THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA & NETWORKING IN POST-CONFLICT SETTINGS
LESSONS-LEARNED FROM EGYPT

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Paper presented at the World Bank/TDRP – African Development Bank Conference:

History and Experience of Post-conflict Reintegration and Stabilization:
Reflections from DDR in Africa

5-6 June, 2013 Hotel African Tunis
1. Introduction and Purpose of the Paper

“We use Facebook to schedule the protests, Twitter to coordinate, and YouTube to tell the world.”

Modern information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as social media, social networking sites and User Generated Content (UGC) are changing the landscape of political discourse in crisis and post-conflict environments. The application of these tools can alter the way ideas are spread and diffused within societies. New technology can facilitate effective and sustained communication between peoples, communities, movements and stakeholders involved in crisis management. Further, public information spread through social media and networks can help create transnational links whereby individuals and groups are able to engage in widespread political dialogue and activism.

It is now widely accepted that social media, social networking sites and UGC carried a central role in shaping political debates during the Arab Spring. In Egypt, the “new media” has emerged as alternative channels of political discourse and broadened political activism. A recent study by Pew Research Center suggests that in Tunisia and Egypt – the two key countries of the Arab Spring – social media users share their views about politics and community issues at twice the rate of countries in the West. As unrest turned into conflict throughout the region, social media, UGC and mobile phones were used by activists and human rights defenders to report on and record violence, as well as to spread information to others. At the same time, social media and UGCs were also used against HRDs and activists as a means of surveillance or disinformation.

While the debate on the role of social media and social networking sites in times of crisis is an ongoing one, it is worth exploring how these technologies related to the Egyptian process both before and after the crisis. This paper presents a brief overview of how the Internet and social networking were used during the uprising. It first presents different movements active in Egypt prior to and during the Arab Spring with a focus on their engagement with the public via the social media. Second, it provides the 2011 Egyptian Revolution’s brief timeline of events. Finally, the paper presents an analysis of social media’s impact in Egypt’s revolution followed by a set of lessons-learned with regards to the use of social media and social networking tools in post-conflict and post-crisis settings.

2. Background

Country Context
Hosni Mubarak became the President of Egypt's semi-presidential republic following the 1981 assassination of Anwar El Sadat and stayed in power until February 2011. Mubarak's three decade rule made him the longest-serving president in the country's history. Throughout his thirty year rule, the country was under a continuous state of emergency law. With his pro-Western foreign policy in the Middle East, particularly Egypt’s peace with Israel, Mubarak earned the political and economic support of the Western world.

During his three decade rule, Mubarak continued the economic policies of his predecessor Sadat and escalated the process of dismantling the structures of production that began during the Nasser era.
Although the Mubarak government carried out economic reforms and received considerable foreign aid, one of the key factors leading to widespread protests was the continued economic hardship faced by the Egyptians. The country maintained steady economic growth in the 2000s but the global financial crisis that hit the world in 2008 caused soaring food prices and increased the number of people living under poverty. In late 2010, around 40 percent of Egypt’s population of 80 million lived on two US dollars per day with a large part of the population relying on subsidized goods. Egypt’s gains from economic growth benefited only the rich and failed to trickle down and reduce poverty, which increased to 50 percent in 2011. Some researchers also argued that the “youth bulge” played a major role in the political transition in Egypt. In fact, unemployment in the Egyptian society is still highest amongst university graduates - a group that has grown rapidly and that is the most dependent upon the government for employment. With high rates of youth unemployment, millions of young people faced difficulties in finding jobs and eventually forced hundreds of young people to the streets. In addition, corruption was considered to be at one of the highest rates in the country’s history with a series of privatization deals leading to unemployment of many Egyptian workers.

