

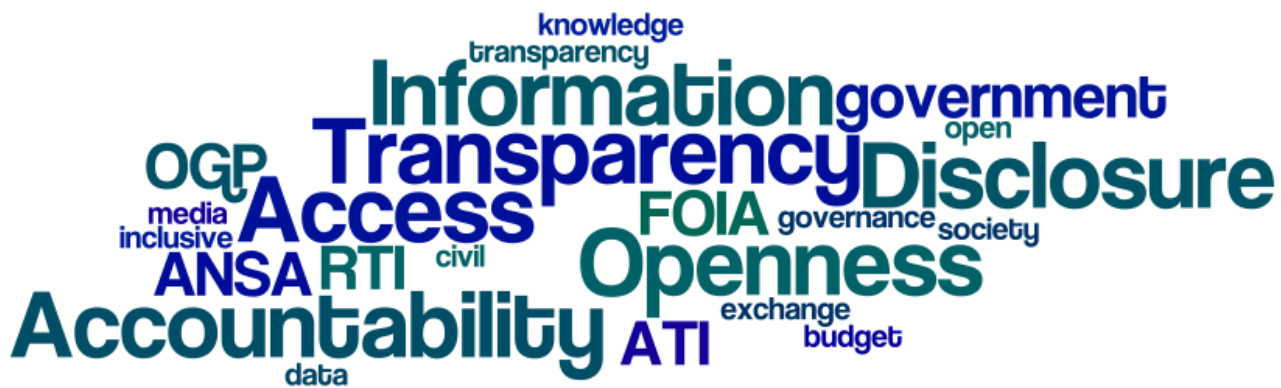


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REGIONAL DIALOGUE

Advancing Access to Information in MNA: Supporting Coalitions & Networks

Newsletter Issue No. 2
MAY 2012



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ATI-MNA Newsletter, Second issue!

This Newsletter is a publication from the “**Regional Dialogue on Supporting Coalitions and Networking to Advance Access to Information in MENA**”, which aims to support the exchange of information and knowledge between different stakeholders from Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia on Access to Information (ATI).

The objective of this newsletter is to provide a space for sharing information where coalitions working toward effective ATI in the MENA region can disseminate broadly their work and recent developments related to ATI in their countries and more. The newsletter is complemented with other online resources such as videos or documents in Arabic and English. Other materials and news can be found on the initiative’s Facebook page. Please like the page and share your content and news with us.

We are grateful for your feedback on the first issue of this Newsletter. Many of you sent us their comments, messages of support and shared the ATI-MNA Newsletter on their websites and e-mailing lists. We hope that you will continue doing so.

We welcome our colleagues Imad Hanna and Danny Haddad, from the Lebanese Transparency Association, as country coordinators in Lebanon for this Regional Dialogue and our warm thanks to Sara Touma for her great work over the last few months and we wish her all the best in her future endeavors.



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about future events or suggestions,
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page:

<http://on.fb.me/ITq76A>

Summary Videoconference #2, 24 April 2012

“Access to Information: The situation in each country”

Participants during the second videoconference of the Regional Dialogue discussed the state of ATI across all four countries—Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia—while sharing ongoing initiatives by governments and CSOs in each country. The session, moderated by Saad Filali Mknassi, included representatives from government, civil society, the media, and academia.

The first half of the session consisted of a presentation by Said Almadhoun, human rights officer at the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and an adjunct professor of law at the University of Palestine. He provided a brief review of legal initiatives in each of the four countries, as well as regional trends regarding ATI implementation.

Based on ongoing work, the presenter mentioned that while a culture of secrecy prevails over openness in the four countries, efforts pushing for legal and institutional reform processes seek to revert this. Thus awareness raising and training for public officials is crucial to assist in this transition from secrecy to openness. Furthermore, demand from civil society must come not only from CSOs that traditionally focus on this issue, but also others that can benefit from using ATI; in other words, it is key to broaden the base of ATI coalitions to include other sectors such as health, education, housing, environment, etc. In order to achieve this, public awareness about the importance of ATI is critical.

