

# Mobilizing Against Sexual Harassment in Public Space in Egypt: From Blaming “open cans of tuna” to “the harasser is a criminal”.

## EMERGE Case Study 8

By Mariz Tadros



Engendering Men  
Evidence on Routes to Gender Equality

Cover photograph: Imprint's Security Patrols volunteers lining up into formation, receiving final instructions and getting ready to patrol the street of Talaat Harb against sexual harassment, August 2014, Eid Patrols. Image from Imprint.

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# Contents

	Acknowledgements and partner information	2
	Abbreviations	3
	Abstract	4
<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Background</b>	<b>6</b>
	2.1 What is the specific problem?	9
	2.1.1 Surviving as an initiative	9
	2.1.2 Sustaining the role of men in initiatives to address sexual harassment	10
	2.1.3 Effectiveness and impact on the ground	10
	2.2 How is this study exploring the issue?	10
<b>3</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>13</b>
	3.1 How is the problem being addressed?	13
	3.1.1 Survival	13
	3.1.2 Mobilising men and sustaining involvement	14
	3.1.3 How is impact being addressed	16
	3.2 What has changed?	17
	3.2.1 Vigilantism transformed	17
	3.2.2 Changes in men's perceptions of themselves and others and broader relations	17
	3.2.3 Societal effects and broader impact	19
	3.3 What can we learn?	22
	3.3.1 Men and women engaging politically behind redlines	22
	3.3.2 Strategies for mobilising men against gender based violence in public spaces:	23
	3.3.3 The role of external actors in creating an enabling environment for men's engagement in collective action on gender matters.	24
<b>4</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>25</b>
	<b>References</b>	<b>27</b>

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# Abbreviations

CSOs	Civil society organisations
ICTs	Information and Communication Technologies
MOI	Ministry of Interior
Opantish	Operation anti sexual harassment
UN Women	United Nations Agency for Women

# Abstract

In the aftermath of the Egyptian revolution in 2011, young men and women led highly innovative initiatives to counter increased levels of sexual harassment in Egypt's public spaces. This study examines what has happened to these initiatives four years after their emergence and whether men have continued to be engaged in the struggle against gender based violence against the backdrop of a changed political environment. An appreciative inquiry approach was taken to examine the present initiatives that continue to be active in the struggle against sexual harassment in Egypt. Two initiatives, Harassmap and Imprint (*Bassma*) were selected in order to examine what accounts for their survival, what difference the involvement of men has made to their sustained activism, and the kind of adaptations they have pursued in order to be effective in countering sexual violence in public spaces. The specific questions broached in this study include (1) Under what conditions have men's involvement in initiatives on gender based violence been sustained? (2) How have men transformed the nature of the struggle against gender based violence and been transformed by it? (3) What societal change have we witnessed on the ground as a consequence of men's engagement in gender based violence initiatives?

# 1 Introduction

The mention of Egypt often conjures images of people congregating in their millions in Tahrir Square to overthrow President Mubarak's 30 year dictatorship. What followed the revolution of January 2011 was a flourishing of political culture as an awakened citizenry engaged in all kinds of civic and political activism. The demise of the old regime was also followed by the withdrawal of the police from the streets of Egypt causing a major security crisis as citizens became prey to criminality and chaos. While Egypt had a long systematic history of sexual harassment in public and private spaces, women complained of a sense of increased frequency and intensity (Tadros 2012). A backlash against women's rights ensued, seeking to circumscribe women's agency to traditional roles, revoke laws that guarantee a modicum of rights, and minimise women's representation and power in the transition process. However, with the rise in sexual assault, the country also witnessed the emergence of organic movements committed to defending women's right to harassment-free public space. These initiatives were characterised by (1) high level of men's involvement in membership and leadership (2) the innovation in use of graffiti, art, music, the vernacular, and ICTs [Information and Communication Technologies] in engaging the public (3) the high participation of youth and (4) informality (not having a legal persona). Their activism contributed to breaking the taboo on sexual violence, building constituencies of young men and women who mobilise collectively, offering new role models of men defending women's unconditional rights to freedom from unwanted attention in public spaces, and providing authoritative information on the nature of sexual assault on the streets of Egypt for academics, the media, and government affiliated institutions.

However, in June 2013, after one year in office, Morsi, Egypt's first post-Mubarak elected president was overthrown after millions took to the streets, pressing him to leave. After intervention from the military, represented in the person of Abdel Fattah al Sissi, the Minister of Defence, a new roadmap was instituted, and the head of the Supreme Constitutional Court, Adley Mansour, served as the interim President for a year. In June 2014, Al Sissi won the majority of the vote in the presidential elections and became Egypt's new leader for four years. The post-2013 phase marked a new political context for the anti sexual harassment initiatives that were established post-January 2011 revolution. On the one hand, the new government severely circumscribed public space through a number of legal and security measures. On the other, a new sexual harassment law provided a new framework for holding to account perpetrators, although it was full of imperfections. A new women's police unit was established within the Ministry of Interior to counter sexual harassment. This study seeks to examine how a changed political context affected initiatives working on sexual harassment. In so doing, it raises questions with respect to the sustainability of initiatives, the extent to which regime type has a bearing on men's likelihood of participating in gender justice initiatives, and what kind of transformations are experienced by men, their initiatives, and society at large. In engaging with these issues, the study speaks to many of the gaps identified by Edström and Shahrokh (2015) with respect to understanding 'processes of change, actual and potential roles and what seems to work best in work to engage' men. The specific questions broached in this study include:

1. Under what conditions have men's involvement in initiatives on gender based violence been sustained?
2. How have men transformed the nature of the struggle against gender based violence and been transformed by it?
3. What societal change have we witnessed on the ground as a consequence of men's engagement in gender based violence initiatives?

Operationally, the study examines (1) the adaptation of youth based movements that were mostly the offspring of the Egyptian revolution to new political realities (2) the transformative

impact of men's involvement in countering sexual violence via initiatives (3) the effectiveness of interventions on the ground. An appreciative inquiry approach was taken to examine the present initiatives that continue to be active in the struggle against sexual harassment in Egypt. Two initiatives, Harassmap and Imprint (*Bassma*) were selected in order to examine what accounts for their survival, what difference the involvement of men has made to their sustained activism, and the kind of adaptations they have pursued in order to be effective in countering sexual violence in public spaces.

## 2 Background

According to Egyptian criminal law of 2014 (article 306) sexual harassment is 'defined as anyone who assaults another in a public or private place or any [other] space through innuendos or hints of a sexual or pornographic nature, through signals or speech or action via any means including wired or wireless means' (translation from Arabic by author). According to a widely quoted nationwide study by UN Women (El Dabh 2013) undertaken prior to the demise of Mubarak's regime, 96.5 per cent of women reported experiencing sexual harassment in the form of touching, while 95.5 per cent of women reported experiencing verbal sexual harassment, and a shocking 30.3 per cent reported having been raped. While sexual harassment had been a widely prevalent social problem during Mubarak's 30 year authoritarian rule, according to focus groups undertaken in Egypt in 2011 and 2012, the prevalence and intensity of sexual harassment, particularly in public spaces increased dramatically (Tadros 2012).<sup>1</sup> The occurrence of sexual violence is systemic in a deeply patriarchal society in which the use of violence is in many instances condoned.<sup>2</sup>

In a workshop undertaken in November 2011, men and women involved in various initiatives on sexual harassment on the ground reported that society offers many justifications for sexual harassment intended to extricate assailants from blame such as unemployment, poverty, sexual deprivation, and women's immodesty. One of the recurring statements that members of Harassmap and Imprint reported being made by individual men when asked why harassment occurs is the perceived unacceptable exposure of 'flesh', women were compared to 'open cans of tuna' or an exposed 'piece of meat'. Sexual harassment is a deeply contentious issue, often touching on sexuality, religion, economy, politics, and culture. An extreme example of this was recounted by Mohamed el Sangary, a volunteer for Imprint (see profile on p. 8 below), who said that as his group was leading an awareness raising campaign at one of the universities, one of the male students explained that 'the sexually promiscuous films that the Americans produce in India and China release rays [from the screens] which make our youth sexually assault'. Mohamed asked what he thought of Afghanistan, where there are severe restrictions on the media and internet but the country suffers from one of the worst records in gender based violence. The young man replied 'didn't the US invade Afghanistan?'

