

## *Memo*

To: The National Democratic Institute  
From: The Glover Park Group  
Date: March 7, 2006  
Re: Final Report on Yemen Research Findings

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## A. Research Objectives and Methodology

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Four primary research objectives guided our activities in Yemen. These included the need to:

1. Identify the dominant influences (e.g., familial, societal, and religious) on perceptions of women in political activities;
2. Identify barriers to political participation;
3. Explore perceptions of females as political leaders, especially at the local level; and
4. Investigate how participants and women in particular, perceive the political system, particularly the role of local councils.

Eleven focus groups were conducted between September 12 - 21, 2005, in Sana'a, Mukalla, Aden, and Ibb. Participants were diverse in age, gender, level of education, and political ideology.

Recruiting criteria: A copy of the translated questionnaire used in the recruitment of participants is attached in Appendix A. The vendor, Smart Consulting, hired local Yemenis to recruit participants according to the criteria listed below – as previously agreed upon in discussions between Glover Park Group (GPG) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in Yemen and Washington. Recruitment was started two to three days prior to the scheduled focus group. In some cases, logistical problems required recruitment to continue on the day of the scheduled focus group. Recruitment was conducted face-to-face by Smart Consulting and NDI in Mukalla.

General specifications for the focus groups:

- Sana'a
  - Younger literate women
  - Younger literate men
- Mukalla
  - Older literate women – Islamic party neighborhoods
  - Older literate men – Islamic party neighborhoods
  - Older literate women – government (GPC) party neighborhoods
  - Older literate men – government (GPC) party neighborhoods

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- Aden
  - Older literate women
  - Older literate men
  
- Ibb (rural areas outside the city)
  - Younger illiterate men
  - Older illiterate men
  - Younger illiterate women
  - Older illiterate women

The following variables were also included in all questionnaires to screen for appropriate participants:

- Gender
- Literacy
- Age
- Employment status
- Occupation and employer
- Political party affiliation
- Political extremist
- Vote likelihood

A grid of focus groups is included in Appendix B. It includes the date of each focus group, description of the participants, and the names of the recruiters and moderators for each focus group.

Recruiters and moderators: Smart Consulting contacted Yemeni recruiters prior to the start of the focus group project and discussed the criteria and appropriate methods for the recruitment of each focus group. GPG, NDI, and Smart Consulting also met with recruiters prior to focus groups in Aden and Ibb. Smart Consulting brought Amr Othman, an experienced moderator, to Yemen to conduct the male focus groups. Smart Consulting hired a female Yemeni moderator from a Sana'a university for the Sana'a focus group. Amr worked with the female moderator prior to the focus group. A new female moderator was hired to conduct the groups in Mukalla. Although this moderator's performance was satisfactory, it was decided by GPG, NDI, and Smart Consulting to have Amr moderate all remaining focus groups – both male and female.

Transcripts: GPG took notes during the focus groups, through the assistance of on-site translation. Audio recordings were taken for all female focus groups, and audio/video recordings were made for the male focus groups. A couple of the male groups have partial video recordings but complete audio recordings. These recordings were later translated by

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Smart Consulting. In the case of one focus group, GPG requested the independent analysis of a transcript for clarification of the use of “we” by several participants.

Review and analysis of transcripts: Amy Phee, David Cantor, Ian Marquardt, and Jen Leahy of GPG reviewed and analyzed the translated transcripts and on-site notes for all focus groups.

## **B. Summary of Key Findings**

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Tradition and religion are linked in the lives of the Yemenis with whom we spoke. However, tradition is more of an obstacle than religion for female candidates. In fact, most participants agree that the teachings of the Quran support an active role for women in society. Men and women cite traditional barriers for women including: the inability for women to talk with men in an informal manner, the need for females to have a male escort, the general lack of educational opportunities, and the need to wear a veil while in public.

Local councils are not viewed as effective, and participants – especially women – turn instead to prayer, friends, family, or a local sheikh for assistance.

Women’s views on female participation in local governance fall into four categories:

1. Those who fully support women being elected;
2. Those who give limited support to women being elected;
3. Those who support an expanded role for women, but not in politics; and
4. Those who support a “traditional” role for women.

Female candidates face similar expectations as male candidates, including the need to be well-educated, honest, decent, and knowledgeable of local concerns. However, both men and women agree that female candidates have unique and important traits. Women are seen as being better than men at addressing so-called “women’s issues,” which include education, health, children, and elderly.

Male participants are generally supportive of female candidates, but most would not vote for a woman. Men view current female leaders, especially Amat Aleem Alsoswa, with the same high regard that women hold for the current female leaders.

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## C. Specific Findings by City

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### SANA'A

#### **Participants**

Two groups were conducted in Sana'a. One group included nine men between the ages of 18 and 30, and the second group included nine women, also between the ages of 18 and 30. Both groups included participants who were literate, and the supposition was that these groups would help give an idea of the attitudes for the younger, more urban, and educated voters in the country.

Five of the male participants were currently employed, while one said he was unemployed. Two male participants were students. All but one of the female participants were employed in jobs including teaching, journalism, and secretarial work. One female participant was a student.

The daily routines of the male and female participants were similar in that most worked long hours, tried to visit friends and family often, and watch TV at night. Noticeably absent from their daily lives was any reference to prayer. In fact, only one female participant in both groups mentioned that she read the Quran on a daily basis. As compared with participants in other towns, this lack of emphasis on religion in daily life is unique to the participants in Sana'a.

Both groups of participants expressed an interest in current events, as evidenced by their listing of national and international television news programs among their favorites, and a wide variety of newspapers they said they read daily.

#### **Moods and Issues**

When asked how they felt about life in general in Sana'a, the female participants were mostly positive. They cited job opportunities, a good economy, and increased opportunities for women as examples. These women defined "progress" in their lives in terms of changes to the "tribal mentality" toward women in Yemen. Comparing their lives in Sana'a to those in other parts of the country and also to women in African countries, the female participants acknowledged that they were slowly moving away from the traditional roles of uneducated women being subservient to men. The negative aspects of life cited by the women included high prices, corruption, and poor education.

The male participants were also generally positive in their assessment of life in Sana'a, citing improved cleanliness, drainage projects, and steps to improve education as examples. The men also defined "progress" by the increased number of satellite TV channels and access to

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the internet. Male participants listed corruption, poor education, lack of electricity and water, and low salaries as examples of negative things in Sana'a. As with the female participants, the men generalized these negative aspects to include all of Yemen and not just Sana'a.

## *Poverty*

Both groups identified low wages and high prices as indicative of the problem of poverty for the entire country. The female participants linked improvements in poverty with improvements in educational opportunities. They cited increased technical and science training as ways to combat poverty. However, the women were quick to point out that even with education, corruption also plays a role in limiting access to jobs as unqualified people often bribe their way to jobs. For the men, the answer rests with government increasing the number of jobs along with incomes.

## *Health*

Both groups identified the difference in the quality of care provided at public hospitals and private hospitals. They also talked about high prices of drugs, lack of qualified professionals (doctors, nurses, and pharmacists), and the need to go overseas in order to receive medical care. However, it was interesting to note that participants in both groups spoke in generalizations about problems in health care and did not use specific examples from their lives or from family members. This response is in contrast to how participants in other groups often described their health concerns.

## *Education*

Overcrowded classrooms, under-qualified teachers, and the lack of jobs for graduates were cited by both groups as examples of problems with the current educational system. Again, both the male and female participants tended to speak in generalizations on this issue. In fact, they often compared the higher rates of illiteracy and worse classroom conditions in the rural areas with what they experienced in Sana'a. The male participants were more positive in their assessment of improvements in education than the female participants.

“Education is one of the most important factors. Improving the level of education will solve most of these problems.” – *woman, 18-30, Sana'a*

## *Corruption*

Both groups acknowledged that financial corruption was one of the biggest problems they face. Female participants said the problem is especially unique to Sana'a, while the male participants said the problem was spread throughout the country. When discussing this issue, most female participants talked about it in terms of religion, values, and morals. Many female participants said that increased religious activity and awareness would be the best way to combat corruption. To a much lesser extent, male participants talked about the

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influence of religious values on corruption. Instead, these men said they preferred to see more government regulations and rules to tackle the issue.

## **Role of Government**

When asked who they went to for help, both the male and female participants generally listed friends, family, and private sector organizations. Only one male participant said the local council, and no women mentioned their locally-elected councilors. For the female participants, this response was because societal tradition prevents women from seeking the assistance of local councilors without the presence of a male sponsor. As a result, the female participants' opinions about the role of the local council and the councilors themselves were somewhat limited. The women said they'd like to see the local council address more youth issues and expect their councilors to be well-known, religious, and supported by the government. One female participant mentioned that she would prefer to see "a woman" on the council in order to better address women's issues.

In contrast, the male participants appeared to have more interaction with, and therefore, more knowledge about their local council in Sana'a. Three men said they had used the local council previously in order to get letters of introduction, request a license for a Quran Learning Center, and to ask for a new school to be built. Generally, the men were satisfied with the actions of their local council and said it was acting as the link between the people and the government. Their expectations for the local council are rooted in perceived "local issues" like roads, electricity, police, school construction, and cleanliness of the city. The male participants described their councilors as "ordinary" and spoke positively about their councilors' accomplishments in constructing new schools and their outreach to citizens through neighborhood meetings.

