

Report on Election Systems' Citizen Forums

Introduction:

Made up of several Yemen civil community organizations, Yemen Election Monitoring Network (YEMN) seeks to see free and fair elections through contributing to updating the electoral process. Developing the electoral process can be achieved through increasing election-related awareness, monitoring of the various electoral stages, enforcement of election laws and regulations and the proposal to update them in partnership with those relevant agencies at the local level and internationally.

YEMN is comprised of the following CSOs:

1. National Organization for Developing Society (NODS) – Taiz
2. Aman Society for Blind Women Care (ASBWC) – Capital City
3. Future Society for Development and Social Peace (FSDSP) – Marib
4. Modern Youth Association (MYA) – Shabwa
5. Peace and Development Association (PDA) – Al-Jawf
6. Brotherhood Association for Development and Social Peace (BADSP)

Acknowledgements:

To all those expending sincere efforts with the purpose of reforming the political system of Yemen, including and not limited to the following:

(The Government, opposition, CSOs, donors and international organizations)

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Overview:

All judicious people already know the risky political turmoil experienced by Yemen as a result of flaws in the current election system, which led to absence of transparency, narrowing of political participation, increased complaints against the electoral process and louder voices claiming electoral reforms with the aim of conducting free and fair elections. People are of the hope that elections may achieve even the minimum levels of integrity and transparency.

What is different this time is the agreement reached between ruling and opposition parties (JMP), thereby postponing the upcoming parliamentary elections for two years, during which time both sides will conduct serious political dialogue on making

constitutional and legal amendments, intended to reform the election system and address dire situations in the country.

As we have strong faith in the significance of civil community role and its involvement in politics, YEMN, coordination with NDI, conducted an awareness campaign on election systems through forums.

Targeting the various social groups, the forums intended to discuss people's concerns and increase their electoral awareness, as well as provide a real opportunity for exploring potentials and capacities of YEMN members for community outreach and introducing the network to people.

The forums also aimed to create active political dynamics within parties that signed the Election Postponement Agreement, encourage them to dialogue and come up with a positive agreement that may contribute to overcoming political turmoil in the country.

Description of activities:

From May 14 – July 9, 2009, YEMN organized 35 forums with the participation of over 1,200 people. Each forum lasted from 2 to 3 hours.

Taking place in the governorates of Sana'a, Shabwa, Aden, Hadramawat, Taiz, Ibb, Hodeida, Marib and Al Jawf the forums targeted the following:

- Political parties and organizations
- Parliamentarians
- Local authority members
- CSOs
- Academics
- Women
- People of special needs
- Youth and students
- Media personnel
- Social personalities
- Zone Chiefs (Aqils)

At the beginning of each forum, participants were briefed on YEMN and election systems followed in various countries, and the discussions then focused on the following:

- Making distinction between most eligible and least eligible election systems and choosing the best of them fitting situations in Yemen.
- Is the agreed-upon election system of Yemen's politics included in the Constitutions or in other laws?
- The suitable time period for conducting real election reforms.
- Political parties' responsibilities toward electoral reforms.
- Woman Quota in election systems.
- Composition of election management body.
- Citizens' need for electoral awareness.
- What are the electoral reforms that citizens want to take place.

Moderating these forums, YEMN depended on presentation of debate themes, listening to participants' comments and contributions, recording the most important remarks and adopting recommendations and proposals. The Network also cared about providing participants with materials on election systems. Below is a summary of the most important outputs reached by the forums:

First: Distinction among election systems

All the outputs agreed that proportional list representation is the most suitable for Yemen, however, some of the outputs stressed the necessity of gradually moving toward this system by adopting the mixed system first. Below is some justifications why the proportional list representation is selected:

- Agreement between ruling and opposition parties that First Past-the-Post System is not eligible.
- The proportional representation list may help maintain political balance for parties on the ground and activate their roles.
- It will limit waste and valueless of votes.
- It will promotes representation of smaller parties and women in the various elected bodies.
- It will help competent people to be Parliament members and limit personal and party allegiance.
- It will reduce violence and dishonest competition among the involved political parties, and encourage good democratic practices.

Even their agreement with the proportional list representation, the parties involved showed different opinions on the open and closed proportional list representation, and the latter was supported the most due to the following justifications:

The closed proportional list representation will:

- Put a stop to regional seditions and strengthen national unity in a way contributing to political balance on the ground.
- Be easy for polling and vote counting.
- Competition between parties will be in favor of the voters and will help strengthen their relation with voters.
- Limit the phenomenon of vote buying.
- Ensure good representation for women.
- Strengthen successful parties and give smaller parties a chance to obtain their rights.
- Limit waste of public funds.
- Ensure wider participation for citizens including expatriates.