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<sup>1</sup> A number of factors contributed to the perceived increase in sexual violence post-2011, most notably, the withdrawal of the police force from maintaining law and order on the streets of Egypt. Some evidence also suggests that some types of sexual violence witnessed in protest spaces such as Tahrir Square were politically motivated, intended to intimidate women from expressing their voice through public action (Tadros 2015). Other factors that were considered to have created an enabling environment for the proliferation of sexual harassment include a regressive discourse led by Islamist groups calling upon women to minimize their presence in public spaces and to stick to the private domain, the broader societal acceptance of sexual harassment, and the tendency to blame victims for their exposure to assault.

<sup>2</sup> For example, according to the 2014 Egypt Demographic Health Survey, around one third of women who had ever been married who were aged 15 to 49 agree that wife beating is justified in at least one of the following circumstances: if she goes out without telling him, neglects the children, argues with him, refuses to have sex with him and burns the food (The Egyptian Demographic Health Survey 2015: 215) Three in ten of the same women have experienced some form of spousal violence, with 25 per cent saying they were subjected to physical violence, 19 per cent emotional violence, and 4 per cent sexual violence. More than one in three women experiencing spousal physical or sexual violence are injured as a result of the violence, and 7 per cent have serious injuries (*ibid* 229).



With the intensity of the backlash against women's rights assuming new heights in 2011 and 2012, the country witnessed the flourishing of civic and political forms of resistance, where citizens engaged in collective action to demand their entitlements in all spheres of life (political, economic, and social). Youth led organic initiatives emerged to counter sexual harassment on the streets of Egypt and they were distinguished by the heavy involvement of men in co-leading and joining initiatives (Tadros 2013). Previously most of the work on gender activism was predominantly the sphere of women's activism. Prior to 2011, there were several influential men who championed women's equality; however, few were involved in feminist activism. There were also men who worked as professionals in civil society organisations (CSOs) involved in gender and development; however, those who did so in a volunteer capacity were a minority.

It is critically important to recognise that men are not a homogenous group. From the life histories undertaken with men engaged in Harassmap and Imprint, it is evident there is no 'typical' profile. Perhaps the two most significant factors are age and demography. It seems that the majority of men involved in these initiatives are 35 years or younger. There are few teenage boys and the numbers are also low for middle aged and senior men. Second, the overwhelming majority of active male volunteers tend to be urban based and a significant proportion tend to be based in Cairo and other major cities such as Alexandria. It is difficult to determine whether this is attributable to sexual harassment taking a more acute form in urban quarters or whether it is a reflection of the urban bias of the initiatives themselves. It could also be attributable to the nature of rural societies being more conservative, discouraging men from engaging in activism on what would socially be considered as 'women's matters'.

It is virtually impossible to give an accurate estimate of the number of men involved in initiatives engaging with sexual violence since it is sometimes seasonal (participating only on certain occasions such as festivities) and sometimes cyclic (according to study and exam schedules, or work commitments). However, the percentage of men engaged in anti sexual harassment initiatives has tended to vary between being mostly men (such as the former Tahrir Bodyguards) to roughly half (such as Imprint) to roughly a third (Harassmap) or less for most of the feminist initiatives. The more explicitly feminist an initiative frames itself, the less likely it is for men to be involved in equal numbers to women (Tadros 2013).

In 2013, public hostility towards the poor performance of President Morsi, the first Egyptian president to be elected after the overthrow of Mubarak, grew, and culminated in a mass uprising pressing him to step down and for early presidential elections to be held. As confrontations turned bloody, there were calls upon the army to intervene. Abdel Fattah al Sissi, the then Minister of Defence stepped in and announced on the 3 July 2013 the end of Morsi's presidency, and a number of political forces, announced a new roadmap for Egypt and the appointment of the head of the Supreme Constitutional Court, Adly Mansour, as interim president.

The overthrow of Morsi was met with strong opposition from his supporters and bloody confrontations with the security apparatus ensued, the worst of which was at Al Rab'a mosque in Cairo, August 2013, where protestors were forcibly removed by security forces, leading to hundreds of deaths. Society became fragmented between a majority who endorsed the new status quo and a minority who demanded Morsi's reinstatement, insisting he was the only legitimate leader of Egypt. Terrorist attacks in Sinai and on civilians across the country were frequent, and citizens pressed the government to take a stringent stance.

Against this backdrop, the government took measures to severely narrow space for civil society activism. A new protest law was issued in November 2013, spurring protests against its draconian nature. The new law restricts citizen action in public spaces, effectively prohibiting it without prior permission from the Ministry of Interior (see Al-Ahram 2013 for a translation of the law). In effect, it means that any citizens who go to the streets together to

implement any kind of activity must obtain permission from the Ministry of Interior otherwise they can be arrested for violating the protest law.

Concurrently, while civil space for activism was closing, the overall policy environment with respect to gender matters was becoming, by and large, more favourable to addressing sexual harassment. A new constitution was instated in 2014, incorporating for the first time an article recognising the state's commitment to preventing gender based violence. In May 2014, the interim president issued an amendment to the existing criminal code in order to introduce articles specifically dealing with sexual harassment in lieu of the previous archaic articles. The new articles explicitly recognise the nature of sexual harassment and impose harsh penalties on perpetrators (see Harassmap 2014 for actual articles).

Abdel Fattah Al Sissi won the presidential elections in 2014 with a sweeping majority and assumed office in June 2014. During the first week of his presidency, he paid a visit to a hospital where a survivor of multiple perpetrator sexual assault in a public space was recovering from severe injuries. He apologised to her and committed to catching the perpetrators, holding them to account and introducing tough measures against sexual violence (BBC 11 June 2014). Activists interviewed reported that following Al Sissi's statements at the hospital visit, there was a momentary phase of the police force assuming a tough stance against sexual harassment and social sympathy to efforts to stop harassment.

Initiatives working on sexual harassment found themselves in a deeply complex context: on the one hand, vigilantism<sup>3</sup> was no longer possible and street activism could no longer be spontaneous, and on the other, the government was adopting new measures specifically geared towards countering harassment. For example, the Ministry of Interior established a new unit within its police force to address sexual harassment. It appointed female officers and provided them with a taskforce to patrol the streets on occasions when crowds are expected to gather. The Ministry of Interior's anti sexual harassment unit has invited several initiatives including Harassmap and Imprint for dialogue. Creating invited spaces is a major step forward. Whether civil society's proposed measures will translate into institutionalised policies remains to be seen. There is very little known about the internal incentives structure within the Ministry of Interior.

There is a plethora of actors actively engaged in seeking to elicit positive change in government responsiveness and social acceptability of sexual harassment in Egypt today. The National Council for Women, the country's national women's machinery, has worked with various ministries to try and streamline a national policy on sexual harassment. Egypt is one of the countries that are part of the UN Women's Safe Cities Global Initiative which seeks to work with state and non state actors to make public space free from harassment. In Egypt it works with the Ministry of Housing, Utilities and Urban Planning, and civil society organisations and initiatives (UN Women undated). Imprint has participated in the Safe Cities initiative as a partner to one of the local non-governmental organisations working in one of the poor communities in which the activities are being rolled out. *Harassment seen or I saw Harassment*, an initiative established in 2011, continues to monitor the incidents of sexual harassment occurring in crowded squares during *eid* (religious festivities) and publicise its findings. There are also many small informal groups that form organically in order to assume the role of surveying public space with a view to raise awareness and intervene where women are being assaulted. Some work on a seasonal basis (during *eid* festivities) while others organise when crowds are expected to congregate. There are too many of them to

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<sup>3</sup> The author is aware that vigilantism can carry negative connotations. The word here is used as per the definition of vigilante in Merriam-Webster dictionary; 'a member of a volunteer committee organized to suppress and punish crime summarily (as when the processes of law are viewed as inadequate); broadly: a self-appointed doer of justice'. [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/vigilante](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/vigilante). In the case of initiatives such as Imprint, they formed to suppress sexual violence and rather than punish through use of brute force, punishment was in the form of public condemnation in a context where security was lax and police frequently did not provide adequate protection.

document fully, however, they are important actors because they are characterised by a high level of local ownership. Some of the small informal organic initiatives that were formed in 2011 and 2012 are no longer active, for wide ranging reasons: some became inactive because their *raison d'être* was intrinsically tied to the specifics of a particular historical phase, others were ridden with internal factionalism, others still had members who moved on to work on other causes.

## **2.1 What is the specific problem?**

Prior to the commencement of the research, the author's assumption was that initiatives would be severely weakened by the closure of public spaces, and that this would negatively affect men's recruitment and continued involvement in initiatives whose existence was strongly associated with street activism. The research findings suggested that coping with closed spaces is a challenge but was only part of the story. The cycle of collective action and people's own life cycles has great explanatory power. Three critical challenges were identified:

1. survival of the initiative from an organisational point of view in a changed political environment
2. sustaining the role of men in initiatives to address sexual harassment
3. ensuring continued effectiveness and impact on the ground

Each of these aspects of the problem will be discussed separately though they are interconnected.