## **Profiles of Women Candidates**

Without the help of a list to prompt them, the female participants listed the following prominent women leaders: Raqia Humidan, Rashida Alhmdani, Amat Aleem Alsoswa, Muna Basharahil, Oras, and Najeebah Al Mi'mari. The male participants also listed Alsoswa and Oras, along with Fatima Moreisi, Asma Al Basha, Fathiya Mahan, Fatima Hureibi, and Sameera Al Khiyari. In some cases, the participants confused the names of female leaders or simply referred to female leaders by their first or last names.

### *Fatima Hureibi*

All of the female participants said they were aware of her and described her as "fair," "strong," and "charismatic." However, none of the women had actually met her before. The male participants identified Hureibi from TV as an English news announcer and also as a candidate. They described her as "decent," "cooperative," "open-minded," and with a good reputation.

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## *Amat Aleem Alsoswa*

Female participants described Alsoswa as “educated,” “charismatic,” and one woman said she was a “symbol of hope” for Yemeni women. Most of the male participants identified Alsoswa as a television announcer, while one man said she was a former ambassador to Holland and current Human Rights minister in Yemen. The men said she had a good reputation based on her good works.

## *Raqia Humidan*

Female participants had the most to say about Humidan, describing her as a “famous lawyer,” “charismatic,” “righteous,” a defender of people’s rights, and influential based on her public speaking ability. One woman mentioned a rumor about Humidan taking money from a court case, while another participant said Humidan is the “only woman whom we rely on in retaining our rights.” None of the male participants mentioned Humidan.

## *Oras*

Female participants described her as having won elections and a “helpful” person who is “neither tough nor lenient.” One male participant identified her as a female leader but did not add comment.

## *Najeebah Al Mi’mari*

Female participants described Al Mi’mari as “helpful” and “one of the most prominent women in Yemeni society.” None of the male participants identified her.

## *Rashida Al-Hmadani*

Female participants identified Alhmiedan as a union member and head of the women’s national committee. They described her as being qualified to solve problems because of her position. None of the male participants identified her.

## *Muna Bashrahil*

Female participants identified her as being “rich” and a human rights activist. None of the male participants identified her.

## *Fatima Moreisi*

One of the male participants identified Moreisi as head of the Aden women’s union and described her as “respectable.” None of the female participants identified her.

## *Asma Al Basha*

One male participant identified Al Basha as the undersecretary of the ministry of planning who is currently living in Turkey with her husband. Other men said she was reputable with high morals. None of the female participants identified her.



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## Role of Women in Local Council

Neither the male nor the female participants voted for women in the 2001 local elections, citing the lack of female candidates at the time. Both groups were open to the idea of more women serving on the local councils, and the female participants said that women serving on councils was important because women could be more effective than men on “women’s issues” and “women’s rights.” They said that women would not be able to deal with military issues as effectively as men.

Some male participants agreed that women councilors would be better than men to talk to other women about their issues, citing education as one example. However, the male participants were generally opposed to the idea of local councils with more women than men in them. Instead, these male participants supported the idea of local councils, volunteering ranges between 1% and 30% female membership. The men cited a longer list of issues that women councilors would not be able to do as well including tribal issues, construction, security, and resolving disputes. For some male participants, practical reasons involving conservative women’s inability to move freely and without a “mahram<sup>1</sup>” also explained why more women could not serve as councilors.

Only one male participant said that Islam does not allow women to hold elected office, while the female participants agreed that the religion guarantees their right of expression. Surprisingly though, half of the female participants insisted that a female candidate be veiled while the majority of male participants said the veil didn’t matter.

Both groups cited education and charisma as important traits for female councilors. Female participants also wanted their female councilors to have leadership qualities and the ability to influence people. Male participants said they valued the woman’s honesty and religious nature as well. Both groups described this ideal female councilor as a doctor, journalist, or lawyer.

“The woman of a strong personality and leadership qualities can serve the nation.” – woman, 18-30, Sana’a

## Message Testing

*The Quran encourages us to work for Allah. Serving Allah by representing his believers in government is noble work. Women should be given the opportunity to serve Allah in this capacity.*

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<sup>1</sup> “Mahram” refers to the group of people who are unlawful for a woman to marry due to marital or blood relationships. A mahram is an allowable escort for a Muslim woman when she travels. (source: USC-MSA Compendium of Muslim Texts; [www.usc.edu/dept/MSA](http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA))

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Female participants were split on the value of this statement for a female candidate. One woman said it is always better for a candidate to recite the Quran than not, while another participant said it was common practice for candidates to use the Quran to try to influence people. Male participants discussed their reactions in general terms with one participant noting that “some people” will not want to be ruled by a woman. Other men talked about the statement’s influence on literate voters – who will be more likely to agree with it than illiterate voters.

On some issues, women are better suited to represent the people of the community. Female participants said that women could handle most issues that men handle. Male participants cited specific examples where women were better including: education, health, and fighting illiteracy.

“In the education field, women are more active and dedicated than men are.” – man, 18-30, Sana’a

*Yemeni women represent 51% of the population, though less than 1% of the people elected to local councils. To reflect women’s role in serving the Yemeni society more women should be elected.*

The female participants were not given this statement. A couple of male participants were skeptical of this statement because it didn’t take into account whether the female candidates were as qualified for the job as their male counterparts. They also cited tradition as a barrier for more people to vote for female candidates.

*Women have always played an important role in Yemeni history. From the time of the Queen of Sheba, women have been trusted to care for our land and its people. Women are capable leaders and can be trusted to faithfully work for the public’s best interest.*

Some female participants agreed with this statement because it reflected a candidate’s charisma. However, most of the women cited the importance of a female candidate’s accomplishments, dedication, and performance instead. Some male participants agreed that the candidate’s qualifications were more important than the statement, but others pointed to the Queen of Sheba’s example as a decent and reputable woman as something good to emulate.

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## Prospects for Electoral Success

By the end of the focus group, male participants began discussing the electoral viability of women in terms of women voting for women. They cited practical reasons for women feeling comfortable talking with other women and men with other men. While they never came out and said directly that they would be opposed to personally voting for a woman, when asked how a woman candidate could best deliver a campaign message to them, most male participants responded in terms of female candidates talking only to women.

“If she is a good woman – loved and appreciated by the people – she can win the elections.” – *man, 18-30, Sana’a*

In contrast, most of the female participants were cautiously optimistic at the prospects for electing women to the local council in 2006. However, the female participants acknowledged many barriers for female candidates including the potential for violence and spreading of rumors. The female participants also have high expectations for female candidates including the need for them to have good values, reputation and necessary experience.

When asked how they get information on candidates, both groups listed a number of sources including: TV, newspapers, pamphlets, brochures, face-to-face meetings, opinions from friends, and the opinion of a local sheikh. According to these statements, female candidates in Sana’a will have to use a number of communication methods to reach voters, including the media, personal visits, and endorsements from neighborhood leaders.

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## MUKALLA

### Participants

Three focus groups were conducted in Mukalla including two focus groups with male participants and one group with female participants. All participants were between the ages of 31 and 45 and said that they were literate. The main difference between the groups was that one group of men and one group of women were recruited from neighborhoods that favored the *Islah* party. The other group of men was recruited from neighborhoods that favored the ruling General People's Congress (GPC) party. For the purposes of this analysis, we'll refer to the three groups as "*Islah* Women," "*Islah* Men," and "GPC Men" with the understanding that the designation only refers to the neighborhoods from where they came and not necessarily their political identification.

Mukalla is in one of the more traditionally conservative areas of Yemen called the "Hadramout" region, and the recruitment was conducted in this way in hopes of identifying differences in opinions between those favoring the opposition *Islah* party and those leaning toward the ruling GPC.

Six *Islah* Women participated in one group and included two housewives and two workers at schools. All but one of the participants had children. For these women, prayer and recitation of the Quran were the most important parts of their daily routines. In addition, *Islah* Women would watch TV, specifically *Al Jazeera* for news and other channels for social programs, and tend to their children.

Eight GPC Men participated in a second group, all but one of whom were employed. This group included a teacher, a maintenance worker, and workers from both the private and government sectors. As with the other groups, the daily routine for *Islah* Men revolved around prayer, work and watching TV at night. Specifically, sports programs and *Al Jazeera* news programs were mentioned often.

Finally, eight *Islah* Men participated in our final group in Mukalla. All participants were employed including two farmers, and five of the participants came from families with 10 or more members. Their daily routine mirrored that of the other groups and consisted of prayer, work, and watching TV at night, specifically *Al Arabia* channel and *Al Jazeera*.

### Moods and Issues

One important note about Mukalla: five months prior to these focus groups, national unification anniversary celebrations were held in Mukalla. The government constructed or repaired numerous roads and a new creek and large waterfront development were constructed in time for the celebration. This level of major government involvement in local projects was unique to Mukalla and was often mentioned by participants of all groups.

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When asked how they felt about daily life in Mukalla, the majority of participants offered a negative view based on increasing prices, low wages, lack of job opportunities, and poor education. However, there were several nuances to these assessments among the four groups.

