an example. A former NTC member and woman whose volunteerism extended to monitoring elections in Tunisia and to campaigning against corruption in Libya, was deemed a threat to the politics of the nation-in-becoming or the body politic by terrorist groups and so had her own body violated via a shot in her head within the safe space of her own home. In Egypt, sexual harassment and rape have become one of the main alarming detriments to women’s participation in the public space. The attack of Yasmine El Baramawy in Mohammed Mahmoud and the recent rape of a woman in Tahrir which was caught on video are examples. The presence of women in the public space seems to pose an ideological or ideational threat to the body politic, to the nation as a single unified entity and so, the counter attack seems to have targeted women’s bodies within the context of social and cultural strictures. That said, the body politics of the revolution seem to be much more than simply consolidating a body politic but more about unpacking and restructuring a body politic that would include women.

An analysis of violence against women is beyond the scope of this paper but referring to it is essential. While the point of departure is the same – a call for bread, freedom and social justice – what was called an “Arab Spring” has evolved into polyphony of seasons. It is important to note that the region is not a single unit of analysis but that each country presents a different experience and provides a different model of understanding those shifts especially as they manifest themselves within the public space. What is certain is that the Arab region is currently in a situation of flux. This necessitates an unpacking of each country’s experience and its several dimensions in order to safeguard against regression and/or diffusion of energy.

Realized Pathways

Talent Identification and Opening New Spaces for Self Realization

I have been volunteering with women’s groups in Egypt since I was 17 to work with them on FGM campaigns. It was to the first time I learned how to organize my efforts.

and focus on what I want and to make it happen. Also, the fact that volunteerism is based on the personal free will to do something with others who share the same cause and enthusiasm was key in sustaining my interest for as long as possible.

Civil society leader from Egypt

According to respondents living in all of the five countries covered within the research, volunteerism was a key determinant behind the realization of individual potential. According to one of the Libya respondents, volunteerism was an, “unleashing of talents”.

A respondent from Tunisia reiterated how volunteerism helps to open up “new spaces” to hone skills and identify talents that would not have been possible otherwise. Yet another explained how volunteerism allowed her to realize what she is capable of: “I knew I could step into leadership”. It helped her “evolve as a person” and become more confident. A respondent from Egypt described volunteering as an experience of “self-discovery” and “self-awareness”. More significantly, respondents also described volunteerism as malleable and dynamic: as both a manifestation and a reflection of self-awareness and discovery.

Another interesting insight that emerged from the study is how volunteerism assists individuals to bridge the disciplinary and specialization divide: i.e. a person educated in one profession can volunteer for a completely different one.

For example, as a volunteer, a pharmacist can engage in activities related to raising political awareness, while a political scientist can volunteer at a makeshift hospital. According to a respondent from Tunisia, because volunteerism is eclectic and less rigid with respect to disciplinary boundaries, it opened up new opportunities—not only in terms of her personal growth, but also her professional advancement.

**Structural Consolidation: Sustaining and Institutionalizing Volunteerism**

After the ousting of [former president] Ben Ali, women continued to be active. They took part in elections as candidates. Moreover, women were very active in civil society and political parties too. However, we do see a few changes [in the post-Ben Ali period], especially an increasing number of attacks on our freedoms and on women’s rights.

Lina Ben Mhenni, Tunisia, Interview conducted in Fall 2012.¹⁰

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In all five countries, volunteerism spawned a number of organizations that offered a variety of services that include but are not limited to: human rights, democracy and negotiation skills.

In Yemen, a number of civil society organizations led by women emerged in the period following the Revolution. These can be divided into three main types: short-term initiatives (documentation of the revolution…etc.), service-oriented initiatives and finally, local associations that have an Islamist affiliation—especially with the Islah party. Although, the people have largely driven the process of transforming the experience of volunteerism into a more sustained form, donor funding directs the specific agenda.