During Mubarak’s rule, police brutality and continued human rights violations were also widely reported by international and Egyptian human rights organizations. With the Emergency law, the powers of the police and security forces were extended, constitutional rights suspended, and censorship was legalized. The emergency law sharply limited non-governmental political activity, including street demonstrations and non-approved political organizations. The country failed to develop an environment of political pluralism that would support democratization as well as rights and freedoms of different political movements. The government also kept a strong grip over the opposition, academic environment, political and governmental bodies, as well as trade and student unions, which crippled the civil society in the country. Finally, President Mubarak’s decision to present his son, Gamal Mubarak, as a successor to the office further antagonized an already angry and frustrated people. By 2011, most of the Egyptian people, who had already been simmering due to the economic and socio-political problems, were ready to go out and protest.

**History of Internet in Egypt**

The Internet service in Egypt began with the introduction of small scale network connections between the universities and ministries in 1994. In 1997, service delivery was privatized and by 2000, there were 68 private companies providing Internet services using Telecom Egypt’s infrastructure. In 2002, the government introduced the Egyptian Initiative, a free Internet project sponsored by the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology through a partnership between Telecom Egypt and the private sector. In 2004, the ADSL technology was introduced with a connection speed of 256kbps, followed by the introduction of ADSL +2 with speeds of up to 24 MB/sec in 2008. Egypt’s Internet penetration rate grew from less than one percent in 2000, to five percent in 2004, to 25 percent in 2009 and, most recently in 2012 it reached 40 percent. There are currently more than 200 Internet and data service providers in Egypt, making the country one of the cheapest in access to Internet in Africa.

Before the Revolution, the Egyptian government’s continued censorship policies led to the delivery of inaccurate information to the public. This lack of access to credible information aroused the need for alternative sources of information among citizens and pushed people to demand more rights from the government. Increasingly, the Internet became the alternate source of information for activists. Once the Internet became more accessible to middle class homes in 1998, youth started chronicling their thoughts about their lives in Egypt. This was the beginnings of an online movement which started in the form of Yahoo groups and email shots and later progressed towards blogging. Starting with forums and Yahoo groups, and then through personal blogs and social networking, the Egyptian people learned
more about each other, their fellow citizens from different political backgrounds. By 2008, Internet users in Egypt started to get more technologically sophisticated and savvy and began using Youtube, instant messaging and instant videos, and eventually Facebook and Twitter. Today, one of the most populated countries in the region, Egypt has more than 30 million Internet users with 35 percent of the population with access to the Internet.

4. The January 25 Revolution

By 2011, the grievances of Egyptians were mostly on police brutality and human rights violations, state of emergency law, limitations on freedom of speech and thought, persistent corruption, and economic issues including high unemployment rates and food prices, and low wages. The demands raised by the protesters were the end of the Mubarak regime, the end of emergency law, freedom, justice, a responsive, civilian and elected government and a say in the management of Egypt's future. Tensions were high between the security forces and the protesters as the government took a hard line, using riot-control tactics, and shutting down communications. Although the international media often downplayed the violent aspects of the revolt, clashes between security forces and protesters resulted in around 800 people killed and 6,000 injured.

Before the Revolution

Khaled Saeed was a young Egyptian from Alexandria who died under disputed circumstances on 6 June 2010, after being arrested by the police. Photos of Khaled’s corpse spread throughout online communities and incited outrage over allegations that he was tortured under custody. A prominent Facebook group, called "We are all Khaled Said", led by Wael Ghonim (an internationally known Egyptian activist), significantly contributed to growing discontent in the weeks leading up to the uprising in early 2011. Saeed’s Facebook page received thousands of followers in a matter of days and more than 70,000 Egyptians signed up on Facebook to attend the protests. The activists brought the emergency law to the public’s attention by organizing via Facebook and Twitter over Saeed’s death. Later in October 2011, two Egyptian police officers were found guilty of manslaughter and sentenced to seven years in prison in Saeed’s case.

In addition, the outcomes of the Tunisian revolution had a significant impact on the Egyptian uprising. The news of the Tunisian revolution spreading across social media was a direct motivation for Egyptians to start their own revolution. Many bloggers and activists coordinated with their Tunisian fellows to organize in the streets. The Tunisian revolution not only provided inspiration and motivated hundreds of Egyptians but also provided practical support such as tips on protection from tear gas and other forms of crowd control used by the police.  