### **2.1.1 Surviving as an initiative**

The pressures on initiatives to survive were primarily political, though from several fronts. The obvious front is from the government which introduced new restrictions that inhibit collective action. Both Imprint and Harassmap (see profiles below) have to seek formal permits from the Ministry of Interior in order to interact with citizens on the streets of Cairo. In at least two separate incidents, both initiatives did not receive the permits and had to cancel their outreach work. This had implications on the volunteers' morale, both men and women. Volunteers had attended the training, and prepared themselves for engagement but found out at the last minute that their planned intervention was cancelled because permits had not arrived.

Moreover, the fact that the initiatives were informal, and not registered as associations with the Ministry of Social Solidarity, increased their vulnerability because they did not have an official status. Initiatives had to also negotiate their own strategic positioning within civil society in a context of deep political polarisation. They did not quite fit in any of the categories that characterised civil society in Egypt. The youth revolutionary forces had become split between the pro-Sissi camp (such as Tamarod) and the anti Sissi camp (such as the Populist Revolutionaries) and both Harassmap and Imprint had chosen a non partisan stance. They did not quite fit within the parameters of human rights movements, because they felt uncomfortable with the politicisation of human rights issues by certain organisations for their own political ends. They also did not fit the pre-2011 feminist associational sphere insofar as the men and women who were part of them did not all identify themselves in explicitly (or implicitly) feminist terms.

Initiatives such as Harassmap and Imprint proclaimed that their primary commitment would be to address sexual harassment and that they were going to disentangle this struggle from all other political struggles, political stances or orientations. This still made them vulnerable to attacks from those anti government organisations who accused them of colluding with authorities (read: they were 'traitors') and those who supported the government who thought that by highlighting the prevalence of sexual harassment, they were seeking to undermine the image of the new political order.

### **2.1.2 Sustaining the role of men in initiatives to address sexual harassment**

As noted above, when permits are not granted for fieldwork, this seriously undermines the morale of the volunteers, especially those whose interaction with the initiatives is not on a sustained basis, but on a seasonal one (i.e. joining on special occasions such as the feasts when harassment cases are rampant in crowded public spaces). However, the research findings revealed that the main driver for men's sustained interest or even recruitment was not the political context, though that was influential, but associated with internal dynamics within the initiatives themselves.

The phase when youth joined anti-sexual harassment initiatives was one characterized by a deeply engaged citizenry in which many people wanted to actively participate in building a new Egypt. Interestingly interviewees from both Imprint and Harassmap mentioned the same example to demonstrate the change of times: they both cited the example of how people would step forward to take part in cleaning up the streets campaigns after the 2011 revolution, but today, such appeals would fall on deaf ears. However, the recruitment and sustenance of the volunteers, women or men, was more closely associated with how active, relevant, and connected the initiative is to them. Sustaining engagement is no easy task, especially for men who joined because they wanted to stop harassment on the streets.

Moreover, there are also interpersonal challenges. Many men face intense pressures from their family, friends, and members in society because of their work in anti harassment initiatives. They are not considered real men, and as Heba from Imprint observed, the word sometimes used is '*metnaswen*', meaning acting in a 'womanised' fashion. They are also assumed to be gay, or that they just like to be around women, and have possibly joined to have access to assault them. Similarly women who join the initiatives are seen to be digressing in speaking to strangers, seen as forthright in dealing with taboo subjects that are in the realm of sexuality, and as immodest (even if they are dressed modestly and don the veil). One elderly man once told Yosra from imprint: 'what you are doing is *eib* (shameful), don't you know you are stopping your marriage market [*sic*] this way?'

Sometimes resistance is from within the movements where feminist corps are still very suspicious of men's motives, commitment, and ability to truly empathise with women.

### **2.1.3 Effectiveness and impact on the ground**

The dilemma facing anti sexual harassment initiatives is an ironic one and perfectly summarised by Karim (Harassmap): on the one hand, political space is closed so some of the creative ways to convey messages such as graffiti, human chains, and street theatre are no longer possible, on the other hand, the silence around sexual harassment as a taboo "sexual" issue has been broken, and in many contexts, the culture of denial of its occurrence has been weakened. This has made the public more open and willing to engage with these initiatives. How do you capitalise on this social acquiescence in order to increase outreach (scale) through doable strategies, and have a tangible impact on the ground? Moreover, how do anti sexual harassment initiatives engage with the counter-movements that seek to blame harassment on women or project inherently misogynist approaches to addressing the phenomenon?

## **2.2 How is this study exploring the issue?**

To address the questions highlighted in the introduction, an appreciative inquiry approach was taken to examine what accounts for men's involvement in effective collective action to counter gender based violence. An alternative methodological approach would have been to compare initiatives that faltered with those that have continued, however, this would not have been possible within the limited scope of this research and may also have posed accessibility challenges in identifying the individuals behind the inactive initiatives and securing their participation.

A case study approach was pursued, focusing on particular examples of initiatives that meet the following criteria: (a) they emerged around about the time of the revolution and have continued to this day (2015) even if they have experienced periods of hibernation (b) they continue to have significant male involvement and (c) they continue to work on sexual harassment in public spaces.

Of the initiatives that meet this criteria, the author chose two initiatives: Imprint (*Bassma*) and Harassmap. Other than meeting the above criteria, these two initiatives were previously researched up to early 2013, hence, revisiting them provided an opportunity for a longitudinal analysis. Moreover, the selection of two initiatives allowed for comparisons and analysis from multiple standpoints. A brief description of each initiative is provided in the boxes below:

### **Box 1 Brief synopsis of Harassmap**

Harassmap emerged in late 2010 and adopted an innovative approach of encouraging women and men to report incidents of harassment by using online and SMS forms of reporting. This allowed them to build a map of where incidents were most frequent. Men and women concerned about the incidence of sexual harassment in their own communities would contact Harassmap who would provide training and help connect volunteers from the same area with each other in order to form core groups in their own communities. Harassmap complements research with engagement in consciousness raising efforts to create social pressure against the acceptance of harassment and generate a willingness to intervene. Though an informal, youth led initiative, Harassmap has developed an organisational structure, with several departments (research, media, street outreach, and more recently schools and universities) and has a distinct institutional culture with its own particular ways of working. Many of their staff are men (some started as volunteers) and about a third of its volunteer base is also male. Harassmap has 'captains' who are leaders responsible for groups of volunteers working in particular geographic areas. Its principle activities have been community awareness initiatives to the public in general or to targeted groups (students, government officials, members of business corporations etc.). While Harassmap as an initiative benefitted from the flourishing of a culture of political activism and the relative opening up of political space, its core issue, addressing social acceptance of sexual harassment, was not directly linked to the 2011 revolution. For more on Harassmap see <http://interactions.eldis.org/profile/harrassmap?vnc=XtGrzjNxgjnPJiFRnJuwNb0EDLWLNaaPWzjGxT1iJC8&vnp=4> and see Tadros (2012)

### **Box 2 Synopsis of Imprint (*Bassma*)**

Imprint was to a greater extent the offspring of the political situation following the revolution. Imprint emerged in late November 2012 in direct response to the incidents of sexual harassment witnessed in Tahrir Square. It took a multi pronged approach to addressing what was being identified by Human Rights Watch as an epidemic (Human Rights Watch 2013). About half of its core members and founders were men. They were particularly attracted to the 'intervention' dimension of its work. Imprint took responsibility for making Tahrir Square safe for women to enter by forming its own group to patrol the space and intervene in cases of assault through highly organised rescue operations. These operations were not only active during times of protest but also on the two *eids* (religious festivities) where crowds thronged to these squares and their surrounding vicinities to celebrate. Because Imprint became particularly known for its highly regimented patrol and rescue groups, it represented a good case for examining the question as to whether it would become inactive after protests became banned and the police reclaimed public space. For more info, visit <http://interactions.eldis.org/profile/bassma-imprint?vnc=XtGrzjNxgjnPJiFRnJuwNb0EDLWLNaaPWzjGxT1iJC8&vnp=2> and see Tadros (2013)

Harassmap and Imprint are both committed to changing the social acceptance of sexual harassment and the norms, values and practices that justify it, politically and socially.

A two day meeting was held to co-construct the research agenda with Harassmap and Imprint. The meeting also included an informal reflection session on the most important changes in the contexts in which the initiatives operate, including changes in the role of state

and non state actors, and the pulse of the citizenry. The parameters of the research were also set, and wording of the specific questions guiding the research was agreed with the purpose of making this as sensitive to the individuals and context as possible.