For example, half of the *Islah* Women were initially positive in their assessment of life in Mukalla. These participants were “satisfied” and “comfortable” noting improved roads, newly constructed theaters and an improved sense of security. One *Islah* Woman described this sense of security in terms of giving her house key to a neighbor when she travels outside of the city.

The other half of the *Islah* Women highlighted problems in education, increased prices and lack of jobs as reasons why they felt negatively toward life in Mukalla. Interestingly, these participants also cited the mixing of men and women in shopping areas and on the streets as an example of decreasing morals in Mukalla. Another example of this was the widespread use of *qat*<sup>2</sup>. However, participants were divided on the issue with half noting that the addictive plant was “*haram*”, or forbidden, according to Islam, while the other half said it didn’t matter as long as the *qat* user could provide food for his family.

Most participants emphasized education costs and increased health care expenses as examples of problems in Mukalla and throughout the country.

A similar assessment was provided by the majority of GPC Men who noted the increased development in their city but then listed problems including high prices and a lack of jobs. Of specific concern for these participants was the high cost of electricity in Mukalla as it prohibited the use of air conditioning – a problem common in Yemen but Mukalla’s oppressively hot climate made it even more important there.

The *Islah* Men were generally the most negative of the three groups in their assessment of life in Mukalla. Several participants said that “life is very tough,” and they emphasized the high costs of basic services, low wages, increasing prices, and a lack of jobs. One participant noted his own example of having graduated six years ago but still only makes 7000 rials a month. When asked to describe positive aspects of life in Mukalla, these participants listed several of the recent projects in their town including new roads and the installation of street lights.

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<sup>2</sup> “*Qat*” are leaves of a shrub which are chewed like tobacco or used to make tea. It has the effect of a euphoric stimulant. (source: definition of “*qat*,” [www.thefreedictionary.com](http://www.thefreedictionary.com))

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## *Poverty*

In all three groups, the majority of participants agreed that poverty was a problem throughout Yemen. Each group was unique in how participants defined the issue, often reflecting aspects of life in Mukalla and differences in the participants' backgrounds.

Within the *Islah* Women's group, there was a fundamental disagreement on the level of poverty in Mukalla. Several participants noted how the economy was improving and compared the current situation with their communist past that included rationing of food. However, other participants argued that not all Mukalla residents could afford to buy the newly-available products, specifically imported apples and oranges. The group split along similar lines as some participants explained that it was the individual's responsibility to take any job available to them while other participants noted the lack of jobs appropriate to people's education and needs. There was agreement within the group that the government should play a role in increasing salaries, decreasing prices, and encouraging diversified careers through vocational education.

"A lot of women complete their studies, knowing that they will go to the kitchen after graduation, and a lot of men leave school before graduation because of the lack of job opportunities." -woman, 31-45, Mukalla, *Islah* neighborhood.

The assessment among GPC Men suggested the government had more responsibility to control prices and prevent corruption, specifically in the oil and gas industry. Several GPC Men also talked about their situation in Mukalla in comparison to that in Sana'a where it was easier to get a job.

Finally, for *Islah* Men, poverty was defined primarily by the price of fish and electricity. One participant noted that increased prices were a national problem, citing the recent protests against increased oil prices. However, the majority of participants talked about the threefold increase in the price of fish in Mukalla as an example of price increases. In addition, several participants emphasized the inability of Mukalla residents to pay for electricity in order to power their air conditioners.

## *Health*

Within each of the three groups, participants gave examples of either a friend or a relative – or sometimes themselves – being treated poorly within the health system. In general, the opinion of health in Mukalla is very low and crosses gender lines and neighborhoods. The only bright spot in the health system is the increased level of vaccinations, mentioned in each of the three groups.

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*Islah* Women talked mainly about the differences in cost and quality of care at private hospitals versus government hospitals. However, the majority of participants agreed that the overall quality of care is decreasing in the country, as witnessed by the need to travel overseas for treatment of major diseases. Several participants said the local councils could have an increased role in supervising doctors, and others highlighted the need for the government to decrease health care costs.

For most participants, the issue of cleanliness applied to both private and government hospitals, as did the relative distance of these facilities to most of the rural population in and around Mukalla.

The emphasis among GPC Men was the spread of disease from African immigrants, and the need for an increased government role in controlling the borders. As with other groups, the GPC Men also talked about the differences between private and government hospitals along with the prohibitive distance of facilities to most Mukalla residents.

*Islah* Men also spoke about health problems in terms of high costs, cleanliness of facilities, outdated medical equipment, and the difference in care received at private hospitals versus government facilities. Among the majority of *Islah* Men, it was the government's responsibility to solve these problems.

## *Education*

The majority of *Islah* Women said that the quality of education was decreasing, citing as one example the fact that most teachers are forced to teach subjects for which they aren't trained. These participants agreed that the government should take the lead to improve curriculums, build more schools, hire more teachers, and increase teachers' salaries.

Participants in the GPC Men group compared the high costs of education today with the past where all costs were taken care of by the government. One participant also talked about the lack of jobs available to recent graduates as having a negative impact on those still studying. Some participants agreed that progress has been made in terms of the increased number of universities, however the majority of GPC Men said that the government needs to take an active role in supervising schools and teachers.

*Islah* Men were the most optimistic of the three groups in terms of the current state of education. Participants noted decreasing rates of illiteracy, increased numbers of schools, and the contemporary curriculum as examples of improvements. According to these participants, the government's role should be limited to supervising schools and teachers and increasing teachers' salaries, while the local councils should help repair schools.

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## *Corruption*

Participants in all three groups agreed that corruption was an important issue and that solving it will not be easy.

“You can’t do anything in this country without bribes.” –*man, 31-45, Mukalla, Islah Neighborhood.*

*Islah* Women described the problem in terms of teachers asking their students’ parents for bribes in order to ensure their children receive more attention in the classroom. This problem is not limited to Mukalla, and participants have little faith that the government or judicial system is able to solve the problem due to corruption within both.

GPC Men were more optimistic about the issue and said that corruption is not as big of a problem in Mukalla due to the religious nature of its residents. Low salaries were the main cause of this problem according to many participants, and they agreed that it was a difficult issue to solve.

*Qat* was the focus of much of the discussion among *Islah* Men, and many participants suggested that banning *qat* – especially in the North where both men and women chew it – could help reduce bribery and embezzlement.

## **Role of Government**

Of the three groups, the *Islah* Women were the most positive in their assessment of local councils. In fact, several participants said they would approach a local council member to help solve their problem. According to the participants, this response is the result of the local council doing a good job in solving the issue of confiscated land from the communist era, as well as closing brothels, building schools, and improving roads. However, some participants noted that they can not access local council members and instead have to go to a sheikh for assistance. These participants said they would like to see the local council focus on education and health issues, and they expect their local council members to be educated, engineers, teachers, middle class, “capable,” “caring,” and “decent.” The majority of *Islah* Women said they would prefer their local councilors to be men.

Participants in the GPC Men group relied on relatives for assistance, but many of them also said they went directly to the national government for help – specifically on issues of drainage and disease. Several participants said the local council has limited authority and must be close to the ruling government party in order to be effective. These participants would like to see their local council focus on education, health, unemployment, infrastructure, and supplying basic services like water and electricity. The GPC Men were split evenly between those who want their local councilors to be wealthy and well-educated



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and those who want their councilors to be “just like us.” The single unifying trait for these participants is party affiliation as all GPC Men agreed that their councilors should be from the ruling GPC party. In fact, one participant even said it would be okay for a woman to be a councilor – as long as she was from the GPC.

*Islah* Men generally viewed the local councils as ineffective and instead relied on Allah, local sheikhs, or businessmen for assistance. None of the participants had approached the local council for help, and one participant said the only help is that which the people give to the local council in terms of taxes paid for their salaries. Nevertheless, the participants said they would like to see the local council focus on settling tribal issues, supplying basic services, fighting corruption, improving health, and constructing roads. Participants agreed that local council members should be middle class, businessmen, educated, and “virtuous.”

## Profiles of Women Candidates

Without the help of a list to prompt them, *Islah* Women listed the following examples of female leaders: Orance (“local councilor in Aden”), Amat Aleem Alsoswa, and Amat Al Salam. GPC Men identified the following: Amat Aleem Alsoswa, Raqia Homeidan (“brilliant” and “dedicated”), Fatima Bint Al-Ahmer (“hard working” and “decent”), and Afrah Mohammed. *Islah* Men identified the following: Amat Aleem Alsoswa and Rajia (“lawyer nominated for Nobel Prize”).

### *Amat Aleem Alsoswa*

*Islah* Women described Alsoswa favorably as a “qualified” human rights minister. A GPC Man said Alsoswa acts “more than 10 men” and others described her dedication and “decency.” Participants in the *Islah* Men group identified her as an ambassador and human rights activist.

### *Fatima Hureibi*

While several *Islah* Women said they heard of Hureibi, none offered specific comments about her.

## Role of Women in Local Council

None of the participants in the three groups said they voted for a female candidate in the 2001 elections. Several *Islah* Women mentioned a female candidate at that time – Afrah Mohammed – however they said they didn’t vote for her because they didn’t know her and she wasn’t in their province. Several GPC Men said they didn’t vote for a female candidate because no party supported her and because their traditions and customs wouldn’t allow it. In fact, one GPC Man said it would be a “shameful act” to vote for a woman. The majority of *Islah* Men simply said they did not vote for women in 2001.