Timeline of Major Events

25 January 2011: The "Day of Revolt": Protests erupted throughout Egypt, with tens of thousands of protesters gathered in Cairo and thousands more in cities throughout Egypt. Twitter was one of the most effective tools to document the unrest and a platform through which people coordinated the demonstrations. The activists used the hashtag #Jan25 to help spread information.

26 January 2011 and Twitter Blocking: Civil unrest in Suez and other cities throughout Egypt. Access to Twitter was blocked by the government.

27 January 2011 and Facebook Blocking: Clashes continued on the 27th of January. Facebook was blocked with many people attempting to log into Facebook using proxy programs.
28 January 2011 and Internet & Mobile Shut-Down: On 28 January, the "Friday of Anger" protests began. Hundreds of thousands demonstrated in Cairo and other Egyptian cities after Friday prayers. The government shut down electronic communications in an attempt to prevent people from organizing. Demonstrations, however, continued across Egypt and the censorship over Internet communications led people to go out of their homes and protest in the streets.

29 January 2011: The military presence in Cairo increased. A curfew was declared, but was widely ignored as the flow of defiant protesters to Tahrir Square continued throughout the night.

1 February 2011: Hosni Mubarak made a televised address, pledged to not run for another term in the elections planned for September and said he would stay in office to oversee a peaceful transition.

2 February 2011 and the Incident of the Camel: Violence escalated as Mubarak supporters met protesters. Some supporters of Mubarak rode on camels and horses into Tahrir Square, wielding sticks against the protestors.

6 February 2011: A multi-faith Sunday Mass was held with Christians and Muslims in Tahrir Square. Negotiations involving Egyptian Vice President Omar Suleiman and representatives of the opposition commenced amid continuing protests throughout the nation.

10 February 2011: Mubarak addressed Egyptian people amid speculation of a military coup, but rather than resigning (as was widely expected), he stated he would delegate some of his powers to the vice president.

11 February 2011: The "Friday of Departure": Massive protests continued in many cities as Egyptians refused the concessions announced by Mubarak. Later, the vice president announced Mubarak's resignation, entrusting the military with the leadership of the country.

5. Social Movements and Activists

Kefaya (Enough) Movement

Kefaya is the unofficial nickname of the Egyptian Movement for Change. Founded in 2004, the movement is a group comprising various Egyptian political forces aimed at establishing a new legitimacy in Egypt. It is a grassroots coalition which prior to the 2011 revolution drew its support from across Egypt's political spectrum. The main objectives of the group were to protest against Mubarak's presidency and his efforts to transfer power directly to his son, political corruption and economic stagnation. Described as a “loose knit umbrella of diverse political trends,” Kefaya is a similar opposition movement to Ukraine’s Orange Revolution or Poland’s Solidarity movement. The movement has been criticized on a number of levels. First, the group mostly remained as a protest movement, targeting President Mubarak personally rather than presenting a constructive vision of how things can be transformed. The movement was also criticized for failing to reach beyond an exclusive, Cairo-based crowd, and offering a weak discourse on human rights and democracy with no practical solutions to the problems Egyptians face such as poverty, unemployment, poor access to education and public services.
Shayfeencom (We’re Watching You)
Originally called Shayfeen.com, Shayfeencom is an initiative founded by three Egyptian women (a prominent TV newscaster, a university professor and a marketing consultant) with the objective to "help bring political reform and democracy to their country." It is a grassroots political movement which used the Internet extensively for coordination and organization among its activities. Since 2005, Shayfeencom has been working to monitor the legitimacy and integrity of elections and referenda in Egypt through the participation of a wide network of volunteers. The movement aims to eliminate corruption through observation as well as to educate and empower people by raising awareness about democracy as well as electoral and judicial reform. The movement’s first monitoring and observation experience was during Egypt’s first multi-candidate presidential elections in 2005. Within the first month of the initiative’s launch, more than five thousand people volunteered and joined the group online, while over one thousand volunteers actively helped monitor the elections. Following the 2011 Egyptian revolution, the movement significantly improved its capacity and it began preparing for the first post-Mubarak elections, mobilizing thousands of volunteers across the country within a matter of weeks. The group provided its volunteers with training, sensitization and awareness through Youtube videos and online seminars for the elections. During the election period, members of the group reported irregularities and problems through Twitter, Facebook and Youtube, allowing for the reported violations to appear immediately on the Shayfeencom website. Today, Shayfeencom remains as a watchdog and an anti-corruption movement with thousands of members. Through its website and social media networks such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, the group is actively pursuing its objectives.