Almadhoun also mentioned that particularly in countries that have ATI legislation or other transparency measures, civil society should make use of institutional mechanisms for disclosure. In doing so, they can contribute to promote a culture of openness, while benefiting from using ATI. Finally he stressed the importance of regional networks to foster knowledge and thus strengthen the capacity of stakeholders. In the second half of the session, each country made some remarks regarding the specific status of ATI in their countries.

Jordan

Concerns that the ATI law in Jordan was drafted and adopted without the involvement of relevant stakeholders (CSOs, private sector, journalists) were raised by participants. During the presentation participants noted that the law has not necessarily facilitated access to information for journalists, particularly given that they may have alternative means of getting information. Moreover, Jordan's implementation of the ATI law is still hampered by a number of existing legal and institutional aspects, such as the Law of State Secrets and Documents. Although the presence of an ATI law is a positive step, they noted that challenges regarding implementation should be addressed.

With regards to implementation, a coalition was formed in 2008 but it is not clear what has been the impact of the coalition's work to advance access to information or monitoring its implementation. One of the challenges highlighted by participants was the limited funding available to undertake awareness-raising and to help with the high court fees. Additional support would enable more CSOs—especially women's groups—to understand the benefits of using ATI, thus promoting better implementation. Local ownership was also underscored as an important element to foster effective ATI. Finally, civil society organizations need to engage with other actors, such as government, and political parties, as well as design a solid action plan to move ahead ATI in Jordan.



The World Bank office in Tunis, 24 April 2012.

The report by Said Almadhoun is being finalized; your comments and suggestions regarding such report are welcome. [Click here to view the draft.](#) You can leave your comments on Facebook, or send them via email to Saad Filali Mknassi (saadfi21@hotmail.com)

Tunisia

Following the popular uprising in Tunisia and the removal of former President Ben Ali, a key development has been the adoption of a Decree on Access to Administrative Documents in July 2011 (Decree 41). Yet challenges to freedom of expression and the right to information remain. For instance, conflicts between the ATI Decree and the Secrecy Act; delays encountered by practitioners when requesting information, which ought to be responded to within 15 days, free of charge; or the need of an independent ATI oversight body. Furthermore, there is limited understanding by citizens regarding the guidelines for making requests, as well a need for training among government officials on implementation. Civil society participants also noted the need for an expanded definition of the right; for example, every person has the right of access to information.

During the session, a government official spoke about the regulation for ATI implementation—adopted on May 3, 2012—and the need for establishing an independent administrative oversight body in charge of ensuring that ATI is implemented. The government has also started to initiate disclosure of public financial and statistical information.

Morocco

As Morocco prepares for the implementation of the new constitutional provision guaranteeing the right to information (Article 27), a government representative spoke about next steps in this regard. These steps include grouping all laws related to the media into one bundle,

while modernizing administrative tools for better records management. Public awareness and CSOs' engagement will be key for effective ATI reforms. Likewise, awareness and political will among civil servants is needed to effectively implement ATI. Participants mentioned that Morocco should draw lessons from the

Jordanian example and incorporate extensive CSO consultations into the process of drafting an ATI law.

An ATI bill is currently being drafted. Such bill will be presented and discussed with CSOs before submission to Parliament. Furthermore, media activists and civil society groups have worked hard to promote the adoption of ATI legislation in Morocco.

Lebanon

Some challenges highlighted by participants to ATI in Lebanon include: political, legal, and administrative constraints. In terms of political constraints, there is limited political will to pass an ATI law. In 2009 there was a coalition including representatives from various organizations and institutions (LebPAC, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Economy and Trade, the Syndicate of Journalists, etc) working on ATI. Furthermore, a draft access to information and whistleblower protection legislation was presented to the relevant Parliamentary Commission, however, this was not tabled for discussion in the Lebanese Parliament. . There are currently no discussions with parliamentary committees and government officials on the ATI bill. Hence, citizens' right to claim access to information is at a standstill. With regards to legal constraints, there are some conflicting laws. For example there is legislation that forbids release of information without permission from the ministry. Finally, related to administrative constraints, as participants highlighted, database management is limited and administrative rules are not simple.



