

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EVALUATION OF AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S EGYPT CRISIS AND TRANSITION PROJECT

November 2014 - Michelle Besley, Independent Consultant

This document provides a summary of the external evaluation of Amnesty International's 2013 Crisis and Transition Project in Egypt. The evaluation assessed the project's relevance and impact, effectiveness in a volatile context, and internal processes and project management. It captured the successes, failures and challenges of the project and learnings to inform Amnesty International's future work in Egypt and in other situations of crisis and transition.

INTRODUCTION

The increasingly unpredictable political situation posed a range of challenges for Amnesty International's work on Egypt. The organization responded to the situation with a broad reactive framework addressing human rights issues in six thematic areas:

- Freedoms of expression, association and assembly;
- Accountability in the criminal justice system, especially in the context of the use of excessive force and torture and other ill-treatment by the security forces;
- The need for all detainees to have their rights to due process, including fair trials;
- Security sector reform;
- Discrimination against women and accountability for sexual violence; and
- Discrimination and sectarian attacks against Coptic Christians.

The project aimed to establish Amnesty International's relevance as a powerful voice for human rights in Egypt, and through this influence positive change. The volatile, unpredictable, and politically unstable situation made planning and delivering on previously planned work problematic, rendering Amnesty International's work on Egypt largely reactive in nature. Adapting to the rapidly changing political and human rights situation, the Egypt Team adopted an approach that combined fact-finding and documentation of human rights violations, legal and policy analysis, lobbying and other advocacy activities targeting the Egyptian authorities and other key stakeholders, media initiatives and public campaigning through Amnesty International's sections (national chapters). The project in 2013-14 was funded by the NRK Norwegian Telethon.

METHODOLOGY

The evaluation was conducted by an external independent consultant to assess the changes brought about by the project, and understand how and in what ways the project is achieving change. This was undertaken through a review of critical project documentation and 57 in-depth semi-structured interviews. Consultations were carried out with stakeholders in Egypt including: activists, lawyers, local and international media outlets, civil society organizations (CSOs), individuals and family members who had received support from Amnesty International, and second government contacts, including embassy staff. Consultations were carried out with international stakeholders including: International Secretariat staff, Amnesty International section staff, UN and regional bodies, and international media outlets. While attempts were made to engage Egyptian government officials during the evaluation, the evaluator was unable to secure appointments.

Three interconnected processes were used to assess the project:

Theory of Change – The evaluation made the project's Theory of Change explicit and tested the validity of the project's approach and assumptions underpinning its success based on the evidence collected. It helped to clarify the approach and strategies used in the project, and to better

understand the role of Amnesty International in supporting change in Egypt, and identify the areas in which it is most and least effective, how it adds value, and the barriers it faces.

Identifying outcomes – The evaluation assessed the impact of the project, and the outcomes it contributed to using the Theory of Change developed and the four change dimensions outlined in Amnesty International’s Impact Monitoring Framework: changes in people’s lives; changes in public policies; changes in accountability; and changes in activism and mobilization for human rights. It captured both intended and unintended and positive and negative outcomes. It sought to locate and understand outcomes in relation to the context and the multiple factors and stakeholders that influence outcomes. The evaluation constructed plausible explanations to identify the project’s contribution to outcomes supported by information about the change process through the triangulation of data that included information provided by evaluation respondents and project documentation.

Value for Money – Based on the findings of the first two components, the evaluation provided an evidence-based high level Value for Money assessment of the project. It assessed the four components of Value for Money (economy, efficiency, effectiveness and equity) and examined the links between the costs and inputs, outputs and outcomes with consideration of the context and operating environment and the alternatives available (choice of strategies and investment of resources).

KEY FINDINGS

Impact and relevance

Amnesty International has spoken out strongly against human rights violations while maintaining a position of independence and political neutrality. It is widely regarded as a credible human rights organization across the spectrum of stakeholders in Egypt. This positioning has helped it to establish itself as a powerful and relevant voice on human rights in Egypt and increased its ability to influence. Its relevance is enhanced due to its international voice which has echoed those of Egyptian CSOs which are often ignored by authorities. Supporting Egyptian civil society over the years to develop expertise in using international human rights frameworks has increased its relevance in the current crisis context due to the politicization of human rights dialogue in Egypt.

The Egypt Team has delivered a high number of quality outputs with a limited number of staff in a demanding and challenging period. The quality and scope of documentation produced by the Egypt Team was acknowledged by a respondent engaged by another organisation to undertake a documentation review of human rights issues during the Egypt crisis who stated, *‘The work done by the team was superb; every big and small issue was documented in a timely way. Its documentation reflected and responded to different political and economic rights, women’s rights and minority issues. They covered everything in a very timely way and have produced some very serious work’*. The changeable context, worsening scale of human rights violations and intractable position of the government has created a high demand on the team and made planning and effecting change in Egypt difficult.