Second: Inclusion of election system in the Constitution or in the law

Most of the remarks in this regard agreed on the necessity of including the election system in the Constitution in order to ensure referendum and vote of people on it. Taking into consideration that the Election Law is of key significance to the life of Yemeni citizens, it should not be subjected to political deals or repeated amendments governed by a will to restrict rights and freedoms.

Third: Suitable time period for conducting electoral reforms:

Recommendations on the suitable time period to conduct electoral reforms have varied from 6 months to two or three years, stipulating availability of credible political will to make such reforms a success. All parties know that it isn't good to delay the political reform process as the main objective of such actions is to get rid of the current political turmoil and seriously move to the phase of equal citizenship, rule of law, and expansion of political participation for people in a way contributing to comprehensive and sustainable development.

Fourth: Political parties' responsibility toward electoral reforms

Participants emphasized the necessity of creating real awareness among parties regarding the significance of electoral reforms to overcome current problems faced by Yemen. From their side, members of political parties should play a key role in

achieving terms of Election Postponement Agreement on due time. These were the most important outputs of the forums as regards parties' responsibility.

Fifth: Woman Quota in the election system

As the issue is still standing and women are needed to fight for this right, along with the necessity of offering assistive legislations, opinions varied between claiming implementation of President's Platform and allocating 15% of seats for women, and the significance of proportional list representation to do justice to women. Those concerned admit that it is difficult to persuade society about women candidacy. Other opinions suggested that women needed not specification of a particular share as they are able to compete and practice their right. Women have the faith the one, who decides to give them specific share in elected bodies, may decide to withdraw this share.

Sixth: Composition of the election management body

As the election management body has been and still is a controversial point and a ground for exchange of accusations, participants in forums showed various viewpoints. Some of them suggested that the election management body should be composed according to a consensus by those effective political parties while others said that composition of this body should not be limited to particular parties. The second group claimed that the election management body should be comprised of the various political parties and organizations on the ground and those would-be members of the body should resign from their parties. They also suggested that the election management body may be comprised of independent persons or judges, which means that new legislations need to be enacted to identify the mechanism of composing this body, holding it to account and dismissing it.

Seventh: Citizens' need for electoral awareness

Participants emphasized the necessity of increasing citizens' awareness through symposiums, posters, brochures and via the media. They also recommended inclusion of topics on free and fair elections within school curricula with the aim of creating early awareness about the significance of elections and designing specific awareness programs for people of special needs.

Eighth: What are the electoral reforms that citizens want?

- Conduct constitutional reforms regarding the election system and amend the Election Law in a way expanding people's participation.

- Include legal texts on neutrality and public institutions and jobs, and public funds and activate relevant laws.
- Conduct a voter registration process in light of comprised ID card or passport to ensure validity of the process.
- Approve electronic system of vote counting.
- Open new voter register.
- Approve original domicile of the voter.
- Conduct presidential elections at a time, not together with any other elections.
- Activate punishment system on any violations, frauds or flaws taking place during the electoral process.
- Give women further representation in SCER.

Recommendations:

- 1) Urge political parties to continue dialogue on proposed electoral amendments and reforms by drafting a timeline for dialogue topics and implementing it within a short time period.
- 2) Increase awareness programs on election systems to cover all parties and groups of special needs.
- 3) Compose SCER in a way ensuring its neutrality and effective application of electoral systems and laws.
- 4) Approve Quota as part of Yemen's Election Law.
- 5) Give women further representation in SCER.
- 6) Insert and activate legal texts on neutrality of public institutions and servants, official media and public funds.
- 7) SCER, political parties and those concerned should adopt what is contained in the report.

The following table shows how forums were implemented:

Implementing CSO	Date of Event	Venue	Participants			No. of FGs
			Males	Females	Total	
ASBWC	June 24	Capital city	36	9	45	1
MYA	June 15	Shabwa	18	10	28	1
MYA	June 24 – 25	Aden	22	48	70	2
MYA	July 6	Al-Mukala	9	11	20	1
NODS	May 21 - 28	Taiz	54	33	87	2

NODS	June 10 - 11	Ibb	65	30	95	2
NODS	June 17 - 18	Aden	33	26	59	2
NODS	July 8 - 9	Al-Hoddaida	70	31	101	2
FADSP	June 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10 – 11 – 15 – 20 – 22 & July 9	Marib	281	56	337	10
PDA	May 14 – 24, June 9 – 12 – 13 – 20 & July 9	Al-Jawf	208	45	253	7
BADSP	May 25, June 8 – 9 - 10	Shabwa	77	22	99	4
BADSP	July 5	Al-Mukala	9	10	19	1
Total			882	331	1213	35