The research encompassed interviews with those playing a leading role in both initiatives, life histories with men who have been active as volunteers and professionals, and open ended interviews with women volunteers and professionals who work closely with the men in the organisation and in fieldwork.

In total, 20 life histories were collected; ten from men from each initiative. Preference was also given to men who had been active in the initiatives before and after 2013, however, many had left and new ones joined in Harassmap making this qualifying criterion difficult to meet across the entire sample. The aim was to capture individual men's narratives and experiences in a holistic manner rather than focus exclusively on their role in their respective initiatives. This allowed for a more rounded, nuanced examination of their life trajectories.

Another ten open ended interviews were held with women members of the initiatives (five from each initiative). The aim was to capture their reflections and observations about the role of men in the initiatives. We sought to include both women in management as well as volunteers, the criteria was having been involved in the initiative a long time and having worked closely with men.

In the case of Harassmap, as their work extends nationwide, one of the criteria applied in the selection of men and women was regional representation. Hence we had volunteers from Sohag and Minya (Upper Egypt), Alexandria, Menoufiya (Lower Egypt), and Cairo. With respect to Imprint, their work is mostly based in Cairo, hence, one of the selection criteria was variation in representation within the city.

The author undertook several other interviews with staff in these initiatives as well as informal interviews and conversations with analysts well positioned to comment on these movements. This was complemented with secondary data analysis on sexual harassment and the broader context of Egypt.

Data collection was undertaken partly by the researcher who conducted some of the interviews with men and women and partly by senior members of the initiative. The research would have undoubtedly been affected by the positionality of the interviewers. The author sits as an insider-outsider: an Egyptian female who has long worked with both men and women on issues of gender based violence, on the other hand, an academic based in the UK. The positionality of the staff who undertook the interviews was also dual: on the one hand, some were in leadership positions within their initiatives, on the other, they were being asked to play the role of researchers, challenging their own assumptions, asking questions while refraining from commenting on the interviewees' perspectives.

The issue of potential bias in the research was partly offset by corroboration of the research collected by an outsider (the author). However, other concerns regarding access and openness had to, in this stance, take precedence. In view of the pressures and encroachments facing initiatives working on gender based violence from state and sometimes society alike, volunteers and professionals were unlikely to have readily agreed to participate in the research process had they not been assured by leaders within the initiatives that such collaboration was not harmful or threatening. The involvement of the leadership of the initiatives in the research itself, both as collectors and as interviewees, was important for giving the interviewees the signal that they can be honest and forthright in the research. The timing of the research represented an unexpected challenge: August 2015 witnessed heat spikes that the country had not witnessed in seven decades.

The interviews were transcribed word by word in Arabic by Harassmap and Imprint and relevant parts translated into English by the author. A validation meeting was held after all the data was collected with the leaders and researchers from both initiatives to discuss their experiences and observations and to validate the synthesis and analysis that the author had preliminarily undertaken.

## 3 Findings

The findings presented here specifically focus on three overlapping themes: the survival and transformation of vigilantism, the sustained recruitment and involvement of men as volunteers, and the development of effective strategies in addressing sexual assault in a changing, dynamic context.

### 3.1 How is the problem being addressed?

#### 3.1.1 Survival

In order to adapt to the reconfiguration of power relations, Imprint recognised that there was a phase in which vigilantism was suitable for addressing sexual harassment at a critical juncture in Egypt's history. While Harassmap was not engaged in vigilante activity since their primary focus was awareness raising rather than direct intervention, some of its members were involved in other initiatives engaged in vigilante-type activities such as *Opantish* (Operation Anti Sexual Harassment). As Ahmed from Harassmap reflected, in order to go beyond rescuing women and be able to hold perpetrators accountable, there had to be a functional state in which the police respond to complaints, cases are referred to the general prosecutor and if need be, the judiciary. According to Abdel Fattah, the co-founder of Imprint, such roles could not be pursued by vigilante groups: 'We cannot live in a state of adolescence, telling ourselves that we are capable of protecting the public in lieu of the police'. He further explained: 'We have to admit that our rescue work was right for a particular context at a particular time but vigilante groups are not a solution, they cannot be a *modus vivandi* for a phenomenon that needs state intervention.'

For Imprint, survival as an initiative required a reinvention of part of its identity, as they had become recognised in 2012 and 2013 for their regimented patrol groups that surveyed protest spaces and rescued women from assault. The new context required two adjustments. First, they find ways of working *with*, not *in lieu of* the police to protect public space from violence and second, reorienting their male patrol groups to alternative activities that also serve to address the goal of stopping gender based violence. Imprint believes that one aspect (though by no means the main one) of their new role should be to engage with the Ministry of Interior's (MOI) security forces about how to handle incidents of sexual violence. They believe that security forces need to be equipped to intervene positively to stop harassment without resorting to excessive force and disbursement of crowds through tear gas etc. However, the Ministry of Interior while willing in 2013 and 2014 to co-patrol public space with Imprint and other youth initiatives was not prepared to yield to having its officers undergo training from youth initiative leaders. Abdel Fattah's ambition for Imprint is to 'find advocates for our cause within MOI, so we reach a stage where we talk about the rehabilitation of assailants rather than just punish them. We are not even at the stage of being able to find channels for sustained engagement. We are at the stage of just getting them to engage with us so that they don't arrest us when we go down to the streets [for outreach work]'

Both Imprint and Harassmap deal with the main challenge of obtaining official permits for their outreach work by pursuing a multi tiered approach to engaging the state apparatus. They recognise that the state is not a monolithic whole, and that different parts of the state

will allow or deny access to different kinds of public spaces. For example, where Imprint was unable to obtain a permit to undertake their patrols during the festivities in Cairo, they were able to informally acquire a go ahead from the transport authorities to do their outreach in the subways, a key site for men's encroachments on women (including men occupying coaches designated as women only). Another strategy they pursue is to work in governorates where security restrictions are more relaxed, and where it is easier for volunteers to build a rapport with government officials at different levels.

Moreover, both Harassmap and Imprint have more recently begun to work with universities and the former with schools as well. These require permissions from the university leadership (president and deans) as well as the security bureau on campus that is answerable to the Ministry of Interior. However, once permissions are granted, they allow for sustained engagement (unless there is a change of educational or security personnel). In contrast, in order for initiatives to engage in street work, a permit has to be obtained every time they step into the street as a collective. By engaging in universities both Imprint and Harassmap have been able to build up their volunteer base. Whereas Harassmap's outreach work was suffering as a consequence of weakened links with its volunteers, it concurrently witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of volunteers joining from university campuses in 2014.

Imprint also went through phases. Initially it was an organic initiative with a horizontal decision making structure. It also had limited division of labour across the different activities and interventions, even though such division existed within the actual activities. The shift to institutionalisation was not easy, and in the process, some volunteers left. Some returned when they found out that a system with clear division of roles and responsibilities had been instated.

Finally, initiatives such as Imprint and Harassmap began the process of applying for registration as per the NGO Law. The process is long, dreary, and full of bureaucratic hurdles however, once registered, they will hold a legal entity status, a step that will greatly facilitate their engagements with state and non state actors alike.

### ***3.1.2 Mobilising men and sustaining involvement***

The motives driving men and women to join initiatives such as Harassmap and Imprint are both deeply subjective and gendered. Women and men may be driven by a common commitment to a more just society, or to be part of a group that has a distinct identity or commitment to gender justice (Tadros 2013). Women's firsthand experience of sexual harassment often served as a powerful incentive to join anti sexual harassment groups in order to engage with society on its negative impact on survivors. However, some women also hold deeply patriarchal views and initially join groups believing that women are partly to blame and they should be made aware of their responsibility in provoking men.

Likewise, men's deeply gendered experiences and subjectivities can also influence their decision to join in vastly varied ways. At one end of the spectrum, there are men who join because they don't want to live in a society where they can sense women's anxiety as they cross them by on the streets. Some men join because they want women to know that not all men are aggressors and potential assailants. They want to show that men care. Others join out of a desire to show solidarity. At perhaps the opposite end of the 'drivers spectrum', some men join out of pure misogyny. For example, there have been applications to Harassmap from men who wanted to join so they could preach to women to minimise their outdoor presence and to cover up as much as possible so that they do not become a provocation to men. Ahmed mentioned that such applicants are categorically rejected. Yosra from Imprint mentioned that one man who joined as a volunteer, though fully committed to stopping harassers on the streets of Egypt, had a deeply misogynist attitude towards the female volunteers. He simply would not speak or interact with them and once told her openly 'I don't speak to women, I don't see the point of you girls being in this initiative anyway'.