April 2008 Movement
The April 6 Youth Movement is an activist group established in 2008 to support the workers in El-Mahalla El-Kubra, an industrial district located in the Nile Delta. The movement was founded by Ahmed Maher, Mohammed Adel, who worked with the Kefaya movement since 2005, Waleed Rashed and Asmaa Mahfouz. Most members of the group do not belong to a political party. In April 2008, April 6th Movement activists called on participants to wear black and stay home on the day of the strike and began their social media campaign using the key word “Stay Home.” The Movement used Facebook, Twitter, personal blogs and other social media tools to report on the general strike, alert their networks about police activity, and organize demonstrations. It successfully mobilized people and hundreds turned up in the streets with the government facing a surprise general strike. The Movement does not favor any political current in Egypt and was the first to call for the January 25 demonstrations. Following the January uprising, the movement’s efforts via social media significantly contributed to the “one million march” of February. Later in 2011, the group launched a “black circle, white circle” political awareness campaign via the social media aiming to prevent former members of Mubarak's regime from winning seats in the post-revolution parliament. Most recently, in March 2013, the Movement organized a demonstration in front of the Egyptian Minister of Interior’s house. Later in April, the group called for a "Rage Day" against President Mohamed Mursi. The New York Times has identified the movement as the political Facebook group in Egypt with the most dynamic debates. Today, the movement has almost 350,000 predominantly young members, most of whom had not been politically active before. Their core concerns include free speech, nepotism in government and the country’s stagnant economy with the group discussing these issues through their website and Facebook page.

Bloggers and Citizen Journalists
Individual bloggers and citizen journalists reported extensively on the harassment of women, police brutality and other human rights abuses during the demonstrations. These reports were then shared within the online community via Facebook, Twitter and YouTube and helped spread the message of the
uprising to a wider audience beyond Egypt. Even the international media outlets such as Al Jazeera used the reports of citizen journalists and live bloggers in their coverage. A young blogger called Asmaa Mahfouz was, perhaps, one of the most instrumental figures in sparking the protests in Egypt. In a video blog she posted a week before January 25, she urged people to join her on 25 January in Tahrir Square to bring down Mubarak's regime. Mahfouz's video went viral in the social media within a couple of hours and the Facebook group set up for the event attracted more than 80,000 followers within a matter of days. Similarly, the Facebook page dedicated to Khaled Saeed, called “We Are All Khaled Saeed” reached thousands of Egyptians prior to the January 25th demonstrations. Sharif Abdel Kouddous, a citizen journalist, provided live coverage and tweets from Tahrir Square during the protests and has also been credited with using new media to raise awareness. Although these names are the most commonly cited bloggers and digital activists, the real power behind the social media was the people of Egypt who have posted videos, tweeted, and written Facebook comments to spread the news.

6. Social Media and Networking in the 25 January Revolution

Social Media in the Arab world has been increasingly used to inform, mobilize, and increase awareness among people with regards to issues such as human rights, corruption and democracy. Pro-democracy movements such as Kefaya and April 6th Movement in Egypt have made extensive use of blogs and online communication. In 2007 the BBC reported that there were 6000 Arab bloggers. By late 2010, the Centre for International Media Assistance suggested there were as many as 40,000. In terms of volume and density, Egypt is the leader of the Arab world for social media activism. Nearly five million Egyptians use Facebook in Arabic, English and French out of the Arab region’s seventeen million population, and statistics show there are 50 percent more Facebook users in Egypt post the revolution.

