

Assessing Democracy Assistance: Yemen¹

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This report is FRIDE's contribution to a project entitled 'Assessing Democracy Assistance' that is being carried out by the World Movement for Democracy. The project aims to gather views on how democracy support can be improved and its impact enhanced. Other case studies and a synthesis report can be found at www.fride.org.

Prospects for democracy in Yemen have turned increasingly sour in recent years. Following presidential elections in 2006, donor countries congratulated the country on an 'openly-contested electoral process that represented a milestone in the democratic development in Yemen', but prospects for further reform have subsequently faded as Yemen has slipped into a political and economic downward spiral.² A weakening economy, rapidly increasing population, the threat from separatist and insurgent movements in the south of the country, and a resurgence of *al-Qaeda* affiliated groups have seen an increasingly nervous government become less tolerant and lose interest in continuing the reform agenda. President Ali Abdullah Saleh is no longer negotiating from a position of strength, as the genuine tide of good-will that greeted the reforms at the turn of the century gives way to mounting frustration over corruption and a deepening humanitarian crisis that looks set to worsen in the coming years. Yemen's dwindling oil revenues have exposed the vulnerability of a state largely held together by patronage rather than institutions. Arbitrary arrests and the proliferation of authoritarian legislation such as Yemen's anti-terrorism law have given rise to grave concerns that Yemen's reform process has gone into reverse.

Although Yemen's political system is overtly republican, the state's legitimacy rests heavily upon religious and tribal structures. The current Republic was founded in 1990 by the unification of the Northern Arab

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² See Final Report of the EU Electoral Observation Mission to Yemen, http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/human_rights/election_observation/yemen/final_report_en.pdf

Republic of Yemen (YAR), which was created following the overthrow of the ruling *Hamid al-Din* Imamate dynasty in 1962, and the southern state, the Socialist People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), greatly weakened following years of internecine blood-letting and the collapse of its patron the USSR. In its early days, the YAR modelled itself on the anti-colonial but relatively secular model of Gamal Abd al-Nasser's Egypt from which it drew much of its support, before moving under President Saleh towards a more conciliatory position or *modus vivendi* with its neighbour Saudi Arabia, Yemeni tribes and Islamist groups who were opposed to a more republican model of governance.³ The weakness of the south affected its bargaining position in the new unity government, and led to its main party, the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) being effectively shut out of power following elections in 1993. These elections resoundingly confirmed the predominant position of the former leaders of the YAR in the new state, despite previous power-sharing commitments. A brutal civil war followed in 1994 in which the government relied upon networks of recently returned *jihadi* fighters from Afghanistan to assist in the fighting. The crushing of southern resistance led to a period of effective military occupation of the south by the Yemeni army which some local leaders believe has never truly ended. They accuse senior military figures close to the President of trying to run the local economy through the requisitioning of land and control of local industries. Opposition to the government is also exacerbated by the perception that the south has very little say in how the revenues derived from oil extraction there are spent, and that the north of the country receives a disproportionate share.⁴

In the late 1990s, the increasing influence of Islamists in Yemeni politics led President Saleh to change the constitution to reflect *Sharia* as the 'sole' rather than 'principal' source of law for the country. Both Presidential and Parliamentary elections in 1999 and 2003 were marred by a high occurrence of irregularities, not least due to the dominance of local electoral commissions by the government party, al-Mo'tamar al-Sha'bi al-'Am (the General People's Congress - GPC), supporters and a confused voter registration process. Nevertheless, despite widespread fraud, there was genuine electoral competition and a level of freedom of expression that compared very favourably with other countries in the region. During this time the government permitted the opening of a limited space for public dissent and a space in which independent civil society organisations (CSOs) could operate. However, due to a refusal to devolve power and put in place an independent judiciary, this space remains highly arbitrary, likely to shut at any moment should a political leader, journalist or civil society activist trespass upon areas which the government regard as overly-sensitive.

Following the opening of a space for limited political dissent and freedom of expression in Yemen, both the US and Europe looked to its government to play a leading role in the Forum for the Future democracy promotion framework established following the G8 Summit of 2004 hosted by the US government. Ultimately however, Yemen was perceived to have failed to live up to the hopes Western donors, due to a retrenchment in terms of human rights linked to an increasingly nervous government struggling to uphold its writ in many parts of the country. A combination of a lack of capacity and enthusiasm on the part of the government led to the cancellation of a Forum for the Future summit scheduled to be hosted in Sana'a in late 2007. The Forum for the Future labours on but with greatly reduced enthusiasm with regard to Yemeni participation.

Yemen's political party system is extremely weak, predominantly based on patronage from the domestic government, tribal affiliations or support from Saudi Arabia. Control over the central government and the military is largely in the hands of President Saleh's Sanhan branch of the Hashid tribe, reinforcing the perception of the party as a secondary consideration, or a reflection, of the tribal system. The activities of the YSP remain heavily restricted, with its leaders frequently jailed on vague charges of plotting to overthrow the state, while *al-Islah* (the Reform), the most explicitly Islamist party, is divided into several factions including the Muslim Brotherhood and *Salafi* Islamist trends and those primarily representing respective tribal interests.⁵ Smaller movements including the Baathists and Nasserist parties (previously backed by Iraq and Libya respectively) have limited support although they are occasionally co-opted to back the government. No one party can be said to represent the Zaydi Shia community,⁶ significant numbers of whom support the ruling GPC party, but the small *al-Haq* party is clearly identified along sectarian lines as representing those Zaydis most concerned

³F. Gregory Gause, *Saudi-Yemeni Relations: Structures and Foreign Influence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), pp. 140–9.

