

Local Democracy Assessment in Yemen

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The Local Assessment Democracy project in Yemen, part of International IDEA's project on the State of Local Democracy in the Arab World, was implemented by the Human Rights Information and Training Centre (HRITC). The assessment was conducted in four selected municipalities in four different governorates of the country.

According to the results of the National Report on the State of Local Democracy in Yemen, based on the four local reports, it is possible to highlight some of the main conclusions and recommendations as follows:

1. The Governors, including that of the capital city Sana'a, are elected by indirect elections (last elections held in May 2008), through an electoral college formed by the members of the governorate council and the chairperson and members of the district councils within each governorate. This was the reason behind the opposition parties' decision to boycott those elections, arguing that governors shall be elected directly by a universal suffrage of all eligible voters in each case.
2. The chairperson of the district council is appointed by the central government, to chair a council that is directly elected by the electorate. This leads many to demand an urgent amendment of the Local Authority Law in order to allow for the direct election of this important post at the local level of governance by universal suffrage.
3. It is noted that the number of female candidates was far too low in the last two local elections, compared with that of male candidates and the number of registered women in the voters lists. This needs to be dealt with by introducing legal measures that ensure proper representation of women in the local councils, such as a quota system.
4. There is a clear and rampant scarcity of data and information within the relevant governmental offices at all levels. This requires that the local authorities build and maintain databases that incorporate essential and comprehensive information and data about the districts. Such a database should be accessible and user-friendly so that all citizens and interested parties can consult for all relevant purposes.
5. The search for and adoption of measures and practices that lead to a genuine societal and participatory governance is very much needed and demanded. This includes the establishment of real partnerships between the local authorities and the civil society organizations, the social funds for development and the society in general, with the aim to increase participation in political life and reduce the high levels of poverty and unemployment. Practical measures should not be limited to generic strategies and plans, but shall include concrete solutions, such as training and capacity building

programmes, grants and loans for small size projects and enterprises that may enhance families' income, etc. In addition, civil society organizations are called to play their role in civic education and in disseminating and explaining democratic values and principles, through simplified and long term effective programmes.

6. It has been noted that electoral related disputes among the political actors focus mainly on the electoral system, electoral management and electoral registers. In fact, the differences on these matters led to a political deadlock in the country that resulted in the postponement of the April 2009 legislative elections for two years. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that these issues are dealt with at all levels, so as to arrive at consensual solutions that ensure the conduct of credible elections, based on a level playing field for all parties.

Finally, it is worth highlighting that the draft national report was presented and discussed in a national conference, held in Sana'a on 26 February 2009. The conference was attended by a good number of legislators, including the Speaker of the Shoura Council, as well as representatives of the central and local government, political parties, electoral management body, civil society, academics, media and others. The conference had a wide coverage in national media, including the Yemen TV and the press, both governmental and partisan.