Arab Spring was perhaps the first time in Egyptian history during which events were majorly covered and reported by ordinary citizens via Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and blogs rather than the mainstream media. According to the 2011 Arab Social Media Report, for example, 94 percent of Tunisians get their news from social media tools and social networking sites. This number was 88 percent in Egypt in the same year. In both countries, people relied on state-sponsored media considerably less than they do on social media (40 percent in Egypt and 36 percent in Tunisia). In Egypt, there was considerable growth in the number of users of social media networking sites in early 2011. For example, the number of Facebook users in the country between January and February 2011 increased almost a million, reaching 5.5 million within a matter of weeks. Similarly, the number of Twitter users doubled and reached 45 thousand by the end of February 2011. Almost eight million Egyptians viewed videos posted on YouTube in the January revolution’s first week despite the blocking of communications across the country. According to the “Internet & Revolution” study conducted by eMarketing Egypt, an internet marketing consulting company, on the role of the Internet on the Egyptian revolution:

- 28% of Internet users purely relied on the Internet to stay tuned with the news and updates,
- Among those who purely relied on the Internet to stay tuned with the news and updates, 63% had participated in the demonstrations
- The Internet had solely shaped the views of 17% of users regarding the recent events
- Facebook was the primary tool used to tie up with events and news as mentioned by 71% of users
45% of users reported that they will increase their reliance on the Internet to tie up with coming news and events.\textsuperscript{19}

One of the unique features of the Egyptian Revolution was the relatively short period of time taken for the protestors to reach their goal. The protestors forced Mubarak to resign in less than three weeks after major demonstrations hit the streets in January 25\textsuperscript{th}. A key aspect of this speedy transition was the effective use of social media and social networking tools as platforms through which people organized in groups, coordinated their activities and mobilized the masses.

Twitter, for example, was widely used during the Egyptian revolution. Despite the blackout, Twitter users managed to communicate via the SMS service (when the mobile phone networks came back up), despite slow speeds. This micro-blogging phenomenon of expressing oneself in 140 characters or less has enabled demands and statements to fly around the Internet and be re-tweeted and responded to within a matter of minutes by hundreds of people. A study on Twitter by Pear Analytics, a US-based market-research firm, suggests that large portions of the content on Twitter is usually pointless babble, conversational or for purposes of self-promotion.\textsuperscript{20} During the revolution, however, Egyptian Twitter users used this service for political discourse, organization, transparency and recruitment, substantially changing the status quo. The use of Twitter continued as a revolutionary tool following the 18-days after January 25, with users sharing thoughts and opinions through this medium. Curt Hopkins, for example, suggests, “If the Egyptian revolution was inspired and organized on Facebook, maybe the post-revolution is destined to run its course on Twitter”\textsuperscript{21}. The hash-tags #Jan 25 and #Tahrir have become synonymous with tweets about the revolution.

The use of social media by activists is not unique to the Arab Spring. Most opposition groups and activists maintained Facebook pages, Twitter accounts, websites, blogs, and Youtube channels to spread their ideas, in addition to the individual political and human rights activists who have been using new media at least for the past five years before the revolution. Therefore, most civil society groups, small movements and grassroots organizations that have worked in the streets before the Arab Spring were technically ready to support the revolution and to mobilize their followers via their presence in the social media and the Internet. What was unique with regards to the use of social media and networking tools during the Arab Spring, however, was the effectiveness of these tools in mobilizing masses. Before the revolution, the average Egyptian used social media to follow trends or celebrities, in other words for entertainment, and to stay in touch with friends and family. In the aftermath of the January 25 Revolution, however, many people quickly familiarized themselves with the use of online tools and social networking sites as a weapon for political activism, advocacy, voicing their concerns, and protests with regards to issues such as human rights, women’s rights and anti-corruption.

