REGIONAL OVERVIEW

For most of the Middle East and North Africa region, the initial hope and optimism of the Arab Spring transitions has faded, with the notable exception of Tunisia, as the countries with the most promising transitions stalled or reversed course in their attempts to form democratic societies.

CIPE is committed to continuing to support its democratic partners in the region to help them weather this period of chaos and instability and play a leading role in building democratic institutions, now and in the future. CIPE supports reform-oriented private sector actors to influence the trajectory of transitions in their respective countries. CIPE strengthens the capacity of business associations and chambers to serve as the voice of the private sector in policymaking. CIPE helps improve governance by fostering transparency and accountability in the public and private sectors, and works with local partners to increase support for, and understanding of, the freedoms, rights, and responsibilities essential to market-oriented democracies.
TUNISIA  Establishing Democratic and Free Market Institutions

As the only Arab Spring country to make a transition to democracy, the success of Tunisia’s democratic experiment is vital to the future of democracy in the Arab world. Democracy will only survive if it is seen to deliver for average citizens. To date, politics and security have dominated public debate at the expense of dialogue on economic reform. As a result, CIPE has focused on strengthening the voices of Tunisia’s private sector to participate in policymaking processes and elevate the urgency of economic reform issues in public debate.

CIPE is working with longtime partner the Arab Institute of Business Leaders (IACE) to develop and implement an advocacy program to represent its members’ interests and push for reform. IACE has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Office of the Prime Minister to lead a private sector coalition in dialogue with the government on economic reform priorities. In addition to IACE, the coalition will include the Tunisian Union for Agriculture and Fishing (UTAP) and the Tunisian Union for Industry, Commerce, and Handicrafts (UTICA), Tunisia’s most prominent employers’ union. CIPE will help IACE lead the coalition, beginning with issue-identification and consensus-building through CIPE’s proven National Business Agenda process, and will support the NBA process by engaging additional private sector voices to contribute at the grassroots level.

CIPE is also working to support the proliferation of private sector voices at the local level. With CIPE support, the Union of Small- and Medium-Sized Industries (UPMI) in the Sfax region is building its internal capacity as it explores the issue of poor education and lack of market skills among youth. IACE also received a CIPE grant to collect and disseminate best practices in municipal governance from across Tunisia.

CIPE works with local partners and trainers (such as this woman) to enhance the skills and culture of entrepreneurship in Bahrain.

PROGRAM RESULTS & IMPACT

Tunisia: CIPE partner the Arab Institute of Business Leaders (IACE) played an active role in influencing the debate during Tunisian elections. IACE conducted roundtables with candidates and private sector leaders on issues of reform. It developed a Who’s Who directory of key actors for outreach; created a website, Kanas, to track politicians’ progress in fulfilling promises made; and made a web tool, Le Comparateur, which allowed voters to compare platforms across parties and issues. As a result, citizens were armed with information and tools with which to evaluate candidates and hold them accountable for their promises.

CIPE also worked with the International Republican Institute to help political parties develop economic platforms and consider private sector viewpoints. CIPE’s work resulted in a more proactive, technical, and voter-centric approach to economic platform development.
**Syria:** CIPE partner the Syrian Economic Forum (SEF) is generating real-time business and economic data from various governorates, through a network of liaisons to local councils inside Syria, including Aleppo, Idlib, Lattakia, and Deir Az-Zour. Data includes critical information such as currency exchange rates, industrial and agricultural production, prices of consumer staples, and energy supply. The resulting SEF policy papers are informing the work of decision makers in the democratic opposition, international and host communities, the private sector, and civil society. As a result, SEF strengthened the business community’s role in decision-making and helped ensure that services are delivered in a just manner that supports legitimate commercial activity.

Addressing the tragic “lost generation” of Syrian youth, CIPE and SEF developed a civic education course for young high school graduates displaced by the war. The curriculum focuses on economics and business skills, as well as citizenship and democratic participation. To date, over 600 youth have participated in the course. As a result, the students generated new business ideas and are better prepared to participate in the rebuilding of their country.

**Syria:**

Private Sector Participation to Mitigate the Effects of Conflict

After years of conflict in Syria, Syrian citizens find themselves caught between the brutal autocratic regime of Bashar al Assad and the onslaught of violent extremists. Millions have been displaced by armed conflict, and Syria’s economic and social fabric is in tatters.