The World Bank office in Rabat, 24 April, 2012

Key Messages from VC 2

- ✓ **ATI laws cannot be reduced to passage alone; implementation is critical to allowing people to claim their rights.**
- ✓ **Governments can work with civil society to consult on laws and regulations as well as to provide trainings and implementation support.**
- ✓ **ATI campaigns are required, with effective engagement with local communities and their associations**

INTERVIEW WITH NEJIB MOKNI: Advancing the implementation of ATI in Tunisia

In this interview, Mr. Nejib Mokni, Public Services Advisor, Presidency of the Government, Republic of Tunisia, reflected on the ongoing efforts of the government of Tunisia to implement the Access to Information (ATI) legislation in the country. (May 7, 2012)

Q. With the adoption of the ATI Decree, the Government of Tunisia has made an important step toward transparency. Why is ATI important for the Government of Tunisia? What are some of the benefits of ATI?

A. Good governance can only be achieved through transparency, accountability and citizen participation, and the realization of these principles can only be done by guaranteeing the right of access to information. Decree-Law No. 2011-41 of 26 May 2011 regarding public access to documents held by public agencies adopted by the Tunisian government has introduced new transparency requirements for public bodies in Tunisia, and is aimed to have a major impact in terms of democratization of relations between Tunisian citizens and the government. In particular, the Decree-Law gives citizens a right of access to documents and information held by public bodies, subject only to a limited regime of exceptions, and it describes the procedures for exercising this right.

Q. What are the Government's plans to implement the ATI Decree? When will the regulations to operationalize the ATI Decree be ready? How will these be implemented?

A. The implementation of the Decree-Law is the most important phase, and requires a clear strategy, for short, medium, and long term. The first step is to explain and raise awareness about the provisions of the Decree-Law. To achieve this goal, thus far the Tunisian government has organized two seminars on ATI and on open data. Also, to further make it understandable and applicable, the government issued an implementing regulation (Circulaire d'application) of this Decree, signed on May 3, 2012. In addition, an action plan that covers many measures related to the Decree-law on ATI is being developed.

Q. What do you think is the role of CSO regarding the implementation of the ATI Decree? Are there plans or mechanisms to engage them?

A. The role of CSO is crucial for the implementation of ATI legislation, especially in the ongoing reform and the claim of this right. Indeed, a panel with CSO has been organized at the regional seminar on "Government and open access to information" held in Tunis last 28-29 March to discuss the role, expectations and engagement mechanisms of civil society in this process.

Q. What do you think are the main challenges regarding the implementation of the ATI Decree? And how do you plan to tackle them? What has been done already?

A. In my opinion, the implementation of the ATI Decree requires major changes in how public bodies manage information, which involves changes in the behaviors and mindsets of public officials, and the harmonization of the existing legislation that conflicts with the Decree. Tackling these challenges will require assistance, monitoring, and training. The regulation (Circulaire d'application), the action plan, and the creation of an independent oversight body to ensure the administrative oversight for the ATI Decree are key actions toward achieving this goal.

Q. What are the benefits that you perceive in this kind of regional knowledge exchanges (e.g. the Regional Dialogue on ATI in MNA)? Have these activities contributed to enhance ATI in Tunisia? If so, how? What other knowledge exchanges activities are planned or have taken place between Tunisia and peer countries to enhance ATI?

A. Certainly, the exchange of knowledge and experiences with other countries is important because it helps in facilitating discussions with experts on access to information and to learn best practices and comparative law on access to information. Similarly, such initiatives allow an exchange between governments and CSO, and can contribute to a better understanding and benchmarking in national policies on access to information in the region. For instance, Tunisia recently attended the annual conference on "Open Government Partnership" (OGP) which was held in Brasilia on 17-18 April 2012 and brought together 53 countries. We are working presently to develop an international exchange program.