Within each of the three groups, opinions were split when it came to the discussion of whether women should serve on local councils. Among *Islah* Women, participants said yes as

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long as the female candidate was “sociable.” However, other *Islah* Women said no because women are “fragile” and would be subject to harassment from men if they served on the council. Some of these *Islah* Women explained that men are better suited for the job and that tradition is an obstacle for women to serve.

“A woman is a like a jewel and can not be insulted by a man if he asks her to do something and she can’t do it.” –woman, Mukalla, 31-45, *Islah Neighborhood*.

While not providing a ringing endorsement for empowering women, several GPC Men said that a woman’s “beauty and personality” could help them achieve things on a local council. The consensus among *Islah* Men was that women were not suited to be on the local council and were “sentimental and less intelligent” than men. One *Islah* Man did offer that women could participate if they were “active.”

When asked which issues women may be better than men at addressing on the local council, most of the participants in all three groups said education and health. One *Islah* Woman said that women were simply closer to women’s issues, but another participant in the group added the caveat that women shouldn’t deal with men. A GPC Man added elderly issues to the list, but another participant in that group noted that women would be limited in their ability to travel while on the local council. In fact, the consensus among GPC Men was that one woman on the local council was sufficient as long as that woman limited her work to “women’s and children” issues.

Some *Islah* Women supported the idea that Islam gives women the right to participate in elections and on the local council, but they were quick to point out that the religion also gives women many “rational alternatives” to help others. GPC Men were split on whether Islam gives women these rights, while *Islah* Men were unanimous in their belief that Islam prohibits the direct contact of women with men and thereby limits women’s ability to serve on the local council.

The issue of whether a female candidate should wear a veil or not was not a concern to the GPC Men. Surprisingly, several *Islah* Women said they would not vote for an unveiled woman from Hadramout, but that they would consider voting for an unveiled woman from Aden or Sana’a. They described this discrepancy as the Hadramout candidate insulting her background and people.

“The unveiled woman doesn’t respect the traditions of society. So how can she solve the problems of society?” –woman, Mukalla, 31-40, *Islah neighborhood*.

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*Islah* Women provided the only feedback from the groups on what character traits they would like to see from female candidates. These participants described an ideal female candidate as: “educated,” “decent,” “flexible,” “sociable” and “rational.” They also would like the candidates to be either doctors or teachers.

## Message Testing

*The Quran encourages us to work for Allah. Serving Allah by representing his believers in government is noble work. Women should be given the opportunity to serve Allah in this capacity.*

Several *Islah* Women were skeptical about this statement and instead emphasized the candidate’s actions (i.e. prayer five times a day and fasting) in highlighting their obedience to religion. One participant acknowledged that such a statement may influence some of the “simple people” in Hadramout.

As with the *Islah* Women, the majority of GPC Men were skeptical of the statement and instead said that a candidate’s actions were more important. One participant offered the general observation that it’s more important for a female candidate to be from the ruling party and have women supporting her.

Finally, the majority of *Islah* Men were opposed to this statement because they believe Islam prohibits participation of women in elections. However, one participant in this group argued that women could win elections if they were “decent and honest.”

*On some issues, women are better suited to represent the people of the community.*

Participants in all three groups – including the *Islah* Men – agreed that women were better suited than men to handle so-called “women’s issues” like education and health. Within the *Islah* Women’s group the discussion also focused on the need for the candidate to be “decent and honest.” One participant also argued that women were limited by their physical nature (i.e. pregnancy) and may not be better able than men to serve on the local council. Even among *Islah* Men there was reluctant acceptance that women could perform some things better than men. However, several participants quickly pointed out that they still weren’t going to vote for a woman.

*Yemeni women represent 51% of the population, though less than 1% of the people elected to local councils. To reflect women’s role in serving the Yemeni society more women should be elected.*

The only discussion regarding this statement occurred among *Islah* Women and GPC Men. The attitude among the *Islah* Women is best summed up by the comments from one participant that “one decent and dedicated woman” on the local council is enough. These participants added that it’s likely only women will vote for a female candidate. The GPC

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Men argued that the statement may be true, but it didn't impact whether they would vote for a woman or not.

*Women have always played an important role in Yemeni history. From the time of the Queen of Sheba, women have been trusted to care for our land and its people. Women are capable leaders and can be trusted to faithfully work for the public's best interest.*

With the exception of the *Islah* Men, this statement was the one accepted by the majority of the other participants as being convincing and agreeable. Several *Islah* Women said that such a statement would encourage literate and educated voters who were aware of their history, and they liked it because it reflects something that actually happened. GPC Men were less enthusiastic in their support for this statement, noting that the times were much different when Sheba ruled as opposed to the present.

## **Prospects for Electoral Success**

Participants in all three groups said that they generally obtain knowledge of candidates from various sources including media, brochures, posters, and word-of-mouth from friends and relatives. For several *Islah* Women, prior knowledge of the candidate is also important. One GPC Man was bold enough to say that bribes would be the most influential aspect for any candidate in convincing voters.

The *Islah* Women were the most open to the idea of actively supporting a female candidate. One *Islah* Woman noted that the idea of women "standing by" female candidates is important, and other participants said female candidates need to run effective campaigns with voter contact programs, platforms, and media outreach.

The prospects of GPC Men and *Islah* Men voting for female candidates is quite low, and several GPC Men said that women should focus on women's issues. Female candidates talking to the majority of *Islah* Men will be facing an added obstacle as most of these participants would need to first be convinced that women should even hold positions on the local council. Beyond this challenge, the idea of these *Islah* Men voting for a female candidate is remote at best.

"Yes, I will be convinced, but whether I will vote for her or not is another thing." –man, Mukalla, 31-45, GPC Neighborhood.

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## ADEN

### Participants

Two focus groups were conducted in Aden. One group included nine women who were between the ages of 31 and 45 and said they were literate. The majority of these women did not work outside the home and had families that included multiple children. The other group included seven men also between the ages of 31 and 45 who said they were literate. All of the male participants were employed including two who were salesmen and a professional theater performer at the university in Aden. As with the groups conducted in Sana'a, the supposition was that the two groups in Aden would help provide data from urban and educated participants. However, Aden's unique history – with both its British-colonial and socialist past – may have an influence on the perspectives of its residents, setting it apart from Sana'a.

The daily routine of the female participants centered around caring for their children and the home and prayer. For the men, their day included work, prayer and chewing *qat*. Both groups also said they watched TV on a daily basis, citing *Al Jazeera* as the preferred source for news.

### Mood and Issues

When asked how they felt about life in Aden, the female participants focused on negative aspects including unemployment, high prices, and problems in education. One woman described it as a “struggle” to live because of these difficulties. It's interesting to note that these participants placed much of the blame for these problems on incompetent authorities, corruption, and the increasing numbers of illegal immigrants coming into Aden.

“It feels like a wound . . . it's too much of a struggle to live and survive.” -woman, 31-45, Aden

When prompted to talk about the positive things in Aden, some women mentioned the increased level of security and freedom of speech. No other group in Yemen talked about freedom of speech, and it may be because of Aden's recent socialist past that this topic was discussed here. However, the discussion of positive aspects was short-lived and the women talked about additional negatives in their lives, often comparing themselves with those living in Sana'a – the presumption being that Sana'a residents experienced things like corruption and unemployment, but they ultimately benefited from living in the capital.

The male participants were equally pessimistic about life in Aden, citing the lack of jobs and basic services including telecommunications, water and electricity. The only positive things they could say focused on increased levels of tourism and the general statement said by two participants that “people are good” in Aden.

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According to the male participants, corruption was the main source of the problems in Aden. The corruption took multiple forms and included financial corruption and bribery and moral corruption as witnessed by night clubs and *qat* that negatively influenced the city's youth.

## *Poverty*

Female participants talked about the problem of poverty in Aden in terms of high costs and low wages. Interestingly, the participants placed the blame equally on the government and the private sector. Most other groups in Yemen usually talked only about the government's role in wages and prices. Ideally, the female participants said the local council should be a source of new jobs with the ability to supervise the poor residents and address their daily needs. However, the women argued that the local council is unable to do so because of its inability to fight corruption and accomplish anything to-date in terms of increased wages or price controls.

The male participants were quick to point out that simply being "poor" in Aden was not the same as the "poverty" experienced elsewhere in Yemen or in other countries. According to the men, poor people in Aden are still able to afford *qat* and eat basic food, and that true "poverty" was rare in their city. For these men, the solution was straightforward as the government should increase salaries, decrease costs (especially of water and electricity), create more jobs, and fight corruption. As opposed to the female participants, the men agreed that the local council would be better than the national government to accomplish these things because the local council understood the unique nature of poverty in Aden.

"We have poor people who can't afford to eat, yet they buy *qat* and cigarettes." -man, 31-45, Aden.

## *Health*

As with groups in other cities, the male and female participants in Aden cited high costs and the lack of proper equipment as problems in the health system. Both groups often described the situation by comparing the quality of service and the associated costs of visiting a private clinic and going to a government hospital. Many male participants mentioned how health services used to be free prior to unification, as opposed to the official costs for services and medicines and accompanying bribes they now have to pay. For both groups, the scope of the problem is so large that the national government – and not the local council – should attempt to solve it.