Since the country’s initial pro-democracy uprising in 2011, CIPE has worked with a group of Syrian businesspeople committed to a united, prosperous, democratic Syria. With CIPE’s help, the group formed the Syrian Economic Forum (SEF), an independent think tank that serves as a meeting point and voice of the pro-democracy Syrian business community. With an office in neighboring Turkey, and businesspeople on the board of directors, SEF has become a vehicle for Syria’s democracy-oriented private sector to effect positive change for their country. SEF also serves as a point of contact for outside engagement. SEF’s office in Turkey hosts a steady stream of visitors from the Syrian opposition government and the international community seeking to meet with SEF, its members, and stakeholders. Without SEF, this kind of engagement would not be possible.

While there is no end to war in sight, pro-democracy Syrians refuse to give up on their country. Civil society organizations like the Syrian Economic Forum offer a vehicle for hope and action to build a brighter future for the embattled Syrian people.

**Egypt FEDA:** CIPE partner the Federation of Economic Development Associations (FEDA) engaged in a multi-year grassroots consensus-building process among its members to develop a Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) Reform Agenda and advocate to policymakers for its implementation. FEDA’s advocacy resulted in commitments in Egypt’s new constitution to develop the small business sector and to address the informal sector of entrepreneurs operating without the benefits and legal protections that are available to registered companies. Seven changes in tax policy favorable to small business came as a result of FEDA recommendations.

Most significantly, FEDA’s advocacy resulted in a regulatory change allowing SMEs to fully own land in “new urban communities.” Full ownership frees SME owners to use the land as collateral on bank loans, thus increasing SMEs’ access to finance. Access to finance facilitates SME growth and urgently-needed job creation.
CIPE PROGRAMMING IN MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA

ALGERIA

Supporting CSO Advocacy for Increased Political and Economic Opportunity for Algerian Citizens
Cercle d’Action et de Réflexion autour de l’Entreprise

BAHRAIN

Progress through Private Sector Engagement

EGYPT

Expanding Economic and Political Participation by Reducing Informality
Federation of Economic Development Associations

Fostering Democratic Dialogue on Economic Issues II
Strengthening the Independent Voice of the Private Sector

IRAQ

Public Private Dialogue at the National Level
Iraqi Businessmen Union

JORDAN

Strengthening the Democratic Participation of Small Business Associations
Al Quds Center for Political Studies

LEBANON

Enhancing Democracy through Public-Private Dialogue II
Lebanese Center for Policy Studies

MOROCCO

Building Associations’ Capacity to Improve the Local Business Environment in Morocco

SYRIA

Strengthening Citizens’ Engagement in a Changing Syria II
Syrian Economic Forum

TUNISIA

Engaging the Private Sector in Municipal Reform
L’Institut Arabe des Chefs D’Entreprises

Bringing the Voices of Local Business to Reform
Union Des Petites et Moyennes Industries

Supporting Public- and Private-Sector Participation for a National Business Agenda

A National Business Agenda to Advance Economic Reform
L’Institut Arabe des Chefs D’Entreprises

TURKEY

Strengthening Democracy through Private Sector Collective Action to Combat Corruption
Ethics and Reputation Society
Corporate Governance Association of Turkey

WEST BANK/GAZA

Strengthening National Institutions of Democratic Governance Through Private Sector Engagement
Palestine Governance Institute

YEMEN

Empowering Citizens through Increased Economic Engagement
Human Rights Information and Training Center

Enhancing Private Sector Participation in Constitutional Transition
Political Development Forum

Supporting Democratic Reform through Private Sector Advocacy
Studies and Economic Media Center / Political Development Forum / Human Rights Information

REGIONAL

Advancing Democratic Reforms through Knowledge & Experience-Sharing

The Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE) strengthens democracy around the globe through private enterprise and market-oriented reform. CIPE is one of the four core institutes of the National Endowment for Democracy and an affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Since 1983, CIPE has worked with business leaders, policymakers, and civil society to build the institutions vital to a democratic society. CIPE’s key program areas include enterprise ecosystems, business advocacy, democratic governance, and anti-corruption & ethics.

For more information, please contact CIPE at: CIPEMENA@cipe.org

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