In Tunisia, the drafting of the constitution revealed the impact of female volunteerism on public life. One organization—Al Bawsala—was launched and led by a woman in order to act as a watchdog and monitor the constitutional drafting process. The organization’s objectives are: 11

- To reposition citizens by placing them at the centre of political action by offering them the means to stay updated with their elected representatives and by providing them with the opportunity to defend their fundamental rights.
- To build relationships with elected representatives and decision-makers in order to work towards the establishment of good governance practices and political ethics.
- To participate in defending concepts of social progress and citizen empowerment.

Not all consolidation efforts were successful or sustained. Nevertheless, research revealed that in all of the countries covered there were a number of successes. In Yemen for example, two women and two men launched #Support Yemen, an independent media collective that uses video to share stories that would otherwise remain untold and to chronicle the struggle for rights. They define themselves as follows:

We are young Yemeni female and male organizers, activists, journalists, videographers, photographers, and bloggers who are passionate about using creative communication strategies as a tool for social change. Our work is guided by the collective vision and goals of our community to build a free and just world.

New Strategic Directions: Bringing the Periphery to the Center

Volunteerism can transform according to changing needs as well as shifts in the public space.

In Tunisia, volunteerism fanned out from the urban centers to other parts of the country thereby facilitating greater communication between different parts of the Tunisian society post-Ben Ali. In Yemen, one respondent highlighted how civil society organizations have extended the geographic scope of volunteering activities. Some respondents transformed from being volunteers to managing them. One respondent from Egypt related her experience thus:

> My work in civil society is for the most part is actually based on volunteerism. I think the thing I learned most from being a volunteer is that now I can manage fresh volunteers and guide them to achieving their professional goals.

**Retaining values inherent in volunteering**

All respondents emphasized how they had retained the values acquired as volunteers even after the voluntary experience had ended. They also stated that they continue to engage in volunteering activities—including those who have since found employment. In response to the question regarding whether or not she has continued to volunteer despite being employed, one respondent from Egypt said:

> Yes, of course. All the time. My career (civil society) is basically based on this. The majority of the women I know, including my "traditional Egyptian" mother, are volunteering for different work they are passionate about.

The key values they highlighted were:

- **Tolerance**: Volunteerism allows for meeting and communicating with people with different backgrounds and interests; often not from within one’s own circle. This helps to defeat harmful stereotypes. Exposure to others is key. One Tunisian respondent related how as a volunteer, she met with women who wore the niqab and that this helped alter her understanding and expectations of women who wear that attire. “Stereotypes are broken,” she said.

- **Belonging**: According to two respondents, one of the key values acquired is the sense of belonging to a community that is a result of networking and exposure to fellow volunteers on a joint mission and/or interest.

- **Selflessness**: According to a respondent from Jordan, volunteerism makes you feel “appreciated; you touch someone else’s life”.

- **Empowerment**: Respondents from all five countries identified “confidence” and feeling “empowered” as one of the values that they took away from their experience as volunteers.
Contested Pathways

Contested Definitions: Volunteerism as Service, Volunteerism as Dissent

In Arab region the line that separates volunteerism from protest and dissent are difficult to gauge—especially given the sociopolitical upheavals that continue to characterize issues of governance. Respondents tended to define dissent and protest as political and volunteerism as service.

A number of respondents argued that volunteerism means providing community services in a long-term and sustained manner and that taking part in protests was reactive, short-term and thus, does not constitute volunteerism. A respondent from Tunisia described the experience of volunteerism as different from that of protest—that volunteerism is guided by a “vision” and is “sustainable” as opposed to demonstrating, which is “a form engagement but to what extent? And how frequent?”

Still others contend that volunteerism is integral to taking part in public demonstrations, such as serving in make-shift hospitals and leveraging resources for food and shelter. Another respondent from Egypt noted that a sense of solidarity is inherent to both volunteerism and protest: e.g. the act of uniting for a common mission and cause.