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## *Education*

Both the male and female participants talked about similar problems with education including high costs, poorly-trained and insufficient numbers of teachers, and large class sizes (70-80 students per class). Several female participants also said that the lack of jobs for graduates was causing students to lose interest in their studies. Interestingly, the male participants discussed unique problems facing women and education, whereas this issue was not raised in the women's group. Even so, the men talked about this problem in general terms, citing "traditions in rural areas" that prevent women from graduating. Of the two groups, only one male mentioned a positive aspect in education: the increased number of universities in Yemen was allowing more students to study in-country rather than go abroad.

## *Corruption*

Male and female participants in Aden echoed participants in other groups by saying that corruption was the most important problem facing the country. Examples of bribery and embezzlement were discussed in relation to other issues and throughout both focus groups. Many participants cited personal examples of having to pay bribes to accomplish routine tasks and obtain basic services. In both groups, the prevailing sentiment was that corruption was nationwide, common, and something not easily fixed. Some male participants suggested better supervision of government officials along with increased salaries for all workers.

## *Role of Government*

When asked who they turn to for help, both male and female participants said they ask friends, family, and their local councils. A few male participants also mentioned Allah and local elders as sources of help. The level of experience in dealing with local councils was unique to the participants in Aden, as focus groups in other cities generally had not interacted with their local councils to the same degree. For both male and female participants in Aden, their involvement with local councils focused around basic services like water and electricity. Contacting the local council was seen as the first step in eventually getting assistance from another source or the national government.

However, many women talked about approaching local councils in terms of their community (a collective "we") approaching the local council. In contrast, most of the male participants cited examples where they individually approached the council to address their specific problem.

Several female participants said the local council should also be responsible for other issues including salaries, prices, education, and health. They said that local councilors should be religious, benevolent, educated and "decent" – a trait echoed by participants in other groups as well. A few female participants specifically cited teachers and politicians as sources of potential local councilors. Several women said they would like to see fellow women on the council.

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Most male participants agreed that their local councilors should be educated and understand the problems of the residents. But several participants were skeptical that, once elected, the local councilor would continue to represent their interests well. For most men, the ideal councilor would be a teacher, private sector employee, or have links to the ruling GPC party. Many of the male participants said that it didn't matter if the local council had men and women, but they quickly pointed out that they preferred male councilors because of the traditions that limit women's ability to travel and talk to men.

## **Profiles of Women Candidates**

Without the help of a list to prompt them, the female participants listed the following women leaders: Amat Aleem Alsoswa, Radhiya Homeidan ("defends rights"), and Ranziah Al Iriani ("educated"). The male participants listed: Huda Hemedan, Khawlah Sharaf, Fatima Moreisi, Amat Aleem Alsoswa, Huda Al Attas, Thuaya Mantoush, and Najeeba Mamory.

### *Amat Aleem Alsoswa*

Female participants described Alsoswa as a human rights activist, ambassador, journalist, someone who defends their rights and cares about them. Several women also used the phrase "excellent" when talking about Alsoswa and noted her education. Male participants described her as a "leader" and "the best to represent Yemen."

### *Fatima Moreisi*

Female participants used the words "decent," "humble," "active," and "dedicated" to describe Moreisi. Male participants said Moreisi was a member of the local council and the GPC party, a leader, very important on women's issues, and someone with a lot of participation in the community.

### *Jawhra Hamoud*

Female participants described Hamoud as a headmistress and local council member. One woman noted Hamoud's "good connections with top officials," and another said Hamoud was "capable" of getting things done for them. Several male participants noted Hamoud was a teacher, principal, and mother. They used "strong" and "serious" to describe Hamoud.

## **Role of Women in Local Council**

Three women said they voted for female candidates in the 2001 elections on the basis of the candidates being well-known, educated, "representing us," and "working for our rights." No male participant said they voted for a female candidate.

When asked whether women can be effective on local councils, most female participants said that women local councilors can be more effective than their male counterparts because women are "affectionate," have passions, and "feel our problems." Several male participants agreed that women could be effective on local councils, especially dealing with families, social issues, education, and children.



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“Women can feel the people's concerns more than men.” - *woman, 31-45, Aden.*

Female participants agreed that women were not as good as men on issues of security, crime, land, and youth. Some male participants noted that women could not become leaders of the local council they served on. Both groups agreed that Islam encourages women to play an active role on the local council, and several members from both groups cited Queen Sheba and Prophet Mohammed's wives as examples of capable women in Islamic history. The majority of participants in both groups also agreed that female candidates did not need to be veiled.

Expectations for female candidates are high among female participants, as they said they want women candidates to be “educated,” “qualified,” “humble,” “decent,” and “active.” They also want female leaders to focus on issues like health and education. These participants cited journalists and lawyers as sources of possible female candidates. Male participants emphasized aspects like the woman being “well-known,” “strong,” and capable of managing people.

Interestingly, while many female participants spoke excitedly about the need for more women on local councils, none of them said they would be capable of running for a position citing age, lack of education, and fear of not being able to do a good job as their reasons.

## Message Testing

*The Quran encourages us to work for Allah. Serving Allah by representing his believers in government is noble work. Women should be given the opportunity to serve Allah in this capacity.*

Reaction among most female participants was limited, and one woman said she identified such a statement with a member of the *Islah* party. For other female participants, the statement shows that the candidate performs her duty according to the Quran and is “honest.” Male participants were generally skeptical about this statement. One man said that all politicians quote the Quran, and another was reminded of how the communists used the Quran to try to influence people. For most male participants, a candidate's actions outweigh their words.

*On some issues, women are better suited to represent the people of the community.*

Only one female participant responded to this statement, agreeing that women were better suited to deal with issues of managing daily life. Several male participants agreed that women are better suited to handle “women's issues” including health and education. When

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asked at the end of this section, the majority of men said they preferred this statement to the other three.

*Yemeni women represent 51% of the population, though less than 1% of the people elected to local councils. To reflect women's role in serving the Yemeni society more women should be elected.*

Among female participants, reaction was split on this statement. Some women noted that this level of equality was their goal, however others said that women have “more noble duties” to perform than serve on local councils. Many agreed that the current level of education for women would be an obstacle in achieving increased representation on local councils. Most of the male participants agreed to the general idea of more women on local councils but did not offer further explanation.

*Women have always played an important role in Yemeni history. From the time of the Queen of Sheba, women have been trusted to care for our land and its people. Women are capable leaders and can be trusted to faithfully work for the public's best interest.*

The majority of female participants preferred this statement of the four, saying that it provided a good example of a successful female leader. Most of the male participants responded favorably to this statement on the basis of positive reactions to the Queen of Sheba reference. However, one participant noted that it is not effective in comparing the past with the present situation.

## **Prospects for Electoral Success**

By the end of the discussion, female participants talked about the benefits of women on the local council in both practical and symbolic terms. Several women said that electing more women would help bring progress to the country, improve equality between men and women, and increase the overall level of cooperation in society. In order to achieve these lofty goals however, the female participants said they want women candidates to focus on education and health issues, with specific platforms and plans.

Male participants also expressed positive expectations with the election of more women, restating their belief that women local councilors will be better able to address women's issues. None of the participants elaborated as to what these “women's issues” were, and instead they emphasized the need for women candidates to be “humble,” fearing Allah, willing to both listen and talk to people, and armed with a clear platform.

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“Women are half of the society and have rights and they have to participate.” - *man, 31-45, Aden.*

Both groups said that they received their information about candidates primarily from pamphlets, radio and TV, and newspaper coverage. Some female participants also said they expect to meet candidates face-to-face.

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## IBB

### Participants

Four focus groups were conducted in Ibb, with participants recruited on the basis of their age, gender, illiteracy and living in near-rural areas around the city of Ibb. The importance of these four groups in Ibb, in relation to the ones conducted elsewhere in the country, is the fact that these groups included illiterate participants who don't live in the city. A significant percentage of voters are illiterate and non-urban, and it was hoped that these groups in Ibb would help identify opinions possibly shared by this electorate.

One focus group included eight women between the ages of 18 and 30. Three of these participants were housewives, and two said they were single. It's important to note that one participant said she completed secondary class but also said she was illiterate. For the sake of clarity in this report, this group will be referred to as "Young Women."

A second focus group included eight men between the ages of 18 and 30. All of these participants were employed including three who worked in gas stations/mechanic shops and three who were either *qat* farmers or *qat* sellers. This group will be known as "Young Men."

The third group included eight women between the ages of 31 and 45. All of these participants were mothers and had between three and 10 children each. Again, for the purpose of this report, this group will be referred to as "Older Women."

Finally, nine men between the ages of 31 and 45 participated in the fourth focus group in Ibb. All of these participants are employed in various jobs including farming and manual labor. An interesting trait among these participants was the fact that many came from large families. Seven of the participants were currently living with 10 or more family members and one participant had as many as 19 in his family. This group is referred to as "Older Men" in this report.

As with groups in other cities, the daily routines of these participants is fairly straightforward and includes prayer, work, time with friends and family, and watching TV at night. Several Young Women noted that transportation problems limit their ability to leave the villages and travel into town on a regular basis. One Older Woman said that most of her day was occupied with tending to her cows, leaving little time for anything else. With the exception of the two Older Women and one Older Man who said they didn't own a TV, most participants said they watch *Al Jazeera* for news and a variety of other satellite channels for programs including sports, serials, and health programs.