Therefore, in the case of Egypt, protests made up of thousands of people were organized through simple messaging and information, mostly through Facebook and Twitter. Egyptian protestors benefited from the Internet for mobilization through different ways. While people used their laptops and mobile phones, people who had neither connected to their peers via Internet cafes. Although the Internet Café in the Egyptian context played a minor role during the Arab Spring, some people preferred connecting to the Internet through cafes for the purposes of anonymity and security. Not only did these platforms provide pathways to mass organized activity, but they allowed the Egyptians to talk to each other and share common grievances. Further, through informal networks—such as family members and neighbors—Egyptians who lacked access to the Internet or members of the older generations who did not use social media and networking tools received information about what was going on in the streets.
Moreover, social media and networking empowered “the individual” in Egypt. Once the individuals saw that others were planning to go out and protest, they were more likely to join these groups via social media because “the protest or activity becomes self-reinforcing, and increases without further direct organization or action by the leadership.” In fact, following the January 25 demonstrations, many individuals took to the streets and turned into citizen journalists and digital activists, taking videos and posting them on Youtube or sharing updates via Twitter, empowering and motivating other individuals to do the same. The Egyptian revolution showed how new media and social networks can transform from a tool for entertainment and daily communication into a tool for mass political activity and the primary source for understanding what is happening in the ground.

Further, new media played an important role in advocacy during the uprising. Social networking websites such as Facebook and Twitter were used by political activists to communicate with each other, publish their thoughts and report on the events as they unfold. A poll by the Arab Social Media Report indicated that the majority of Facebook users agreed that Facebook was used most effectively to raise awareness of the causes of the movements within Egypt. In fact, even before the revolution, the “We are all Khaled Said,” a Facebook page created in June 2010 for example, helped activists mobilize hundreds of people and sparked widespread protests in the streets, becoming a prelude to the outbreak of the revolution in January 2011.

Social media and networks have become a window to various political movements that use it to express ideas. As the case of Egypt demonstrates, in times of crises, authorities may limit knowledge-sharing through a strict control over electronic communications. When the authorities in Egypt realized the key role social networking sites played in the uprising, the government first limited access to Facebook and Twitter. Later, it blocked mobile phone networks to prevent people from communicating and when that did not work either, the government finally shut down Internet access in the country completely. The government’s attempts, however, backfired and people who could not communicate via social networking sites took to the streets to demonstrate in larger numbers.

Therefore, new media succeeded in imposing its own rules rather than losing its influence, especially with the failure of authorities in blocking websites and social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook. These two social networking websites played a significant role in the events of January 25. They not only elevated the impact of advocacy efforts but also contributed to chronicling the aftermath until communications were shut down by the government. As people chronicled the incidents through social media websites, they reported and stored human rights abuses and police brutality during the revolution. These reports not only helped spread the message globally but were later used to prosecute officials who ordered or committed crimes.

Social media and networking tools defeated the state of emergency in the country and helped disseminate knowledge about the issues such as corruption and human rights violations. The new ICTs functioned as platforms where ideas, ideologies, beliefs, and trends during the revolution were shared. They made the entire process of knowledge dissemination and sharing of ideas an easy one for the protestors. Digital activists were able to capitalize on the power of social network platforms to trigger social movements and political action. In many ways, social media and networking tools were a revelation for youth on the realities in the Egyptian streets. They created a parallel environment where people were able to organize around political ideas with social media’s state of anonymity creating security that enabled people to openly discuss their ideas.
7. Conclusion and Lessons Learned
The Egyptian Revolutions demonstrate social media and networking sites’ impact on democratic processes and outcomes. The increasing speed of news cycles and explosion of social media have served to enhance this effect. Increasingly, the balance of power is shifting in favor of citizens. Underpinning this shift is people’s ability to communicate with large audiences at minimal cost, interact directly with decision-makers, build social movements rapidly and globally, inform and shape news agendas through social media and social networks. As the Arab Spring showed, social media’s swiftness and international reach can help bring local conflicts global attention.