Citizens First, Women Second: Citizenship and Gender

“At the beginning of the protests, women were participating and mobilizing others to join in—not only activist women but also housewives and young women who were not previously engaged in politics. They knew they were seeking dignity and freedom, not as women, but as citizens.” Esraa Abdel Fattah, Egypt, Interview conducted in Fall 2012. 12

In all of the four countries that experienced major sociopolitical and regime change, respondents emphasized that that the women who participated in volunteer activities never identified themselves as “women” but primarily as “citizens”. According to a respondent from Yemen, when women volunteer, they do so, “as part of the people and for a universal cause…” and that women “struggle for mankind and not only for women” and therefore should not be undermined as being motivated only by self-interest.

During the more intense days of the uprising, the public discourse focused on the political change and not necessarily gender inequality. Women and men volunteered in the public space as equals: Women shouldered the same responsibility as men, toiling in make-shift

hospitals and organizing the allocation and distribution of food, water and other necessities in order to maintain the protests.

According to respondents from Libya, the Revolution led to an increase in female volunteerism. During the Qaddafi regime any collective were forbidden. The government prohibited both women and men from volunteering. The Revolution “opened up a space for much change to take place”. This space, however, is shrinking. The needs for volunteerism have changed; from the need to deliver aid during the intense days of the uprisings to less urgent initiatives; and cultural norms that prevent women from participating in public have re-emerged.

From Volunteerism to the Corporate World

Although the public tends to perceive volunteerism as essentially a transient experience, this is not necessarily the perspective of volunteers who invest their time and energy.

According to one respondent from Tunisia, the transition from being a volunteer to a professional was not a linear process. For her, it was more of a transformation, both personal and professional than a transition from one to the other. “I did not move from one point to another. It is less of a linear path; that path from volunteerism to becoming a professional.”

Another respondent from Tunisia linked volunteering to employment. Volunteerism, “increases your employability profile” she said and added that it also allowed her to find the right job. It is, “experience without money.” This link was particularly significant in Jordan where one respondent related that young people in particular acquire “experience” through volunteering and that it enhances their CVs.

Volunteerism as Entrepreneurship

For many women, participating in the 2011 uprising boosted their self-confidence and their willingness to take risks. A number of women went on to launch new enterprises. One of the respondents from Egypt, for example, transformed her considerable experience as a volunteer and is now leading a human rights organization and co-founded a political party. During the interview, she described women volunteers as “social entrepreneurs”. In response to a question concerning whether the role of women volunteers had shifted following the revolution, she replied:

“Dramatically! Before women usually kept out of social work and only volunteered for charity work that was related to their biological nature as mothers and caretakers. But now, women are not only volunteering for extreme and risky social and political action, they are also taking the initiative. They are becoming social entrepreneurs, not only volunteers.”
**Politicized Volunteerism?**

“I do not think that the women in the constituent assembly represent me: they are just toys in the hands of their male colleagues, and they are the kind of women who take their cue from their male colleagues before raising their hands to vote for an article or reject it.” Lina Ben Mhenni, Tunisia, Interview conducted in Fall 2012.13

In the period immediately following the uprisings and the beginning of the democratic process, volunteerism became political. Men and women volunteered for political campaigns. Indeed, many of candidates had been volunteers during the uprisings. Nevertheless, one respondent from Libya, was critical and charged that it “contradicted” the very essence of volunteerism. “Volunteerism is now on billboards and used for political advancement not for the sincere desire to bring about change.”

**Legacies of Volunteerism**

Many respondents mentioned the historical and political roots of volunteerism; particularly those from Tunisia and Yemen. A respondent from the latter noted that the country’s past history as a socialist state helped create a legacy of volunteerism that has since become part of the social DNA. Tribal constituencies also helped expand these activities making them, “by default, volunteers”. The historical memory of volunteerism has not been sufficiently analyzed and is thus, often misunderstood as not having existed before the uprisings. In both countries volunteerism is therefore not only rooted in cultural tradition but also relatively recent history.