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“We perform the prayers and feed the kids. We go the valley to feed the cows. We visit the neighbors, and then we perform the prayers. After that, we perform the prayers and have lunch and then we go back to the valley.” – *woman, 31-45, Ibb.*

## **Moods and Issues**

When asked how they felt about life in Ibb, the majority of participants in all four groups noted problems with health care, lack of educational opportunities, increasing prices (especially for basic services like water, electricity, and phone), low wages, and unemployment. Younger Men were the most negative of the four groups in their assessment of life in Ibb, and many discussed corruption and bribery as examples of negative things in their daily lives. As one Younger Man said, “life is tough.”

On the positive side, several Young Women noted increased tourism in the region and new government projects including a shopping center and repaired streets. Many Older Women were also positive in their assessment of improvements in education, health services, and access to water, electricity and phones.

“We have electricity, water, and telephones. Every thing is improving.” – *woman, 31-45, Ibb.*

A common problem mentioned by both Younger Women and Younger Men dealt with marriage. Specifically, many Younger Women talked about “tourist marriages” where a foreigner (in this case, a Saudi man) marries a local woman but only sees her once or twice while in Yemen. Other Younger Women spoke about “temporary marriages” among students that are not officially recognized by their families and lead to problems with relatives. Several Younger Men noted the increased rates of divorce and accompanying social problems as a result of these types of marriages taking place.

While the issue of marriage was not raised in either the Older Women or Older Men groups, participants in both of these groups bemoaned the lack of gardens and parks available for families. In fact, it was such a problem that several participants in both groups mentioned it as the first thing wrong with life in Ibb.

The issue of *qat* was discussed among Younger Women with half of the participants saying *qat* addiction was a negative aspect of society and the other participants agreeing that chewing *qat* was at least better than drug addiction.

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## *Poverty*

The majority of participants in the Young Women, Young Men, and Older Men groups agreed that poverty was a major issue in Ibb, as evidenced by bribery and the high rate of unemployment. Older Women participants were split in their assessment as half of them echoed the statements from other groups and the other half said that poverty was a thing of the past and that the problem is with people who don't want to work.

However, despite general agreement on the problem of poverty, most participants in all four groups said that the economy in Ibb was improving. For several Young Women and Young Men, economic improvement meant more government projects. For many of the Older Men, the availability of new goods illustrated improvements. Again, Older Women participants were split on this issue as half of them said that new schools and hospitals showed improvements while the other half argued that increased bribery and rising costs of electricity pointed to a lack of improvement.

Among the four groups, there was the general consensus that the government – more so than the local council – should fight poverty by decreasing costs, increasing the number of jobs, improving the infrastructure, and fighting corruption. Interestingly, a couple of Older Men suggested increased family planning programs in order to reduce the size of families.

## *Health*

The discussion of health care in the four groups focused primarily on issues of high costs, the lack of access to care in villages, the lack of qualified doctors, and the difference in quality – and costs – between private hospitals and government hospitals. Several Older Women also complained about hospitals being unclean, and one Older Man emphasized the issue of corruption within hospitals. The majority of participants agreed that the situation was getting worse in Ibb, while some Young Men countered that progress was being made in vaccinations and access for poor families.

According to participants in all four groups, the answer to the health problems rests with the government decreasing costs and building more hospitals and clinics in rural areas. A Young Woman and an Older Man suggested that the government recruit and train more doctors, and several Young Men and Older Men said they want the government to better supervise hospitals, doctors, and pharmacists. Some of the Older Women offered other approaches including nationwide family planning programs and cleanliness campaigns.

While some Young Men suggested that the government and local councils could work together, the majority of participants in all four groups said that it was the government's responsibility to tackle this issue. For some, government responsibility was the result of the sheer enormity of the health care problems, while for other participants, it was due to their lack of trust in the abilities of their local councils.

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## *Education*

For most of the participants, problems in education involved high costs (including fees, uniforms, text books), the lack of qualified teachers, overcrowded classrooms, and unclean schools. Many Young Women also talked about parents emphasizing their sons' education over the daughters. Several Young Men and Older Women mentioned how the lack of jobs after graduation encourages students to leave schools early to try to find employment. Improvements in education were limited to private schools, which Young Women agreed were too costly for most people.

The majority of participants in all four groups agreed that the government should decrease class sizes, increase the number of jobs for graduates, and decrease fees for students. Older Men and Older Women also said that the government should better supervise teachers and their schools.

Among Young Women and Young Men, the local council was best able to supervise schools and address problems with education. The majority of Older Women said that it was the responsibility of both the local council and the government, while most Older Men said that only the government had the necessary resources to solve this problem. One Older Man added that the local council lacks the authority, and people simply don't obey the council's orders.

## *Corruption*

Bribery was the most often cited example of corruption among the participants. As one Older Woman said, "nothing can be accomplished without paying bribe." Young Women gave examples of having to pay bribes to receive care in hospitals or to pass a class in school. However, while the participants agreed it was a major problem, there was an accompanying degree of acceptance toward the issue. As an Older Man said, bribery is everywhere in Yemen, but people in Ibb are "simpler" and are more willing to accept it as necessary to get something done.

Several participants in all four groups said that solving corruption should start with the government and include all levels of society. Fighting corruption would be done by raising salaries and increasing the amount of jobs. Several Young Women also suggested a consciousness-raising campaign about the problem, and Older Men discussed the need to provide a better system to register and deal with citizens' complaints.

## **Role of Government**

When asked who they turn to for help with a problem, the majority of participants said Allah, family, or friends. The majority of Older Women said they rely only on themselves, and some Older Men and Younger Men mentioned sheikhs as a source of assistance. A few of the Younger Women gave personal examples of asking their local councilor for help.

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In general, there is a fundamental lack of awareness about the local council and its role among all of the participants. Among some Young Women, there is also a perception that the councilors only help themselves and don't accomplish anything for the rest of the city or village. This lack of awareness about the council could explain why participants were split in their opinions of whether the local councils should have more authority. For some Young Women and Young Men, there are certain issues that can only be solved by the national government. However, some Older Men and Young Men said they would like to see the authority expanded.

"We voted for the local council, and we're waiting for them to solve our problems." - *woman, Ibb, 18-30.*

There was a general consensus among the participants that the local council should focus on providing basic services (electricity, water, telephone), improving roads, and building hospitals and schools. Some Young Women also want the local council to build parks and provide centers to fight illiteracy. For Older Women, the local council's role is primarily to assist the poor.

Expectations for local councilors also were similar among the groups. Most participants want their councilors to be educated, moral, religious, humble, decent, and aware of the people's problems. For Young Women, doctors, teachers, businessmen, religious leaders, and sheikhs would be suitable to become local councilors. Some Young Men said they prefer a local councilor from an upper class and well-connected family.

"Some local council members are not educated, so they lack the professionalism to deal with issues." - *man, 31-45, Ibb.*

## Profiles of Women Candidates

Without the help of a list to prompt them, the Young Women listed the following women leaders: Samira Albahili, Hayat Al Kani, Amat Aleem Alsoswa, Huda Al-fadwa, Huda Ablan, Jamila Ali Raja ("Woman Association Member" and "cultural attaché in Yemen Embassy in Egypt"), and Ibtisam Al Motawakil. The Young Men only listed Amat Aleem Alsoswa and Dr. Barakah ("may god bless her soul"). Older Women listed Amat Aleem Alsoswa and Blqis Al Hdrani ("in Sana'a" and "excellent"). Finally, Older Men listed Amat Aleem Alsoswa and Faiza Al Ba'dani.



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## *Amat Aleem Alsoswa*

Young Men described Alsoswa as someone who “helps people,” an activist, minister in human rights, “good,” and “decent.” These participants knew about her from watching her on TV. One Older Woman identified Alsoswa as a local council member. Several Older Men identified Alsoswa as an announcer and minister of human rights. They said she was “respected.”

## *Fatima Moreisi*

Young Women identified Moreisi as an announcer and poetess from having seen her on TV. One participant described her as a “good woman.” Older Women had the most to say about Moreisi, describing her as “defending women’s rights” and “decent.” Some participants identified her as someone who is developing education opportunities for women and helping to fight female illiteracy. One Older Woman also said Moreisi is helping with vocational training and sewing projects. The only Older Man who identified Moreisi said she was from Aden.

## *Fatima Hureibi*

One Young Woman identified Hureibi as a local councilor, and another one said she was confusing Hureibi with Moreisi. One Older Man identified Hureibi as someone working on TV.

## *Najeeba Mi’mari*

Several Young Women said they knew Mi’mari from the elections and described her as “good,” “very active,” and “very loyal.”

## *Jawhra Hamoud*

None of the participants identified Jawhra Hamoud without prompting. However, when prompted with the name, two Older Women identified Hamoud as someone who helps women through education programs.

## *Al Motawakil*

Young Women had the most to say about Al Motawakil, identifying her as a journalist, poetess, and member of the General Union of Yemen Students. Many of the Young Women said they viewed Al Motawakil favorably, saying that they were “proud of her” and that she increased the morale of women.

## **Role of Women in Local Council**

One Older Woman and two Older Men said they voted for a female candidate in the 2001 elections. Many Younger Women said they were too young to vote in that election, and other Young Women and Young Men said that there were no female candidates at that time.