The Open Government Partnership and the Arab Region: A platform for Government and Civil Society collaboration

Marcos Mendiburu and Luis Esquivel¹

Last April 17-18, in Brasilia, over 1,000 practitioners—including government officials, civil society, academics, etc—from all over the world came together to discuss how to advance open government as part of the first annual Open Government Partnership (OGP) meeting². The remarkably high attendance to this meeting and the interest generated, even among practitioners who were not able to attend but could follow the meeting online, shows the growing traction of this multi-stakeholder and multi-country initiative. Indeed this underscores the momentum that issues around open government (OG) have been gaining globally. For the Middle East and North Africa region (MNA) this is quite important as various countries have embarked in promoting OG reforms, in the wake of the Arab spring last year. Increasing demand from citizens, together with the use of information and communication technologies, have contributed to put this issue in the agenda of countries in the region.

With the number of countries focusing on OG on the rise, a discussion on the conceptual definition of OG is starting to take place. A narrow view of OG could curtail its cross-cutting transformative potential. In this regard, growing concerns from practitioners highlight the risk of equating OG with open data. As Harlan Yu and David Robinson recently noted in their work “The New Ambiguity of Open Government”³, while governments can facilitate open data on issues that are not politically sensitive this does not necessarily translate in a government being transparent and accountable. Open data it

is clearly an important tool within the broad context of OG, yet it is important to keep in mind that limited participation and lack of accountability can still prevail in governments with strong open data initiatives.



This of course poses the question of what OG means. While it is important to acknowledge that the OG field is in constant evolution due to a number of factors (e.g. changes in technology, citizens demand, engagement with a wide range of actors), and thus OG can be understood in different ways by different practitioners, it is also key to take a look at current efforts to unpack the OG concept. In this sense, the OECD identifies three key elements: (i) transparency, or the possibility of citizens to scrutinize government; (ii) accessibility, or making governments accessible to anyone anywhere; and (iii) responsiveness of government to demands from citizens⁴. In other words, an open government is that one in which citizens can access information related to its performance, allocation and use of resources, decision making processes among others; a government in which through such information citizens can participate in an informed way to demand accountability; and a government that will respond to such demand for accountability. Similarly the Obama Administration in the Open Government Memo released in his first day in office understands that an open government is transparent, participatory and collaborative⁵.

A common issue that can be identified in these definitions of OG is transparency. And within transparency, a crucial element of OG that has been gaining salience consistently in the OGP is access to information (ATI)—also known as freedom of information or the right to information. ATI legislation contributes to strengthen the right of citizens to

¹ Marcos Mendiburu is Senior Social Development Specialist at the World Bank Institute, and Luis Esquivel is Operations Officer at the World Bank Institute.

² The OGP is a new multilateral multi-stakeholder initiative that aims to secure concrete commitments from governments to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to strengthen governance. Given its multi-stakeholder approach, OGP is overseen by a steering committee of governments and civil society organizations. for further information visit <http://www.opengovpartnership.org/>

³ Presentation Available at: <https://worldbankva.adobeconnect.com/a833642795/p3n6v5yodq9/?lauer=false&fcsContent=true&pbMode=normal>

⁴ Policy Brief. *Public Sector Modernisation: Open government*. OECD, February 2005. Available here:

<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/1/35/34455306.pdf>

⁵ The White House. Transparency and Open Government Memorandum. Available here:

http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/TransparencyandOpenGovernment

access government-held information, which in turn can empower them to participate and demand accountability. This can be achieved either by citizens requesting information or by governments proactively disclosing information. Moreover, ATI is one of the eligibility criteria to become an OGP member, together with fiscal transparency, disclosures related to elected or senior public officials and citizen engagement.

As countries presented their OGP action plans during the meeting in Brasilia, it became clear that improving ATI is a common issue across regions and also among both countries with ATI legislation and those without it. For example, Kenya and Tanzania mentioned their commitment to adopt ATI legislation, while Chile, Peru and the US highlighted the importance of improving the implementation of their respective ATI laws.