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**Impeded Pathways**

**Cultural Strictures**

The Arab Spring did not save Arab women.

Yemeni Activist

In all five countries, the major challenge for is a culture that does not allow women to transform their experiences as volunteers into a more sustainable and institutionalized form of participation. Respondents mentioned patriarchy, violence against women who dare to transgress into the public space (i.e. forced virginity testing in Egypt) and deteriorating security in Libya as the main reasons why the rights of women were being systematically eroded.

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According to a respondent from Libya: “Progress for women did happen but it is now stagnant because of the culture. Women need to fight to change the culture and not give in to it.” Another respondent described patriarchy as, “not only sexist but downright misogynist.” Yet another responded from Libya cited tribalism as, “pillaging the dreams of young people”.

In Yemen, the respondent described the situation as more complex; the struggle was “at home, in the street and in political parties”. Women were active participants in the social mobilization, but their public fight for social justice and freedom is also mirrored in home and subsequently in political parties.

*Organizational Challenges: Creating a Vision for Volunteerism*

In Tunisia, the challenge for women was to sustain their activities beyond a short time span and to have more autonomy over their volunteerism agenda, which relates to the need for a national vision for volunteerism. In Egypt, sexual harassment, beatings and rape mean that in women require special security zones in order to engage in the public discourse. Deteriorating security has made it more difficult for women to move freely in within the public space.

Another challenge is the inability to absorb an increasing number of volunteers. Student unions represent what one respondent described as an expanding space for volunteers; more students are joining and their presence is getting heard. A number of respondents noted that the necessity of managing such large numbers of volunteers is vital to sustaining that space in the future. Regulating volunteerism is a challenge and an opportunity at the same time.

There were also personal challenges. One respondent from Egypt described her experience as follows: “I had personal difficulty dealing with certain types of people because I am an introvert by nature. But the good news is that volunteerism helped me change this. I now know how to manage my energy among others.”

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

This preliminary round of interviews has demonstrated that Arab countries are indeed undergoing a transformation and that women are retaining the values and skills that they have acquired through volunteerism. They are transformed from within.

Nevertheless, translating self-discovery and self-realization into the public realm is not always successful. Governments and related governance institutions within the Arab region are still overwhelmingly male dominated and highly patriarchal. The majority of the obstacles that women struggle to overcome are cultural as well as organizational. They vary according to country context.
Recommendations include the following:

1. Rethinking our approach to “volunteerism”: The assumption that volunteer work is transient is flawed. To fully comprehend the kinds of effects that volunteering has on volunteers will require a study of much greater depth, reach and length. A longitudinal study could be an interesting place to start.

2. Bringing culture back into volunteering: The best and most sustainable volunteering institutions are those that are culturally entrenched. This is particularly critical for women: for example, tribal confederations in Libya and Jordan. An approach to volunteering that targets them as a sustainable vehicle for change would help expand both the activities and their impact.

3. Funding: One of the reasons why volunteering is so attractive is because it allows individuals to exercise autonomy and the freedom to pursue their passion outside of their particular discipline. Nevertheless, volunteers should not be expected to pay out of their own pockets. More funding should go into supporting volunteer activities.

4. Managing volunteers: In the Arab region, no regulations currently exist to manage and monitor volunteers. Quality volunteer management has significant effects on the quality and impact of the volunteer experience.

5. Preserve and expand public spaces: Given findings on shrinking spaces for volunteering and activism, especially for women, Governments and key stakeholders should consider how to ensure supportive environments for volunteerism and civic engagement.

6. Develop a gender-based agenda that is as inclusive as possible: It was clear that female respondents found their contributions as volunteers as inherently degendered, and largely about their roles as citizens. Some of the challenges they faced were indeed related to their gender. Nevertheless, their priorities are on agendas for inclusive governance for all.

Works Cited