Though Harassmap and Imprint each have their own particular approaches to eliciting transformative change in attitudes and thinking, they share one common approach: action on the ground is the entry point to change. There is an element of 'being the change you want to see' in the sense that these men are stepping out of mainstream notions of how real men should act taking to the street for the cause. However, this is not entirely satisfactory in explaining how change happens on two accounts. First, while being a role model in the street is a positive affirming experience, nonetheless, men's subjectivities (like women's) are continuously been transformed as a consequence of their experiences of interacting with vast array of citizens. Second, the experiential dimension of this transformation occurs on the streets not only on account of one to one engagements but as a consequence of the interactions occurring within members of the group representing the initiative. In other words, transformation occurs within the context of interacting within the group as much as through projecting outwards through citizen engagement. Third, it was in the iterative process of doing intervention (on the streets), then sharing, debating and reflecting, that opportunities for sustained transformations occurred. This process is neither linear, nor does it work like a production line. It does not start with gender blind men on one end of the 'production line' being developed, so as to release gender sensitive men at the other end. Men's perceptions of themselves and others as well as intersecting aspects of their identity mean that the 'start' and 'end' places are very dynamic and subjective. However, across both initiatives, there were a number of common approaches that this research identified as enabling transformation. These include consciousness raising sessions that:

- provide a holistic approach to gender and sexuality and dispel many of the myths about why men harass, as well as question oppressive constructs of masculinities and femininities (Harassmap for example use the very popular technique called the 'gender box' which challenges participants to examine what is considered acceptable and unacceptable roles/behaviours in society).
- encourage men to empathise with women's experiences of harassment at an experiential level. For example, both Imprint and Harassmap encourage men to reflect on their own experiences of what goes through their minds when they prepare to leave home, and compare that with women's experiences (Is this attire likely to bring about undue attention? In view of needing to go through x or y place, should I dress in a particular way?).
- training in non violent, effective forms of engaging with the harasser, and those who defend them. This is particularly challenging for men (and women) who join and are filled with rage at the manner in which society often blames the survivor of assault and defends the assailant.
- expose volunteers to different entry points of influence, to ways of engaging in male peer to peer outreach, and to how to counter people's varied justifications for assault.
- created safe spaces that amount to a distinct niche or parallel society to the one in which they live. These safe spaces play a central role in sustaining the interest and commitment of volunteers in the cause and the initiatives. It is in challenging hegemonic constructions of masculinities and femininities that a sense of common identity is created. Men and women are encouraged to express their feelings.
- developed a safe space (not necessarily free of conflict) with a policy of zero tolerance towards homophobia and bigotry. Harassmap incorporated in its volunteer recruitment policy a set of questions designed to ensure that future members are accepting of sexual diversity. Imprint developed such a policy after a deep fissure emerged when one member launched a campaign demanding the exclusion of a male volunteer who he had discovered to be gay. Members were split, one of the co-founders pulled out in objection to calls to remove the gay member, and several followed suit. The cofounder returned after the initiative arrived at a consensus that tolerance is a prerequisite to involvement in Imprint and therefore the person who had objected had to leave.

### **3.1.3 How is impact being addressed**

One of the key impacts that both initiatives seek to achieve is to break the taboo around sexual harassment. Thanks to the efforts of feminist organisations in the past century in particular, in addition to the work of youth initiatives in 2011 and 2012, and some supportive voices within the media, very rarely do people today deny the occurrence or say it is something socially unacceptable to talk about. However, the words 'jinsy' meaning 'sexual' is still deeply unsettling for many Egyptians. Initiatives insist on using the term irrespective of whether the harassment took the form of verbal or physical encroachment so as to be explicit about its nature and encourage society to confront the phenomenon for what it is.

The initiatives have recognised that justifications and rationales for sexual harassment are not static, they evolve as society metamorphoses. They have sought to engage with the dynamism of the public negotiation over sexual harassment by continuously reworking the messages and arguments, in order to respond to new expressions of resistance and backlash. Both Harassmap and Imprint have strong adaptive learning mechanisms that help them go back to the drawing board to rethink entry points for change and to confront new arguments that serve to justify harassment. Such an adaptive learning process has allowed them to expose to the broader public new ills and confront regressive dynamics as they emerge.

Imprint and Harassmap have both reworked their strategies of outreach with the public. Both point out that whereas at an earlier phase of their activism, one of their entry points was 'this could be happening to your mother, sister or wife' or a variation thereof, they have both abandoned this framing. This patriarchal framing was premised on the notion that if men can relate to the predicament of people close to them that they love, this empathy would translate into an understanding that no woman is immune from exposure to harassment, irrespective of her demeanour, attire, and background. However, other than affirming the patriarchal underpinnings of why men should care, it proved to be of limited effectiveness. Men would reply: 'I don't have women members in my family' or 'my mother/sister/wife would never dress like that'.

Harassmap and Imprint have evolved their entry point of engagement to emphasise the idea that it is the right of every human being not to be harassed. The emphasis is on dispelling myths associated with attire, showing for example how women in the *niqab* (face veil) also get harassed. They have also sought to distinguish between flirtation from both sides (men and women) and incidents where girls and women don't like the attention. They have challenged the idea that it is no big deal, and that men can't control their sexual urges.

Harassmap and Imprint believe that they should capitalise on the fact that the state has issued a law specifically on sexual harassment by building this in to their messages in public outreach. Harassmap has already produced a new campaign message broadcast on television, radio, and through online media with the slogan, '*al moutaheresh mogrem*' meaning 'the harasser is a criminal'. Imprint supports Harassmap's move in such a direction as do many other initiatives. The new messaging is controversial: there are concerns that men would be demonised, that their openness to social consciousness building efforts would be undermined with a punitive, negative expression of their agency, and that it would drive sexual assault underground. The emphasis on men being criminals (their poster has a picture of a man's hands clutching) could also further deepen the notion that men need to conform because of a security apparatus that deploys draconian discipline, rather than the conviction that that harassment is socially and morally unacceptable behaviour. However, Reem Wael, the director of Harassmap has defended the new approach on the basis that male and female volunteers were finding that there was a disconnect between the dominant theory of change, namely one premised on the conviction that assailants will stop the assault through awareness-raising engagements. 'Our aim is not to rehabilitate the person who assaults but to create in society awareness that such actions should not be tolerated. In

order to do that, there needs to be a shift from [society's] stigmatising the victim (woman) to stigmatising the assailant, so that women would feel empowered to go to the police station and press charges and not feel that they are the ones accused [of breaking gendered norms about respectability]’.

### **3.2 What has changed?**

The approach to understanding change was to explore the contribution of both men's involvements, and the initiatives under study, to processes of change rather than one of establishing causal relations from which we attribute change to a singular intervention or men within it. This allows for a more embedded approach that recognises opportunities as well as limitations inherent in processes of social transformation, and which are rarely ever linear.

#### **3.2.1 Vigilantism transformed**

The survival of Imprint (even though there were periods of hibernation) embodies the survival of a model of engaging with gender issues that is distinguished by its composition and ethos: youth led, incorporating women and men who seek to build constituencies on the ground. In other words, it proved that some of these initiatives were not just revolutionary fads.

Vigilantism could not be sustained due to a changed political environment and changed needs on the ground; however, the fact that the Ministry of Interior thought that the work of youth based initiatives is important enough to invite them for brainstorming meetings represents a first. While Ministry of Interior officials have not shown a willingness to concede to some of the demands made by Harassmap and Imprint providing their security officers with training on handling sexual assault, nevertheless, the fact that they have invited them to what has conventionally been a closed space is significant. Whether these will be sustained, expanded, or closed remains to be seen.

Moreover, both initiatives have had success in finding alternative public spaces when street work became severely circumscribed. For example, Harassmap, together with several other initiatives working on sexual assault, were able to convince the governor of Alexandria to grant them permission to do their outreach work during *eid* (religious festivities) in June 2015. He gave them qualified access to public space. The transport authorities are under his jurisdiction, therefore they can work in the trams, micro/mini buses and so forth, but not the actual streets which are under the prerogative of the Ministry of Interior.

The strategy of seeking multiple ways to access public spaces has paid off. Harassmap experienced high spikes in volunteer recruitment between November 2014 and March 2015 (100+ per month) largely as a consequence of their initiation of new programmes in public universities. Whereas many initiatives that emerged in 2012 to patrol protest spaces have either desisted or become seasonal in their interventions (focusing on *eid* when crowds gather), Imprint has sought to assume different pathways of engaging the public on sexual harassment, through direct community engagement or by, for example training members of the Ministry of Youth. The former never ceases to be risky. Once when in a poor community, they were arrested and detained until a police officer who knew the initiative called in and asked to have them released. However, outreach work involving engaging the public has not stopped.