Particularly relevant for the MNA region is the case of Jordan. In Jordan ATI legislation was enacted in 2007, yet as some academics, media and civil society practitioners have

mentioned some challenges regarding its implementation⁶. With Jordan joining the OGP, and due to the requirement to elaborate and implement an action that addresses national OG priorities, one of the key commitments in its OGP action plan is to amend ATI legislation in order to tackle some of the current challenges and thus improve implementation⁷.

Additionally, Tunisia has expressed interest in joining OGP⁸, as the government has been working to strengthen transparency as part of their OG agenda. For instance, recently the Government of Tunisia prepared and released the regulation to operationalize the ATI legislation there; they are also working to improve budget transparency as well as assets disclosure⁹. These issues are all part of the eligibility criteria to become an OGP member country.

Jordan and Tunisia in MNA—together with several other countries around the globe—underline the interest around ATI as a key element of OG. Both countries have shown commitment to advance the OG agenda internally and ATI has become a pillar of such agenda. On the other hand, given the multi-stakeholder nature of OGP, civil society campaigning for better ATI, could leverage OGP-related processes (e.g. consultations to elaborate country action plans) to enhance their efforts.

One of the reasons why OGP is seen as a promising platform to enhance open government is precisely the multi-stakeholder approach. In OGP, governments and civil society are equal partners, both at the international steering committee and nationally in the elaboration, implementation and monitoring of action plans. This presents stakeholders with a unique opportunity to foster a truly collaborative and constructive relationship between government and civil society that can result in significant improvements in the area of OG.

COUNTRY COMMITMENTS

 **JORDAN**

+ 20 September 2011

Developing Commitments

Download the Draft Action Plan

INTRODUCTION EFFORTS TO DATE COMMITMENTS RELATED FILES

Country Action Plan coming in March 2012.

Below, please see this country's letter of intent.



م ك 11836-48540

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan presents its compliments to the Embassy of the United States of American, and has the honor to formally inform the esteemed Embassy that the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan will participate in the "Open Government Partnership".

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was informed that communicating our decision to participate in this important Partnership should be directed to H.E Ms. Maria Otero, Under Secretary of State for Democracy and Global Affairs. We were also advised that once upon the receipt of our communication, an invitation will be extended by President Barack Obama for a formal lunch that is scheduled to take place from 2:00-3:30 pm on September 20th 2011 in New York on the margins of the United Nation' General Assembly's upcoming session.

Therefore, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs requests the esteemed Embassy's assistance in urgently conveying Jordan's formal decision to participate in the "Open Government Partnership" to H.E Ms. Otero and to kindly advise it regarding the aforementioned formal lunch invitation by President Barack Obama.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Embassy of the United States of America

⁶ See for instance Almadhoun, Said. Status of Freedom of Information Legislation in the Arab World. Open Society Justice Initiative. 2010

⁷ See Jordan's OGP Action plan, available here:

<http://www.opengovpartnership.org/countries/jordan>

⁸ See for instance the speech by Mabrouka Mbarek, Constituent Assembly Member and Hedi Ben Abbes, Secretary of State Foreign Affairs for the Americas and Asia in Tunisia at the OGP meeting in Brasilia, available here: <http://mabrouka.org/174>

⁹ See Interview (video) with Nejib Mokni, Government of Tunisia available here: http://info.worldbank.org/etools/docs/chvideos/OGP_tunisia.html

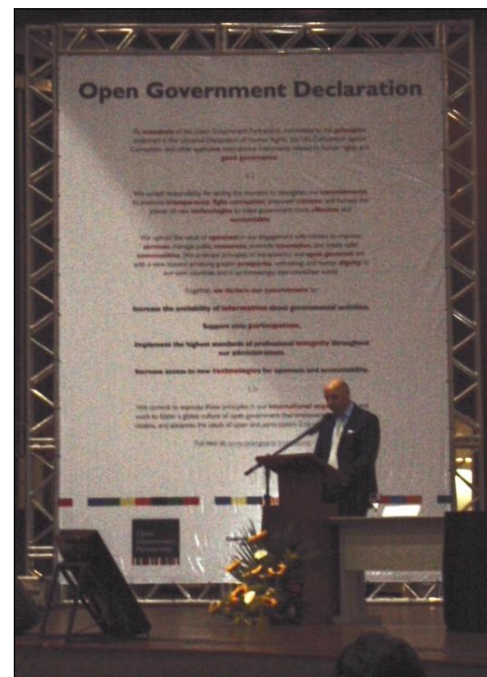
Engagement of civil society at the international level, through the international steering committee—which has nine civil society members—has been quite effective, to the point where civil society now has a rotating seat among the co-chairs of the steering committee. Additionally, in some regions such as Latin America, regional networks of CSOs have started to address OGP engagement from a regional perspective, in order to strengthen the capacity of its members and facilitate knowledge exchanges around OG issues. This of course is great progress in fostering constructive relationships between governments and civil society.