Amnesty International has worked in collaboration with CSOs and a range of individuals, organisations and governments to address human rights violations and bring about changes in the lives of Egyptians. The project has contributed to a range of significant outcomes. Some notable examples include:

- *Prisoner release and reduced sentences* – an 11-year prison sentence against 14 women and seven girls was overturned and a 15-year-old schoolboy released. Amnesty International’s work over the years 2011-13 has contributed to the release of several other detainees. Respondents also pointed to reductions in mass death penalty sentences imposed in 2014.
- *Stopping repressive laws from being imposed* – hampering efforts by Egyptian authorities to impose a new NGO law that would have imposed tighter restrictions on freedom of association.
- *Creating safety for Egyptian CSOs to speak and heightening the margins of speech* – such as by exposing the secret detention centre at an Egyptian military camp which CSOs did not feel safe to speak up about until Amnesty International first raised and published the issue.

- *Challenging the narrative of government* – its report on the killings of protesters at Rabaa al-Adawiya in August 2013 revealed large inaccuracies in the government’s version of events, and established a pattern of excessive use of force, including unnecessary lethal force by security forces.

The evaluation also found that Amnesty International’s longer-term work on Egypt had contributed to the organization’s continued relevance during the reporting period:

- *Raising awareness and influencing the national debate* - particularly in relation to taboo subjects such as forced “virginity tests” (which were banned by an administrative court in 2011 in a ruling based in part on Amnesty International’s research), and blasphemy charges.
- *Enhanced capacity of Egyptian CSOs* – particularly in the area of documentation of human rights violations and abuses.
- *Supporting long term shifts in public awareness of human rights* – for example by making Egyptian people see torture as unacceptable.
- *Improving people’s quality of life in informal settlements* – through its long term work on housing and slums, documenting forced evictions and unsafe areas.
- *Eliciting rare statements from authorities used by CSOs to hold government to account* - An example cited in several interviews was the case in which Amnesty International met Abdel Fattah al-Sisi when he was the head of Egypt’s military intelligence in June 2011 to discuss the issue of forced “virginity tests”. The process elicited a range of statements and commitments that have allowed CSOs to point to contradictions and failed commitments, holding him to account in his current position as president.

The project has tried hard to bring about changes in laws, policies and standards, and practice and accountability. However, significant changes have not been made in these areas, largely due to the low political will on the part of the Egyptian Government to undertake human rights reform, in which Amnesty International has limited scope to influence, and successive changes in governments which has made it difficult to apply sustained pressure upon power holders. Despite the highly challenging advocacy context, Amnesty International successfully seized some windows of opportunity, leading to some small gains. Many of these changes were not sustainable in the political context and gains were largely reversed or made redundant as new governments came into power, taking the organization back to square one on several occasions.

Effectiveness in a volatile context

Conducting robust and in-depth research on human rights issues has enabled Amnesty International to speak out strongly on a wide range of human rights issues from a position of authority using an independent evidence base. It has been strong and quick in its condemnation which has proved effective in a number of cases. For example, the immediate and productive approach taken by Amnesty International after the verdict of the three Al Jazeera journalists in June 2014 was seen to influence the position of others to build collective pressure. An Egyptian-based second government respondent stated, *‘It put the US in an uncomfortable position. As the US is farther behind [in time zones], their statements are affected by what has been said; John Kerry would never have said something that strongly if it wasn’t for the reaction’.*

While the team has produced an exceptional number of in-depth reports, stakeholders noted that the team is using a default traditional research methodology in a crisis context, waiting to gather all the facts before releasing statements. They noted that a ‘crisis’ research methodology whereby information is conveyed quickly when researchers are on the ground (such as through the reporting of observations which do not need to be substantiated on the spot) followed up by in-depth reporting would enhance effectiveness.

The project has used a broad reactive framework which has allowed it to document and campaign on a range of critical issues as they emerge. However, this has made it difficult for the team to prioritize, causing it to try to cover too many issues and resulted in a focus on fast-paced delivery. The project’s effectiveness may have been enhanced if it had narrowed its focus areas, defined

realistic yet flexible goals in thematic areas, and developed, monitored and tested theories of change at the micro level to bring about specific changes. This is particularly important as some traditional campaigning strategies which aimed to pressure the Egyptian government to live up to international human rights obligations have not been effective in instances where authorities are impervious to such pressure.