#### **3.2.2 Changes in men's perceptions of themselves and others and broader relations**

The stories of transformation in men's trajectories in collective initiatives on sexual violence, though varied, all have one common feature: non conformity.

Karim, who started with Harassmap as a volunteer used to respond to cases where women were exposed to sexual harassment on the streets by resorting to violence. He found himself embroiled in many fights where people did not necessarily empathise with him. They would lay the blame squarely on his shoulders for having intervened: 'is she your sister? Do you know her? Why should you care?' Karim's twin sister was raped when returning home as a

13 year old. She passed away a year later. Karim's extended family blamed her for not being at home when the assault occurred. He found this unacceptable, left his residence in Alexandria, and went to live with his grandfather in Cairo. He has now engaged in years of awareness raising on the streets through peer to peer dialogues about why any kind of unwanted attention is harmful. A talented photographer, he has captured the work of Harassmap across the years.

Some of the women professionals at Harassmap reflect that sometimes particular kinds of men join expecting that they will assume a 'manly' role in the fight against harassment. Such men often expect that they will be going down to the streets to beat up harassers. Yet instead, they find themselves engaged in outreach work that challenges in fundamental ways their conception of 'manly power'. Instead of using force, they are trained in how to reach out to perfect strangers and engage in dialogue on sexual harassment. This clearly puts them in a position of vulnerability as the outreach rests on receptivity of and engagement from the public. Sometimes people tell them outright that it is not their business, or that they should find something meaningful to do with their time, etc. Further, since both initiatives insist that public outreach initiatives involve groups of men and women, these men find themselves in positions where they are accompanying women, not to protect them or act as chaperones, but as their equals. Sometimes, some men find this too much and don't continue, others, through sustained engagement discover new ways of relating to these women as strong and capable, not weak and in need of male protection.

Yosra Amir from Imprint noticed that when some men apply to join their initiative, they understand the term sexual harassment to mean rape, so they think their role will be to stop women from being physically assaulted. Once they are exposed to the idea that sexual harassment is also about glares and words, this challenges them to think about their own behaviour and whether it accounts to harassment.

Women volunteers' own conceptions of masculinities and femininities have also been key to their own transformation and those of the men in the movement. As Noha, a captain from Harassmap pointed out, expectations from women regarding men's roles in the initiatives and men's own assumptions about how they should act and be had to be contested. For example, in her group they had to be explicit that men need not assume responsibility for 'protecting' women volunteers when engaging in public outreach activities, that men too have the right to express fear and that they should not be ashamed to cry in public.

Transformations also occur in intra-group dynamics that reflect profound rethinking of gender roles and hierarchies. As Tohamy from Imprint pointed out, the idea of men speaking and women listening is fundamentally challenged in group dynamics. Men who join Harassmap and Imprint engage with women in leadership positions in the initiatives, as founders, directors, and trainers.

Finally, one of the transformations that several men mentioned as a consequence of being in Harassmap and Imprint is a greater tolerance towards those who share a different identity or hold different beliefs. Some men mentioned that prior to joining the initiatives, they would not tolerate being with those who have a different sexuality or are self proclaimed atheists. Others said that when they joined, they had a mindset of accepting gay and atheist persons but preferring not to interact or associate with them. These men all mentioned that as a consequence of several awareness raising sessions on gender, being part of groups in which there was a zero tolerance policy towards prejudice, and of person to person interaction, their own personal values and behaviours have changed, such that people's personal beliefs or sexual orientation makes no difference to them.

### **3.2.3 Societal effects and broader impact**

A number of enabling factors such as the media, the issuance of a new law, and initiatives such as Harassmap, Imprint, and many others have played a major contributing role to breaking the silence around the occurrence of sexual harassment. When volunteer members were asked what has changed in engaging people with sexual harassment since they started, many identified the fact that people are far less likely to deny its occurrence. They spend a lot less energy trying to prove that harassment happens and that it is a social problem worthy of attention.

Initiatives have also created an epistemic shift in the debates from female attire as being the cause of provocation to one of rights: on what account do people assume they have the right to encroach on the bodily integrity of others?

When women volunteers and professionals in both initiatives were asked how their outreach would be affected if they were exclusively comprised of women, a number of recurring themes emerged suggesting a strong relationship between men's involvement and effectiveness. They include the following:

- **Being able to successfully convey the idea that sexual harassment is not a 'women's issue'** but a social matter that affects everyone. The presence of men in awareness campaigns and their framing of the issue as something that affects them personally has contributed to undermining the claims that this issue is being raised by a group of women to advance their own vested interests and has nothing to do with the rest of society.
- **Being able to develop messages that are effective in reaching out to the citizenry.** It is not so much that women activists were disconnected from the pulse of the citizenry, rather it is the ability to see the issue through the eyes of men, and through multiple lens that messages framed not only for women but for women are arrived at, and which are able to have wide resonance among the citizenry they engage with.
- **Broader outreach and access to hotspots:** The public outreach of the initiatives sometimes extends to male dominated spaces where sexual harassment is rampant (such as micro and mini bus depots). While men do not accompany women there as chaperones to protect them, nevertheless, their presence allows the group greater access to these spaces while minimising risks for women.
- **Attracting volunteers.** While men in the initiatives who engage in public outreach are sometimes treated as socially deviant, nevertheless, they have also served as positive role models. Male volunteers have stepped forward and asked to join because they interacted with members of these initiatives who are not exceptional, but ordinary like them. The fact that members of the initiatives demonstrate leadership, confidence, and respect in engaging the public serves to affirm a positive image of alternative masculinities.
- A number of women members of Imprint said they decided to enrol as volunteers when the initiative set up a booth at their university (where they were still students). When they saw that members were both men and women, they **felt that if men could commit to an issue that directly affects them as women, they should also share in the responsibility of tackling the problem.**
- **Encouraging community ownership of the issue.** At a time when citizen political action is limited, the continued activism of these groups of men and women in street work is important for community ownership of the issue. The temptation to leave the matter (sexual harassment) to the government to handle would make it at the mercy of changes in the political will and priorities of officials.

These observations from women volunteers, professionals, and leaders in both initiatives suggest that men's involvement in anti sexual harassment has a transformative impact on

several levels. First, men's involvement is critical for pressing society to recognising sexual harassment as a social issue that requires a nationwide response. This is critical for undermining deeply patriarchal and reactionary arguments that seek to represent the struggle against sexual harassment as irrelevant and marginal to community needs and priorities. It is also critical for challenging the idea that this is a women's issue on the fringes. Men's involvement has encouraged both men and women to see it as a matter of sufficient importance as to demand both genders' attention. Second, men's involvement has influenced the nature of the approach and intervention. Men's involvement in the development of the framing of the message allows it to be positively aligned with the pulse of men in the community. Third, men's involvement in field activities has increased the scope of outreach, for example, men speaking to the men and not only to the women while facilitating female volunteers' outreach to men. Men's involvement has also affected the quality of interaction when engaging with strangers, who find it easier to talk about taboo subjects associated with sexuality with members of the same sex.

In terms of capturing the impact in social transformation, some indicators, such as incidents of stopping the harassment of women on the streets are possible to capture. Ahmed Ramadan Abd el Hameed, 24 years old, an electronics engineer and volunteer in Imprint spoke of impact in terms of incidents in which his group were able to stop harassment and hand over those responsible for the assaults to the police. In the most recent time in which his group patrolled crowded spaces over the *eid* period, they were able to intervene and stop harassment in 24 separate incidents, catch the assailants, and get the police to intervene. There is a broader ripple effect beyond the cases of harassment stopping against individual women. There is a deterrent effect to others who become aware that they will be handed over to the police and the perceptions of acceptability of harassment within the broader community. Imprint refuse any kind of social justification for the harasser's behaviour and refuse any kind of rationales seeking to blame the victim, and this is done in very public settings, many volunteers have shared anecdotes about families coming up to them, congratulating them for their work and offering words of encouragement and moral support. Where impact has been far less felt is in convincing women who have been assaulted to file complaints with the police, fear of shame and blame continue to be a hindrance.

However, one of the major challenges facing initiatives working on the ground is the difficulty of capturing impact since they mostly work in streets and on forms of public transport where citizens are in constant flow in and out of that space. It is likely to be easier in future to do impact assessments for outreach in public space within more limited parameters such as schools and universities. However, beyond quantifiable assessment of impact, there are also powerful stories of change emerging from the narratives of volunteers of how they witnessed impact on the ground.