At the national level though, the situation is uneven; the opportunity for civil society is yet to be fully realized. With the moving forward of OGP, some challenges have emerged. Civil society organizations from several countries have voiced their concerns regarding the limited scope of government consultations. In this regard, improvement of public consultations, not just for OGP issues but in broader terms, could become an OGP commitment. Additionally, there is a need to broaden the base of stakeholders engaged in OGP; thus far engagement has generally taken place in the capitals, with high-skilled organizations, that sometimes pursue their own agenda. OGP could serve as a space for CSOs working on various streams of the OG agenda—including transparency, accountability, participation, etc—to break silos and come to work together. If OGP is to realize its full potential, it is crucial to engage with other groups to maximize the impact, while expanding commitments to include substantial reforms regarding accountability and participation, in addition to transparency. There are also challenges in terms of capacity, concerning the skills and experience to foster constructive relationships between government and civil society toward effective implementation of the country action plans, as well as capacity to monitor such implementation. Furthermore, it will be key that, as Abhinav Bahl from Global Integrity notes, countries focus not only on the “low hanging fruits” in terms of commitments (e.g. Open Data initiatives)¹⁰, but that also include reforms that might be more politically contentious but that have great transformative potential such as full-fledged ATI legislation. Another emerging issue, as the OGP gains momentum, is how to engage with countries that are

not members, but want to become members. Though some has been done in this regard, as evidenced by the participation of Tunisia and Libya, as well as countries that are not members, it is still unclear how to engage with non-member countries¹¹.

Doubtlessly, OGP presents a new and exciting opportunity to advance OG

globally, yet it is important to understand what is meant by open government in order to realize its transformative potential. Furthermore, while the multi-stakeholder approach is the best way to go, this does not come challenge-free. Challenges such as civil society capacity at the country level, or the need to broaden the base of stakeholders engaged must be addressed as the initiative moves forward.



Mr. Hedi Ben Abbes, OGP Summit, Brasilia, 18 April, 2012

Blogs on OGP Summit

Carole Excell from the World Resources Institute: [The Open Government Partnership – Some Thoughts](#)

Abhinav Bahl from Global Integrity: [Taking Stock of OGP](#)

Martin Tisne from the Transparency and Accountability Initiative: [Brasilia in a Nutshell](#)

¹⁰Bahl, Abhinav. *Taking Stock of OGP*. Global Integrity Blog. May 11, 2012. Available here: http://globalintegrity.org/blog/taking-stock-ogp?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+globalintegritycommons+%28Global+Integrity%29

¹¹ See for instance the White House Press release on this matter: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/05/19/fact-sheet-g-8-action-deauville-partnership-arab-countries-transition>

Country Status Reports: April 2012

An overview of the situation in the countries participating in the Regional Dialogue.

Morocco:

On April 24, Transparency Morocco organized a press conference to present the latest publication of the “Corruption Observatory”, focusing on ATI in Morocco. The audience included journalists, civil society practitioners and public officials. The discussion centered on the actual situation of ATI in Morocco, and the steps that still need to be achieved in order to guarantee citizens’ free access to public information. Participants stressed the importance of not only drafting a new specific law on ATI, but also modifying existing laws that could limit free access to information by citizens.