Gaps and weakness in the project related to strategy and campaigning tactics appear to result from the Amnesty International team structure which sets a predetermined response approach of producing in-depth documentation and leading membership-based campaigning. This structure has limited effectiveness as it has not given the team the freedom and flexibility to fully explore the best ways to bring about change in the context of Egypt, and develop appropriate strategies by engaging select stakeholders and targeting power holders in nuanced and appropriate ways.

Value for Money

The overall value for money of the project is strong, with the project balancing issues of economy, efficiency, effectiveness and equity appropriately. The team is particularly excelling in the area of efficiency, producing an exceptionally high number of outputs compared to Amnesty International's other Middle East and North Africa (MENA) crisis and transition projects. There are issues relating to the sustainability of outcomes (which are unavoidable given the unpredictable and changing context) and of efficiency (as the high level of outputs produced appears to be the result of a committed team that have worked above and beyond over a protracted crisis period). There is scope to re-conceptualize the project and prioritize the levels and types of investment in different areas of work to enhance effectiveness.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **Quick and 'real time' power and context analyzes** – need to be carried out more often as power holders change, collecting specific and critical information from key stakeholders.
- **Consciously setting the response agenda** – there is a danger that during fast-paced crisis periods, the team will be left reacting to a string of violations, and a risk that the government sets the agenda, distracting the organization from its longer term crucial work.
- **Lack of clear parameters for thematic areas** – the organization may spread itself too thinly by trying to cover too much ground with a broad reactive framework.
- **Ebb and flow of work** – the unpredictable nature of a crisis context may mean that gains and momentum built through long term planned work are lost if resources are diverted.
- **Realistic and flexible goals** – the unpredictable and fast-paced nature of change means traditional planning processes may not be appropriate.
- **Importance of the speed of response** – speaking out loudly early on in a crisis can set the tone and influence the reactions of others who follow (governments, leaders and organizations).
- **Traditional research methodologies** – whereby researchers on the ground hold off on making statements until they have conducted in-depth research may result in missed opportunities to convey important information and influence at critical junctures.
- **Agile campaigning processes** – seizing on short windows for effecting change may require collaboration with a smaller number of actors who can work in a focused way to deliver specific strategies in short timeframes.
- **Insufficient management resources** – standard review arrangements may be insufficient in times of crisis, creating bottlenecks during periods where the team is producing a high number of reports and statements which must be signed off and submitted to media quickly.
- **Diminished time for learning and reflection** – the pace and scale of the crisis may lead to a focus on delivery, making it difficult to monitor and explore the potential links between different advocacy efforts and their result, and reflect on how to invest strategically in particular areas.
- **Staff burn out** – the organization attracts committed staff who work above and beyond in protracted crises which can be detrimental when planning and resourcing are unrealistic.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Clarity of purpose** - Be explicit regarding when efforts are expected to bring about real change in Egypt and when they are undertaken because Amnesty International has a moral imperative to speak out even if this is not expected to effect change (for measurement purposes).
- **Link Theory of Change more closely to context** - Clearly differentiate and invest in strategies to effect change through local and international pressure in ways appropriate to the Egyptian context.
- **Monitoring** – Develop light monitoring processes which capture information about which strategies are working and why, success factors, and factors enabling and hindering change.
- **Investment in developing and testing Theories of Change** - give the team time and opportunity to build their understanding of how change happens in Egypt through regular structured reflection on the appropriateness of strategies based on monitoring data and power analyzes and periodically revisit and revise the project's Theory of Change.
- **Team roles** – Give the team freedom to adapt their roles and focus areas as the Egypt context demands more innovative campaigning strategies, and opportunity to test alternate approaches such as working more selectively with a smaller number of sections and change agents.
- **Planning** – Institute shorter flexible planning cycles, develop realistic shorter term goals, and determine more specific thematic areas – doing less to have a greater impact in key areas. The ToC should ensure the project theory is realistic by clarifying project boundaries and mapping out how it sits within the wider context (influences it and is influenced by it).
- **Proactive** – Be clear on what level of violations Amnesty International will and must respond to, and carve time out to work on issues set by Amnesty International's own agenda (balancing reactive and proactive efforts) and short term and longer term efforts and mobilize resources to maintain these areas of work by bringing in additional staff in times of crisis, and / or drawing more strongly on International Secretariat teams and sections if feasible and appropriate.
- **Adapted research methodology** – Adopt a crisis research methodology when critical events are unfolding quickly whereby researchers on the ground make top line statements based on observation, followed by in-depth reports.
- **Maintain timeliness** – Engage additional temporary supervisors when a high number of outputs are being produced during fast-paced crisis periods to ensure they are submitted to the media section on time.
- **Support to staff** – Put additional mechanisms in place to support and retain country staff (i.e. remuneration, terms of contracts and safety) and give team members additional leave or compensation (i.e. R&R) if they have worked intensively over protracted crisis periods.