Moataz, a captain for Harassmap in Alexandria recalled how on one occasion when he was on a microbus, a woman spoke out against a male passenger who was harassing her. In reaction the male passenger insisted that he was not doing anything and she was just making an unnecessarily fuss and should keep quiet. When the microbus driver overheard what was happening, he immediately stopped the vehicle and insisted that the man who was harassing her get out. People sympathised with the assailant trying to put pressure on the driver not to get him off, and made insinuations about women asking for it etc. Moataz said that he was pleasantly surprised when the driver, withstanding all peer pressure, stood his ground and began to confidently rehearse the arguments presented in Harassmap's flyers, almost in the exact order as they appear, using exactly the same terms! Passengers defending the assailant found themselves unable to present counter arguments, and the microbus driver's position on the assailant leaving prevailed.

Karim from Harassmap recalls that at a microbus depot, his group was drawing anti harassment graffiti on one of the walls when they were approached by a Salafi man (follower

of an ultra radical conservative Islamist movement) who insisted they stop and began to openly accuse them of corrupting society and promoting women's immodesty. As he was stirring the drivers at the depot to expel the group from the area, an elderly man who carried much moral authority emerged, shouted at the Salafi man, and defended the group's work. He then began to lecture the drivers about the importance of the work they do (though he did not know them) and the necessity of stopping all kinds of harassment in the country. He placed his chair in front of the wall that they were painting, sat there and he said he would personally make sure no one vandalises it. He shared with Harassmap his appreciation of the work that they were doing in seeking to change social acceptance of harassment. He confided to them that he had raped several women and had been put in prison for over 15 years on charges of rape. When he was incarcerated, his daughter was a baby and upon his discharge he realised she was a young woman. Over the years, he worried, what if his daughter fell into the hands of men who also considered it their right to rape? While it was his personal experience that altered his behaviour, his strong endorsement of Harassmap's work was a testament to how much people feel there is a need for their outreach work.

One way in which impact can also be assessed is through observation by an independent researcher. The author encountered two entirely separate incidents which bear testament to Imprint and Harassmap's outreach impact. In November 2012, I was interviewing members of Imprint in a coffee shop when a group of young men and women approached them and said they watched them talk on television about harassment and related to what they were saying and would like to join the initiative. In August 2015, while interviewing a member of Harassmap, also in a coffee shop (albeit a different one), the waiter approached us before we left and said he noticed the anti harassment sticker on one of the Harassmap leader's laptops and shared his experience in informally organising himself and other youth in his area to ensure that on occasions where crowds gather, women are not harassed. He too asked to join as volunteer (I found out a couple of days later that he had indeed filled the application and was going to be interviewed to check his eligibility). These were coffee shops in areas where neither Imprint nor Harassmap had undertaken direct outreach, and the incidents were completely random. This showed that the initiatives had succeeded in having a broad outreach beyond the physical spaces in which they had undertaken outreach work. It also suggested that they are able to appeal to young people beyond their immediate networks, and they have developed solid reputations that enable them to build relations of trust with unknown youth.

While it is difficult to attribute positive change exclusively to the role of youth led initiatives such as Imprint and Harassmap, it is nonetheless possible to decipher from the above ways in which they have collectively contributed to processes that allow for inroads to be made into both policy and societal levels. These contributions can be summarised as follows:

- Breaking the silence: the saturation of online and offline spaces with messages against sexual harassment has served to break the silence on the prevalence and seriousness of sexual harassment.
- Policy influence: the fact that actors as diverse as the National Council for Women and the Ministry of Interior are inviting initiatives for brainstorming on addressing sexual harassment is indicative that they are seen as authoritative sources of knowledge on the issue. How much of these initiatives' input features in national policy is impossible to say, however, at the very least, it challenges the government to see the situation from the ground up.
- Empowering leaders and ordinary citizens who want to stop harassment to know that they are not alone and that they can join initiatives in solidarity
- Shifting attitudes and practices towards the social acceptability of sexual harassment
- Initiatives have had some success in shifting attitudes that have in some incidents translated into citizens taking action to speak up against harassment and actively intervene to stop it.

### 3.3 What can we learn?

#### 3.3.1 *Men and women engaging politically behind redlines*

One of the strongest messages that emerged from this research was that many of the men who have formed and joined initiatives to counter gender based violence in public spaces in Egypt **did not only do so out of a transient revolutionary fervour or to simply substitute for a police force that had withdrawn from public spaces**. Certainly these were important drivers, but they do not wield full explanatory power for why men joined women in mobilising for change. Moreover, not all men became involved simply to 'protect women' and in so doing fulfil a patriarchal desire to control and affirm their strength. Certainly, other factors may have influenced the decision on the part of some men to sustain activism on this issue, i.e. being part of a group and the recognition and status that comes from being associated with being an anti sexual harassment champion. However, since 2014, the revolutionary culture that flourished post-Mubarak has waned, the police are back on the streets, and yet many men continue to give their time and effort to initiatives to stop sexual harassment.

It is important to note however, **that men's involvement, like that of women, is cyclic** in two ways: first, the cycle of the movement itself, which can go through phases of dormancy and hibernation, and critical junctures of heightened activism. Second, phases in the life cycle of the volunteers themselves: starting a new job requires a concerted effort especially at the beginning that may leave limited time for volunteerism, and meeting a new life partner may also exert similar pressures on time.

Another strong message that emerged from the research was the need to understand that **political authoritarianism is not a predictor of the nature of gender policies**. In this instance, a regime that **closed political spaces** assumed a number of policies that, though not without blemish, have been supportive of addressing sexual harassment. Moreover, in contexts where political space is severely circumscribed, there will still be expressions of collective citizen agency, even if they take different forms. Initiatives adapt, innovate and re-configure their strategies of engagement. Harassmap and Imprint adopted a multi pronged strategy to engaging multiple public spaces as a way of reducing vulnerability to state control. Such public spaces included targeting microbus and minibus stops, and key shopping areas, in particular preparatory and secondary schools.

The initiatives' adoption of a **differentiated approach towards engaging the state** has proven to be strategically highly effective. This differentiated approach has allowed initiatives to build key allies within different state institutions at different levels. It has allowed Harassmap and Imprint to identify persons within the civil service, various levels of governance, and even within the security force who are sympathetic to their cause, rather than engage with the state as one undifferentiated homogenous bloc with one will and one policy. The full potential of applying this differentiated approach to acquire access to multiple publics has yet to be fully exploited. Moreover, implanting new branches of these initiatives led by locals across different governorates may reduce the impact of security tightening in one area, allowing the shifting of the work towards another.

If initiatives succeed in building and strengthening their volunteer base and ability to sustain outreach on the ground, a multipronged approach may be called for in addressing sexual violence. The first area of focus would be to ensure that the political will to assume a state zero tolerance policy towards sexual harassment is neither abandoned in favour of 'more urgent matters' nor applied in a piecemeal fashion by a committed few.

President Al Sissi's open condemnation of sexual assault in his visit to a survivor of sexual violence in 2014, though temporary in its effect, did stir the public's sympathy and incentivise public officials to be more responsive to incoming cases of sexual harassment. There is a need to further invest in creating such political opportunities to rekindle a national commitment to addressing sexual harassment without encouraging patrimonial politics. As



Egypt is expected to have a new parliament by January 2016, activists may seek to engage with parliamentarians in order to put pressure on the government and president to ensure that the institutional culture within different branches of the state responds to sexual harassment appropriately and consistently.

The second area of focus to address sexual harassment is to strengthen the ties across groups and initiatives in order for the sum of all parts to be greater than the individual initiatives. The power of the collective may not be deployed in the same manner as it was in the period immediately after the 25 January revolution when initiatives found strength in mobilising constituencies to take to the street en masse. Such forms or manifestations of collective action across groups may not necessarily be pursued with the same kind of ease as it was between 2011 and 2013. However, collective action is still possible on other fronts: experience sharing, joint learning, co-ordination of field activities, and synchronisation of priority issues for the delivery of consistent messages to policy makers. Much of the strength of the collective action across groups will be dependent on internal group dynamics as much as the external context.