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In regard to whether women should serve on the local council, participants in the Young Women, Young Men, and Older Men groups were split in their opinions. Only those participants in the Older Women group were overwhelmingly in favor of women serving on the council. For those participants who said women should serve, many said that an educated woman should have the same footing as a man. Some Young Women noted that women's rights have already extended to other fields like the media and teaching. For Young Men, it was more a matter of whether the woman had a good reputation and was well-known. Some Older Men preferred to see women limited to their involvement on "women's issues" like health and education.

Those opposed to women serving on the local council included some Young Women who cited customs, tradition, and religion as obstacles limiting a woman's ability to travel and debate. One Young Woman said it was the woman's "duty" to manage the house and take care of her children instead. An Older Man simply said that it's the woman's duty to "stay away from politics."

Participants who agreed that women can serve on the local council agreed that women were better able to address "women's issues" better than men. For Young Women, this meant assisting families, female students and children. Young Men defined these issues simply as "women's rights," and Older Men elaborated to include education and health issues. Older Women were the most specific of any group by noting that women councilors can establish women's centers, help the needy, and assist other women in finding jobs.

"Men can't defend the women rights as skillfully as women." – *man, 31-45, Ibb*

Young Women who opposed the idea of women councilors noted that physical limitations (i.e. pregnancy), modesty, and a lack of rationale thinking meant that men were better suited for the position than women. Some Older Men said that women would have a more difficult time than men settling legal and tribal disputes on the local council.

Surprisingly, despite the number of participants who opposed the idea of women councilors, the majority of all participants agreed that Islam allows women to participate in elections. However, as one Older Woman noted, having the right to work doesn't always mean the woman is able to work.

"Islam has given woman the right to work but their husbands don't permit them." – *woman, 31-45, Ibb.*

Education is the most important quality for women councilors, as noted by the majority of participants in all four groups. Young Women also said women councilors should be

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“sincere,” “decent,” have a family, and possess values. These participants said that teachers, journalists, doctors, and engineers could become female councilors. Some Young Men also agreed that teachers and doctors would be appropriate positions for future women councilors. Older Women added that women councilors should be “experienced,” “famous,” and “strong.” Being married was also important for some Older Men, along with traits like “dedicated” and “responsible.”

On the issue of whether a female candidate needs to wear a veil, participants in the Young Women, Young Men, and Older Men groups were generally split between those who said it was not an issue and those who said they wouldn’t vote for a woman without a veil. As one Older Man said, a veiled woman gains “good reputation.” Only among the Older Women was the issue of a veil not a problem.

## Message Testing

*The Quran encourages us to work for Allah. Serving Allah by representing his believers in government is noble work. Women should be given the opportunity to serve Allah in this capacity.*

Young Women were split in their opinion of this statement. Those who liked it said that they will believe in a candidate who believes in the Quran, while those opposed to the statement claimed that Islam doesn’t allow women to run for office in the first place. The majority of Young Women said they were skeptical of all political slogans, especially those that invoke religion.

This same skepticism was expressed by some Young Men, although the majority from this group agreed with the statement simply because it mentioned Allah. The majority of Older Women said they were convinced by this statement and preferred it over the other three statements because it was clear, understandable, and has religious values. One participant said it showed a self-confident and strong woman. One Older Woman disagreed, saying it was too transparent.

Finally, the majority of Older Men disagreed with the statement because they dislike the use of Islamic references in political slogans and also because they prefer to judge a candidate on her actions.

*On some issues, women are better suited to represent the people of the community.*

Participants in the Young Women and Young Men groups were evenly split in their assessment of this statement. Several Young Women noted that women are better on education and health issues, and some Young Men added that women councilors are better able to visit families and handle “women’s issues.” In both groups, opposition to the

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statement included a Young Woman who said it was the woman's "noble task" to raise her family instead. One Young Man simply said he doesn't trust women.

Older Women were the least receptive to this statement and objected to the implication that it applied to all women. Several Older Women argued that it depends on each woman's abilities to serve.

Finally, some Older Men agreed that the statement applies to issues of health and education, but one Older Man noted that the statement would only encourage women voters.

*To reflect women's role in serving the Yemeni society more women should be elected.*

Older Men were the most receptive to this statement, and one participant said that an acceptable number of women on the local council would be between 20%-30%. A Young Man used a similar number when saying that two-thirds of the council should be men and one-third women. However, other Young Men and some Young Women noted that tradition limits the woman's ability to travel without a "mahram", thereby limiting her ability. In fact, all of the Young Women said they opposed this statement because they interpreted it to imply that local councils would have more women than men.

*Women have always played an important role in Yemeni history. From the time of the Queen of Sheba, women have been trusted to care for our land and its people. Women are capable leaders and can be trusted to faithfully work for the public's best interest.*

Of the four groups, Older Men responded the best to this statement, saying that Queen Sheba was a good leader. All of the Older Men said this one was the most convincing of the four statements. Older Women also liked this statement because it referenced something real and something that they knew about. Young Men were lukewarm on this statement, and there was general agreement within the group that approximately 20% of the local council should be women. Finally, the Young Women were split on the statement, with those opposing it saying that a woman is already "queen in her house." It's interesting to note one Young Woman's assessment that it's okay for a woman to be a teacher or doctor, but not a local council member.

## **Prospects for Electoral Success**

Young Women and Young Men were the least active in previous elections, due to some participants being too young to vote at the time and others being uninterested in the process. Those who were active generally got their information about candidates from magazines, pictures, and the activities of campaigns.

The expectations for female candidates among the Young Women is that the candidate should be credible, honest, and loyal. Interestingly, the Young Women also talked about the

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candidate's activities in terms of her talking and meeting other women. While it may simply be a simple word choice, it could also reflect the participants' assumption that women candidates will only appeal to women voters.

For the handful of Young Men who showed an interest in participating in the upcoming elections, their expectations for female candidates included women supported by the government, educated, and promoting women's rights and the plight of the needy.

"If she is educated, there's no difference between a woman and a man." – *man, Ibb, 18-30.*

Older Women and Older Men were generally more active in previous elections than their younger counterparts. Older Women said they obtained their campaign information from the TV, ads, and brochures. Older Men also referenced ads and added the parties, friends, and relatives as sources of information.

Older Women have high expectations for female candidates, saying that these women should be responsible, educated, decent, tough, and able to talk to people. For some of the Older Men, party affiliation, past achievements, reputation and connections to a prominent family were the most important characteristics for a female candidate.

## D. Strategic Implications and Messages

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The learning gained from the research has practical implications.

Set realistic and achievable goals for the upcoming election. The strength and depth of traditional barriers facing Yemeni female candidates, including the lack of perceived qualified female candidates, prevent the ability for one or two elections to dramatically change the political landscape. Increased female participation at the local level will take multiple elections and several years to achieve.

There are specific, actionable steps that can be taken to help get women elected to the local council:

1. ***Expand the pool of potential candidates through education and civic involvement.*** Voters expect their local councilors to be highly educated and successful in dealing with local issues. Emphasis should be placed on programs that encourage increased schooling among women and heightened activity within the civic society.
2. ***Keep the emphasis local.*** Voters are not motivated to support female candidates because of their current under-representation in elected offices as much as they are likely to vote for a woman who is knowledgeable about local concerns and has the experience to address them. As a result, female candidates should focus their messaging locally.
3. ***Emphasize the perceived strength of women on certain issues.*** There is universal agreement among male and female participants that women are better at addressing education, health, and children's and elderly issues than men. Female candidates should focus their campaign messages on these issues instead of attempting to talk about all issues. Candidates should acknowledge and take advantage of this perceived distinction between male and female candidates.
4. ***Use male messengers for male voters.*** For those few urban men who may be willing to vote for a female candidate, the most effective messenger will be another male. Female candidates should turn to well-respected sheikhs and other prominent men in their community who can speak on their behalf to the limited number of potential male voters. An effective message for these male voters will highlight how the female candidate will be able to address the concerns of the male voter's wife, daughter, sister, mother, etc.

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5. *Make the case to female voters that women can assume similar leadership roles on local councils as they currently have in families.* When talking to women, female candidates can make the analogous case that, just as the woman plays an important role in the daily livelihood of the family, so can a female councilor play an important role in the activities of the local council.
6. *Utilize current female leaders for candidate recruitment and endorsements.* Current female leaders are few in number, but they are well-respected among men and women alike. Amat Aleem Alsoswa, Fatima Hureibi, and Fatima Moreisi should help encourage qualified women to run for local council and also speak on the candidates' behalf through advertisements, interviews, and live appearances.

There are also implications specific to each location in which we conducted research:

## SANA'A

This city should be a primary emphasis for electoral campaign programs due to the apparent willingness of urban men and women to consider voting for a female candidate. Potential candidates should be recruited from various fields including journalism, law, education, and medicine, with special emphasis on those women who can also point to past accomplishments in their community or field. Candidates should focus on education, children, health, and the elderly, and deliver their message in-person with visits to groups of female voters and via the media. Alsoswa's public endorsement and subsequent appearances with the candidates and in advertisements would have a strong impact in Sana'a. An effective message for female voters will be to highlight the need for improved educational opportunities in order to get better jobs in the capital. A similar message can be effective for some male voters, but it is best delivered by a local sheikh in support of the campaign.