In late April, Moroccan NGO FMAS (Forum des Alternatives Maroc) organized regional conference on “Alternative media and their role in developing citizen information”. Transparency Morocco contributed to the event through a presentation on the right of ATI, and the important role that this right can play in order to allow alternative media to effectively contribute to creating and diffusing information by the citizens and for the citizens. The National Coordinator in Morocco for the WB Regional Dialogue, and Jamal Eddine Naji, a Professor and expert on ATI in Morocco also participated in a session during the regional conference. During this session, the participants contributed to drafting a set of recommendations regarding ATI; these recommendations will be included in the overall recommendations of the conference, which will then serve as a basis for an advocacy strategy to develop alternative media in Morocco.

Jordan:

Yahia Shukkeir, the Jordanian national coordinator of this Regional Dialogue participated as speaker in three important events in Egypt and Jordan. At the American University of Cairo, he delivered training on international standards of freedom of expression and historical development of access to information in May 6-15, 2012. In Amman, during a meeting organized by webnews outlet “Jo 24” and Earth and Environment Watch, to discuss the role of media in fighting corruption, Shukkeir stressed that fighting corruption needs the participation of informed citizens, thus “access to information is the best tool to fight corruption”. Finally, Shukkeir was the main speaker of UNESCO event celebrating the International Day of Press Freedom, where he mentioned that access to information is considered a fundamental right and it is pre- requisite to freedom of expression.

Lebanon:

Following the first VC, ALEF (Act for Human Rights) and Nahwa Al Muwatiniya joined the Regional Dialogue. The second in country session contributed to identify the different political, legal and administrative obstacles hindering the implementation of the ATI. Additionally, participants discussed the actual situation of ATI in Lebanon and the previous advocacy strategies. They also noted the absence of a clear vision regarding ATI. Multiples ideas were shared to lay the ground for a new advocacy campaign. The advocacy strategy should define the key elements, audience, benefits, message, messenger and channel through which ATI should be advanced in Lebanon.

Tunisia:

ATI developments in Tunisia during April focused on the release of the regulation that operationalizes the implementation of the ATI law. The head of government signed such regulation in May 3, 2012, as part of the commemoration of the World Press Freedom Day. Additionally, in April 17-18, 2012, Tunisia participated in the Open Government Partnership (OGP) meeting in Brasilia. The delegation from Tunisia included seven practitioners representing the Government, the National Constituency Assembly and Civil Society. There, the Tunisian delegation expressed interest on behalf of the Tunisian government in joining.

Past Events

Tunisia - INRIC report presented

National Authority for the Reform of Information and Communication (INRIC) held on Monday, April 30 2012, at the Congress Palace in Tunis, with representatives of civil society, journalists and media executives, a press conference on the occasion of the presentation of its General Report. Link for the summary in English <http://www.inric.tn/fr/INRIC-Report-Eng-final.pdf>

Morocco - Press conference: presentation of the last edition of Transparency news on ATI

Transparency Morocco organized a press conference on Thursday 3 May 2012 in Rabat, to launch its last edition of Transparency News on Access to information in Morocco. This publication is available online in French <http://www.transparencymaroc.ma/uploads/publications/Fr/188.pdf>



World Press Freedom Day in Tunis

UNESCO celebrated World Press Freedom Day in Tunis this year, with a three-day programme focused on the role of media as a catalyst for social and political change. The WPFDF Conference brought together around 750 participants from 88 countries, making it one of the largest turn-outs for this annual celebration. As a result of the discussions of the plenary sessions, the participants, including media professionals and non-governmental civil rights organizations, adopted the [Carthage Declaration](#). The WPFDF conference in Tunis included a parallel session

on the importance of access to information, supported by the African Platform on Access to Information and including presentations, among others, by Gamal Eid, Executive Director of the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (Egypt) and Habiba Meiri-Cheikh, Director of the Department of Public Information at the African Union Commission. A number of UNESCO WPFDF events were also celebrated all around the world. More information on WPFDF is available on UNESCO's website: <http://www.unesco.org/webworld/en/wpfd12>