The third critical area of engagement is for initiatives to think of broadening their work such that sexual harassment is addressed in relation to the broader phenomenon of gender based violence. For example, there is a need to establish the link between violence against women in public spaces and private spaces and the recognition that the lines are often blurred. This was perfectly highlighted by one of the volunteers who said that when engaging in public outreach on sexual harassment on the streets in Egypt, he would never hesitate for a second to intervene if the woman was being harassed by a stranger. However, in another incident where a husband was hitting his wife in public, he did not know whether to intervene or not. Moreover, as both Harassmap and Imprint (and other initiatives) have come across incidents of sexual violence against boys and men, at the right moment, this issue should be broached in their work. Sexual violence against boys and men is an intensely taboo subject in Egypt where exposure to any kind of gendered violence is intrinsically associated with a questioning of the victim's 'manhood' and masculine identity. In order to minimise public resistance to addressing this topic, it may be easier at the beginning for initiatives to address gender and sexual violence against boys as a child rights issue rather than a gender rights matter. The fact that there are men in initiatives such as Harassmap and Imprint who have acquired experience in addressing social taboos with relative effectiveness may, at the right time, initiate a campaign that would challenge society to recognise gender and sexual based violence against boys and men as an issue around which silence has to be broken and misconceptions challenged.

### ***3.3.2 Strategies for mobilising men against gender based violence in public spaces:***

**The volunteer base of the initiatives is the key to their sustenance and effectiveness.**

This will require the leadership within each initiative adopting a multi tiered approach, recognising that the needs of 'seasonal volunteers' are different from those of 'one off' interventions and yet different from those who have a long term commitment. Certainly the three categories overlap, yet it is clear that sustained volunteer activism is particularly beneficial for morale, ownership, and internal organisational strengthening. In order to sustain volunteers' activism, initiatives need to:

- afford sufficient 'doing' opportunities, followed and preceded by reflexive practice
- invest in team building efforts
- incorporate an innovative system of sharing of stories of change and evidence of impact on the ground
- offer opportunities for mentoring and where appropriate opportunities to mentor,
- protect existing safe spaces for men and women to share struggles and share in experiential learning

- expose the teams to other country's experiences, enhance capacity on the ground, and offer opportunities to acquire new skills that may not necessarily be directly relevant to their interventions, but would be seen as beneficial for personal growth and well being
- increase the sense of ownership of the initiative, not only in terms of power sharing opportunities but in resolving crises facing the initiatives (such as when permits are not granted and volunteers have been mobilised)
- Social media continues to be a powerful channel through which to disseminate information about the initiatives and their activities and mobilise volunteers. Social media is however, only a tool for networking and is not a substitute for offline public action. The mainstream media is critically important for the visibility of the initiatives as it informs the public beyond particular cliques that use social media and gives them social recognition.

### **3.3.3 *The role of external actors in creating an enabling environment for men's engagement in collective action on gender matters.***

- Caution should be taken to **avoid engaging men in gender and development through an 'add men and stir' approach**. The initiatives examined here and the many others that emerged organically offer excellent learning opportunities on how men do mobilise around gender issues when they find the cause as worthy, when they can claim it as their own, and when it is framed in terms of the kind of society we live in.
- Multilateral organisations that are well connected with the Egyptian government and civil society initiatives should assume **a convening role**. This was one of the key policy messages around which the leaders of Harassmap and Imprint have consensus. For example, Abdel Fattah recounted that one of the most important encounters for his organisation was a meeting convened by one of the UN Women agencies in which the Minister of interior, leading members of the General Prosecution, and the Forensic Medicine experts were all present. This allowed for the creation of dialogue and informal relationship building.
- External actors that are regularly working with government officials on issues associated with gender equality, security, or rule of law and justice system issues **should use their leverage to propose the invitation of anti harassment initiatives to consultations and meetings with officials** (even those that they are not convening themselves). This helps create opportunities for initiatives to build connections and bridges with government officials.
- Approaches to engaging men on gender issues need to **be sensitive to men's subjectivities**. In other words, individuals' norms, values, and perceptions are deeply personal. In these initiatives, some men's involvement in anti harassment campaigns has not had the same effects on different men's thinking, attitudes, and behaviours with respect to matters associated with gender equality. Sometimes initiatives have had to deal with levels of inconsistency where men committed to the cause of stopping harassment suddenly expose, in particular situations when they have been caught off guard, signs of misogyny. However, in others, they have had to accept that men should not be measured against a yardstick of what gender sensitive men should look like.
- Supporting anti harassment initiatives to **build capacity in impact assessment studies** would enable them to document, monitor, and appraise change across time. Partnerships between such initiatives and research bodies would allow for building context appropriate impact assessment approaches and methods that can be easily applied at regular intervals.

## 4 Conclusion

The distinctiveness of initiatives such as Imprint and Harassmap in engaging men is that they did not start by developing a programme for addressing gender inequality and then seek to convince men to join. Rather, the initiatives were begun by men and women who envisaged a society free of harassment and chose to act upon it. In other words, this was in direct contrast to a gender and development project adopting an 'add men and stir' approach. The initiatives drew their strength from being a collective that was in tune with the pulse of the citizenry. This led to a complete transformation in the approach and practice of engaging the public on issues of gender based violence by identifying sexual harassment as society's problem rather than a woman's issue. Interventions, entry points, framings, and demands were constantly being reworked to adapt to changes in political environment and society.

Due to feedback loops between strategising and engaging the street, there have been a number of notable shifts in framing. Earlier, one of the arguments sometimes used in community outreach was to appeal to men to imagine the women assaulted being their daughters, wives, or sisters. This did not always create the kind of empathy that was expected. There was a shift towards encouraging volunteers to use other arguments that are premised on emphasising women's humanity. This rights based approach put forward the notion that irrespective of whether you think she is appropriately dressed or not, she has the right to public space free of encroachments, as is your right. Harassmap believe that this approach, though effective with some citizens, does not have teeth. They have now opted for an approach that emphasises that the person who assaults is a criminal, drawing on the issuance of a new sexual harassment code that has harsh penalties to redress all forms of harassment including that of a verbal nature. This approach may be controversial but it is being rolled out and tested across the country to see whether it is effective. It is this iterative process that allows them to be responsive to the pulse of the street.

One of the great challenges (and fears) facing initiatives was whether they would continue to have access to the streets in a context that is becoming increasingly securitised. Both Harassmap and Imprint have shown political resilience in adopting a variety of strategies to adapt, including a differentiated approach to engaging a state that they recognise is not monolithic, the pursuit of strategies to tap into multiple public spaces both within the same governorate and across governorates, and diversifying their activities. Initiatives survived because they were able to navigate the deeply polarised climate (especially among the youth) while maintaining a non partisan position and agreeing by consensus on the absolute minimum requirements for engaging different stakeholders.

The success of both Harassmap and Imprint as effective, relevant, and responsive initiatives on the ground lies with the strength of their volunteer base, comprised of both men and women. If they lose their male members, their street outreach will be severely affected. The challenge of sustaining men's involvement has been greater for Imprint than Harassmap because of the former's emphasis on patrol and rescue operations on the streets of Egypt sometimes with the police (in subways) but often in lieu of them (in protest and crowded spaces). However, whereas other initiatives have faltered, Imprint has been able to transform itself from a vigilante group to an initiative that is moving towards institutionalisation and development as an organisation.

The main challenge for both initiatives to maintaining a volunteer base will be to ensuring that institutionalisation via the formation of registered nongovernmental organisations does not lead to a hierarchical, bureaucratic structure that relies on funded activities for its survival. For the volunteer base to survive, it will have to maintain dynamism, and ownership and ensure access to the streets and multiple spaces. Effective impact studies (even if through innovative conveyance of stories of change) will be particularly important to keep the morale

of the volunteers high. Without feeling impact on the ground, volunteers' incentives to sustain their activism will falter.

Important lessons can be drawn from this case study for engaging men in gender justice issues beyond the context of Egypt. First, the power of organic, locally owned and driven forms of activism to transform gender and development practice. These initiatives studied here together with similar ones offer important lessons in innovations in public outreach, in appealing to, mobilising and sustaining men's involvement in gender justice issues on a voluntary basis. They have shown a powerful alternative to instrumental approaches to engaging men. Second, the transformations characterising men's trajectories over the course of their engagement with the issues of sexual harassment as volunteers and members of these initiatives suggest there isn't a linear process of change. Sometimes men's involvement in work on sexual harassment will lead to positive spill over effects in their engagement with gender issues more broadly, sometimes it will not. Engaging with men (and women) in their subjectivities will allow for an awareness of these inherent contradictions. Third, the importance of recognising that regime type (authoritarian or democratic) is not always a predictor of gender policy (progressive or restrictive) and neither is national gender policy necessarily consistent or coherent. This is critically important for recognising where opportunities lie for work on engaging men on gender issues in contexts where spaces seem circumscribed. Supporting work on engaging men in gender justice issues should not only be restricted to seemingly open societies, not only because there are opportunities for activism there as well, but because they too offer important lessons in innovative ways of eliciting positive social change.

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