## MUKALLA

There appears to be potential support among older *Islah*-leaning women in Mukalla for a single female candidate. Identifying such a candidate within the *Islah* party should be a priority. The candidate must meet the high standards set by these female voters, including strict adherence to local customs (i.e. wearing the veil). As in Sana'a, it will be important for the female candidate to focus exclusively on issues like education, children, health, and elderly. Not only do *Islah*-leaning women in Mukalla care the most about these issues, but they also say that women are better able to address them. The female candidate's campaign will have to focus entirely on *Islah*-leaning women voters as their male counterparts are not receptive to a woman's candidacy. Special emphasis will need to be placed on increasing turnout among *Islah*-leaning women in the upcoming election, along with delivering the candidate's message to these voters.

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## ADEN

As in Sana'a, the potential for electing female councilors is the highest among these urban men and women. However, candidate recruitment in Aden may be a challenge as many of the women we spoke with said they lacked the qualifications to run for office. Alsoswa and Moreisi could play an important role in the recruitment of candidates from the ranks of female teachers, in addition to being visible spokespeople on behalf of female candidates in Aden. Again, candidates' messages will need to focus on female voters and emphasize education, health, children, and elderly as these are seen as being areas where women excel compared to men. A potential approach to attracting male voters could be for male spokespeople (i.e. local sheikhs or other visible male leaders in the community) to talk about the need for female councilors to help address problems in women's education. Surprisingly, such support from male leaders was one of the most important issues cited by male participants in Aden.

## IBB

Conducting campaigns in Ibb could provide the greatest challenge. Of all the participants, the non-urban and less-educated participants in Ibb were generally the least receptive to the idea of female candidates. Emphasis on improving general education among this population should be a priority. However, there is the slight potential for a female candidate in Ibb to appeal to older women. As with all participants, these older women agreed that female candidates are better able to address issues like education, health, children, and elderly. Education is of specific interest to them as most are aware of their limitations due to a lack of formal education and the subsequent importance they place on educating their children. Despite not having completed their studies, these older women display a unique worldliness in their informal knowledge of local issues. A female candidate in Ibb will have to be careful in campaigning so as not to appear to talk down to these older women while at the same time demonstrating her knowledge on local issues.

Unfortunately, many of these older women in Ibb may still be reluctant to vote for a female candidate because their husbands won't approve or allow it. Therefore, it will be important for male messengers of the campaign to communicate to older men in Ibb that one female councilor will be a good thing in order to address their wives' concerns.

Finally, young women in Ibb are divided in their support of female candidates. For those who do not oppose women based on religious issues, there is the potential to use similar messages as those for older women. In addition, young women had the most to say about Al Motawakil, identifying her as a journalist, poetess, and member of the General Union of Yemen Students. Many of the young women say they view Al Motawakil favorably, and it would be worth exploring if she would be a spokesperson on behalf of a female candidate in this region.



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## APPENDIX A

### PROJECT: FUTURE RECRUITMENT FORM SEPTEMBER-2005

Good morning/ Good evening

I am from **SMART- GLOVER PARK RESEARCH**. We are currently conducting a study on certain issues which serve the family and the society in general in Yemen.

We would like to have minutes from your precious time to answer some questions for your participation. Your participation will play a major part in developing the services, which we are going to talk about. We do appreciate your participation hoping to attend on time to discuss with other persons the relevant issues. We would like to thank you for your cooperation

**Q1: Do you or any of you relatives work with:**

- |                                     |                   |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1- Market Research Agency           | - close interview |
| 2- Advertising Agency               | - close interview |
| 3- Officials working in Governments | - close interview |

**Q2: Gender**

- 1- Male  
Female-2

**Q3: Age**

- |                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| 1- Less than 18 years | - close interview   |
| 2- 18- 21 years       | } Sana'a (1 Male/ 1 female) literate -2 Groups<br>Ibb (1 Male+1 Female) Illiterate        |
| 3- 22- 25 years       |   |
| 4- 26 -30 years       |   |
| 5- 31 -35 years       |   |
| 6- 36 -40 years       | } Mukalla-Aden (M and F)(4Mukalla+2Aden) Illiterate<br>Ibb (1 Male + 1 Female) Illiterate |
| 7- 41 -45years        |   |
| 8- More than 45 years | - close interview   |

**Q4- CITY**

- |           |               |
|-----------|---------------|
| 1- SANA'A | 2- AL-MUKALLA |
| 3- ADEN   | 4- IBB        |

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## Q5: What are the T.V Channel/s you watch

- 1- Yemen - Local Channel
- 2- Yemen - Satellite Channel
- 3- MBC 1
- 4- MBC 2
- 5- MBC 4
- 6- Al - Jazira Satellite Channel
- 7- Al - Arabia
- 8- ESC
- 9- Al - Majd Satellite Channel
- 10- Al-Manar
- 11- Future
- 12- LBC
- 13- Dubai Satellite Channel
- 14- Abu Dhabi Satellite Channel
- 15- Saudi 1
- 16- Saudi 2
- 17- Others ( Specify ) .....

## Q6: Family average income

- 1- Less than Yemeni Riyal 20,000
- 2- 20,000 - 30,000 YR.
- 3- 30,001 - 40,000 YR
- 4- 40,001 - 50,000 YR
- 5- 50,001 - 75,000 YR
- 6- 75,001- 100,000 YR
- 7- 100,001- 150,000 YR
- 8- More than 150,000 YR

## Q7: Are you working as a:

- 1- Full time employee
- 2- Self employed
- 3- Looking for a job vacancy
- 4- House wife
- 5- Student in University level
- 6- Do not work for the time being (Jobless) - Close interview

## Q8: In which sector you are working?

- 1- Public Sector - Ask Q8.a
- 2- Private Sector - Ask Q8.b

## Q8a: What is your exact job in the public sector?

- 1- A high ranking governmental employee.
- 2- A public sector employee who is inferior to another governmental superior employee / high ranking post.
- 3- A public sector employee working with ordinary government department.
- 4- Public sector teacher/lecturer (Schools/ Universities).
- 5- A government bank employee.

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- 6- Working in his field (Doctor, Engineer, Lawyer, Accountant...).
- 7- Other public sector employee working in specialized positions / Operator/ Typist/ Secretary.
- 8- A student (Institute/ University) in the public sector.

## **Q8.b: What is your exact job in the private sector?**

- 1- Establishment / Company owner
- 2- Business other than Establishments / Companies
- 3- Top Management Employee
- 4- Medium Level Management Employee
- 5- An ordinary employee (Typist, Secretary, Operator or telephone cabin employee) .
- 6- A private Sector Teacher ( Schools, Universities )
- 7- Working in his field (Doctor, Engineer, Lawyer, Accountant...)
- 8- A private sector student (Institute / University).

## **Q9: What is your level of education?**

- 1- He did not receive any official education / Illiterate
- 2- Completed his elementary education / Did not complete his intermediate education
- 3- Completed his intermediate education / Did not complete his Secondary education
- 4- Completed his secondary education / Did not complete his university education
- 5- Completed his university education
- 6- Completed Master Degree / PHD

## **Ask Q10 Only In Al-Mukalla (Political Party Affiliation)**

## **Q10: Which Political Party Affiliation you are with?**

- 1- General People's Congress
- 2- Yemeni Congregation for Reform (Islah Party)
- 3- Nasserite Unionist Party
- 4- Arab Socialist Party
- 5- Non- Partisan

## **Q11: Are you intending to participate in the next parliamentary elections?**

- 1- Yes, I will participate in the upcoming parliament elections for sure
- 2- Yes , I will participate in the upcoming parliament elections
- 3- May be yes, may be no( average ) to participate in the upcoming parliament elections
- 4- I'll never participate in the in the upcoming parliament elections

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NAME: .....

ADDRESS: .....

PHONE NO.: .....MOBILE NO. : .....

E-MAIL: .....

Group/ Day of the week: .....

Date: /09/2005 Recruiter name and signature: .....

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## APPENDIX B

<u>Date</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u># of participants</u>	<u>Educational Attainment</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Recruiter</u>	<u>Moderator</u>
<i>Sana'a</i>						
9.12.05	women	9	Educated	18-30	Mohamed Badwei Omar Okaily Bassam	Huda
9.12.05	men	8	Educated	18-30	Mohamed Badwei Omar Okaily Bassam	Amr
<i>Mukalla</i>						
9.14.05	women	8	Educated	31-45	Hussein	Nada
9.14.05	men	8	Educated	31-45	Hussein Entedar	Amr
9.15.05	men	7	Educated	31-45	Entedar	Amr
9.16.05	women	6	Educated	31-45	Entedar Islah leader	Amr
<i>Aden</i>						
9.18.05	men	7	Educated	31-45	Mohamed Badwei	Amr
9.18.05	women	9	Educated	31-45	Mohamed Badwei	Amr
<i>Ibb</i>						
9.20.05	men	8	Illiterate	18-30	Mohamed Badwei	Amr
9.20.05	women	8	Illiterate	18-30	Mohamed Badwei	Amr
9.21.05	women	8	Illiterate	31-45	Badwei Badwei	Amr
9.21.05	men	8	Illiterate	31-45	Badwei Badwei	Amr