Morocco - Regional conference on Alternative Media

The FMAS (Forum des Alternatives Maroc) organized a regional conference on "Alternative media" and their role in developing "citizen information" in Marrakesh, 27-28 April 2012. Transparency Morocco has contributed to the event through a presentation on the right of ATI, and the important role that this right can play in order to allow alternative media to effectively contribute to communicating information by the citizens, for the citizens. <http://www.e-joussour.net/node/10868>



Recent Developments: RTI law in Yemen passed on April 24, 2012

The Yemeni Parliament passed a Right to information law on April 24. A bill was first presented in 2008 by a political party and followed by another draft presented by the Ministry of Information, and since deliberations on both drafts have been proceeding off and on until recently. A local newspaper reported that the outcome was “a combination of both drafts”. <http://bit.ly/JEC1kv>

The Global Partnership for Social Accountability: A New Mechanism to Support CSOs

The World Bank Board of Executive Directors during its meeting in Washington, on 19 April 2012, has approved in principle the creation of a Global Partnership for Social Accountability (GPSA). The GPSA is a new mechanism to scale up and support social accountability by beneficiary groups and civil society organizations (CSOs) in developing countries. The Bank’s Board will review operational details of the proposed Partnership in June. <http://bit.ly/lBzumv>

Regional Workshop: Access to Information in MNA. The Road Ahead June 13-15, 2012

Multi-stakeholder delegations from Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia will meet in June 13-15 to discuss progress made under the Regional dialogue “Supporting Coalitions and Networking to Advance ATI in MENA” and propose next steps in order to enhance Access to Information in the Region.

Regional Consultation for North Africa – African Union model law on Access to Information, June 16-17, Tunis

Upcoming Events

3rd videoconference of the Regional dialogue “Supporting Coalitions and Networking to Advance ATI in MENA” on 29 May 2012

The next videoconference will take place on Tuesday 29 May 2012 in the four countries. Representatives of different stakeholder groups are invited to join participants who attended the last 2 VCs. This videoconference will discuss early steps for ATI implementation.



Press Reviews Related to ATI

Morocco (in French)

<http://bit.ly/lyit0o>

Jordan (in Arabic)

1. <http://bit.ly/JcqPvB>
2. <http://bit.ly/KNV4TK>
3. <http://bit.ly/K9DKh0>

Regional Dialogue “Supporting Coalitions and Networking to Advance ATI in MNA”

One of the key pillars of the World Bank’s (WB) support in the Middle East and North Africa region consists of strengthening the governance framework, working with both State and non-State actors. Efforts with non-State actors focus principally on opening government to the people, while strengthening the capacities of these actors to enhance transparency, public participation, and accountability.

In this context, the WB is supporting The Affiliated Network for Social Accountability – Arab World (ANSA-AW). ANSA-AW is a platform for constructive dialogue and knowledge exchanges on transparency and social accountability issues across multiple stakeholders. As part of its activities, ANSA-AW held various regional workshops and consultations where access to information (ATI) emerged as a priority among participating countries.

In order to strengthen the capacities of stakeholders in the region to move forward ATI reforms, as one of the priorities highlighted, the World Bank Institute and the Social Development Department at the World Bank’s Middle East and North Africa Vice-presidency, in partnership with ANSA-AW are supporting the emergence of a regional community of practice focused on ATI issues through facilitating the Regional Dialogue “Supporting Coalitions and Networking to Advance ATI in MNA. In this first stage, the four countries participating are Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia, with opportunities to expand to other countries during the second stage. Additionally, support to multi-stakeholder coalitions in these countries will take place. As international experience demonstrates, multi-stakeholder coalitions have been key in sparking the demand for ATI while engaging with government in the drafting and passing of ATI laws. These coalitions can also play a crucial role in supporting effective implementation of ATI legislation. Furthermore, knowledge exchanges through the Regional Dialogue will contribute to strengthen the capacity of country coalitions.

The Regional Dialogue will consist of series of knowledge exchanges through videoconferences, as well as in country sessions aimed at practitioners from both the supply and demand sides of ATI: Civil society practitioners, journalists, academia, government officials, MPs, etc.

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