The interaction of organized groups and new ICTs was crystallized in the Egyptian revolution. Social media and networking tools helped the Egyptians convert their individual ideas into more organized and group-based movements that were later backed up by demonstrations, strikes and marches. These technologies helped establish an alternative public sphere where young Egyptians could bypass the state control of information and discuss politics and democracy. Yet, it is important to note that the movement towards the Egyptian revolution did not happen overnight. Rather, the Arab Spring in Egypt came after years of preparation of Egyptian opposition groups, activists and students, both offline and online.

The Internet was the starting point that propelled the Arab Spring in Egypt and the subsequent revolution. Messages and ideas that spread through social media and networking contributed significantly to the emergence of organized political action. Clearly, social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter can play important roles in transforming organized groups and informal networks, establishing external linkages, and developing a sense of community, as well as drawing international attention. Social networking tools contributed significantly to the work of the activists and helped them coordinate and promote their messages. However, their impact should not be overestimated. Social media and networking websites themselves cannot be effective (in defining the course of the revolution) unless the message itself chimes with the wider public mood. What happened in Egypt was the result of many factors interacting with each other including existing grievances against the government, socioeconomic factors and an effective activism led by people who maximized the benefits of social media and networking.

As the Arab Spring showed, social media can play a significant role in mobilizing people but it is not the number one reason for the events. In Egypt, demonstrations continued and grew further after the government blocked communications and the Internet. In Yemen, for example, although there were a limited number of users of social networking sites, the protestors were able to organize and demonstrate. Therefore, it is important to remember that social networking technologies are not the cause but tools of communicating, organizing and mobilizing – all of which can help foster advocacy efforts, reporting on human rights violations, and advancement of democracy. The following are key learnings or considerations about the role of social media and social networking in Egypt’s Arab Spring:

- Social networks in post-conflict societies can provide the activists and the people, for the first time after the conflict, an opportunity to quickly disseminate information while bypassing government restrictions or threats associated with traditional media.
- The new ICTs can act as a platform of transition from “political recession” into political awareness and activism. In post-conflict and post-crisis settings, social media and networking technologies can help establish the right conditions for an active civil society both online and offline (real-life) that would uphold human rights, peace and democracy. New ICTs have the
capacity to represent voices from all groups regardless of their political and ideological backgrounds.

- Social media and networking can help break the psychological barrier of fear of searching for and sharing information during and after the conflict. It can help create a sense of community that gives individuals the feeling that they are not alone in the aftermath of the conflict and that there are others experiencing similar hardships and difficulties.

- In post-conflict settings, governments of transitional authorities can develop strategies and guidelines for enhancing citizen engagement in the democratic processes through social media and networks. Discussions and debates between individuals and authorities have the potential to foster democracy. Therefore, state, local governmental and international authorities should disseminate information through social media and networks with the aim of familiarizing citizens with key themes to increase awareness.

- Social media and networks can be used as electronic whistle-blowers to uncover corruption, human rights abuses or political violence, all of which represent a serious threat to the rule of law, democracy, human rights, equity and social justice in post-conflict situations.

- Conflict may damage social, economic and community structures and may lead to distrust and decrease in the social cohesion in a country. Social media can enhance citizen engagement by allowing people to create networks, meet and talk to each other with anonymity, share ideas and motivate others, contributing to post-conflict stabilization efforts.

- Social media can foster participation and inclusion of vulnerable groups such as women, youth and seniors in the democratic process. Therefore, fostering social media and networking literacy, particularly among the vulnerable groups, is an essential prerequisite for post-conflict stabilization and peacebuilding.

- Social media and networking provides an accessible platform, allowing the “individual” to report on events on the ground, uploading text and videos directly to the Internet or feeding information and videos to media outlets. The “individual’s empowerment” is key in advancing human rights, democracy and peace in post-conflict societies.
NOTES


2 http://www.pewglobal.org/2012/12/12/social-networking-popular-across-globe/


4 http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1156&context=jss


8 http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/classroom/women/resources/shayfeen_discussion.pdf

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25 Ibid.