⁴Ana Echagüe, 'Yemen', in Richard Youngs and Ted Piccone (eds.), *Strategies for Democratic Change: Assessing the Global Response* (Washington DC: Democracy Coalition Project, 2006), pp. 152–155; and Francois Burgat and Laurent Bonnefoy, 'El Yemen, entre la integración política y la espiral de (contra) violencia', Casa Arabe – Documento de trabajo, 7 July 2009.

⁵Agence France Presse, 'Yemen frees Socialists jailed over unrest', 12 September 2008

⁶Zaydi Shiism is a distinctive form of Islam that should not be confused with Twelver Shiism that is practised in Bahrain, Iraq, Iran, Lebanon and elsewhere in the Middle East. Zaydis follow the teachings of Zayd bin Ali and the first four Imams, beginning with Ali, and traditionally have looked to a living Iman for leadership, who must be a descendant of the prophet (*sayyid*). The leader of the rebellion in Saada, Abd al-Malik al-Houthi qualifies for such a distinction. See Crisis Group Report, 'Defusing the Saada time-bomb', May 2009, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Iran%20Gulf/Yemen/086%20Yemen%20Defusing%20the%20Saada%20Time%20Bomb.ashx>

about cultural erosion or the Sunnification of their communities.

Since the start of the Saada rebellion in 2003, led originally by Zaydi tribal and religious leader Hussein al-Houthi, prominent members of al-Islah and al-Haq parties have been arrested; some held for extended periods without charge.⁷ The leader of al-Haq is also currently the acting President of the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP) a coalition of opposition parties. The JMP is essentially a working alliance to oppose the government, but there is very little common ground to unite the ideological or distinctive local interests of the various parties. This also creates a dilemma for democracy donors, some of whom remain hesitant to engage an opposition which contains radical Islamists as well as alleged secessionists.

Despite widespread electoral fraud and logistical problems associated with the 2003 parliamentary elections, al-Islah secured 46 seats and the YSP eight, enough to create a vocal if inchoate parliamentary opposition but never near enough to challenge the legislative predominance of the GPC 238 MPs.⁸ Moreover, although some parliamentary bodies such as the Oil and Development Committee have occasionally played an important role in highlighting corruption within the government, power remains concentrated primarily in the hands of the President, the security forces and tribal networks rather than the legislature.⁹ The strength of the tribes in Yemen mean that the President increasingly bypasses parliament to deal directly with tribal leaders, or conversely that selection procedures for parliamentary candidates reflect tribal seniority.

The uncertain space that President Ali Abdullah Saleh opened for civil society during the 1990s has been filled by a plethora of NGOs (over 6000 have registered in less than 20 years). Many of these are exceptionally weak however, essentially 'one person shows', others are highly adept at applying for grants from international donors but have a limited capacity to implement projects at a grass-roots level, while some effective but cash-strapped NGOs lack the capacity to apply for international funding due to a shortage of English language skills and reporting know-how. The current Law for Associations and Foundations requires a re-registering obligation on NGOs which, although rarely implemented, grants the government arbitrary leverage to frustrate the activities of CSOs. In 2009 the government was planning to introduce a new updated law in order for Yemen 'to align its legislation according to its neighbours in the region', which in the view of some international experts would constitute a significant step backwards for the democratic process in Yemen.¹⁰

An overview of external democracy assistance

The emergence of impoverished Yemen as an island of progressive reform following the devastating wars that began with the ousting of the Imamate and departure of the British from the Aden Colony and Protectorates in the early 1960s surprised many observers, not least its Gulf neighbours, given the dangerous cocktail of tribal grievance, religious extremism and secessionism that threatened the country. The parliamentary elections of 2003 and the presidential elections of 2006 were effectively the high watermarks of the reform agenda led by President Saleh, with a diverse range of Western countries and international institutions providing assistance and monitors. The US, UK, EU, Sweden, France and Italy all contributed to strengthening the electoral process, funding electoral capacity building initiatives undertaken by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Foundation for Electoral Assistance (IFES).

US democracy assistance

Reflecting international optimism, USAID introduced a new 'Special Objective' in 2004, amending their Yemen Strategy from 2003–2006 to provide a programme entitled 'Expanded Democracy and Governance in Yemen'. In 2006 USAID provided over USD 3.5 million for democracy promotion in Yemen in addition to other capacity building initiatives; a significant increase from the USD 8.1 million spent by the US from 1990–2005.¹¹ Meanwhile the State Department's Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) made Yemen a priority,

⁷ See for example, Human Rights Watch 'Disappearances and Arbitrary Arrests in the Armed Conflict with Huthi Rebels in Yemen', <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/75606/section/1>

⁸ Sarah Phillips, *Yemen's Democracy in Regional Perspective: Patronage and Pluralized Authoritarianism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 137–63.

⁹ The Yemeni Observer, 'Parliament reports on corruption in oil establishments', 16 August 2008.

¹⁰ See Carnegie Endowment, http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/Yemen_APS.doc

greatly stimulating the growth of civil society through the granting of flexible small funds of less than USD 100,000, which over 200 NGOs have received in recent years. The US government also funded technical missions to review prospects for legislative reform, including several projects undertaken by the Washington DC-based International Center for Non-Profit Law (ICNL).

Overall US aid to Yemen was remarkably limited during the Bush administration, lagging behind the development assistance provided by European donors. US support for governance and development assistance were gravely affected by deepening concerns that the government was unwilling to tackle corruption. Relations reached a nadir in 2007 when an al-Qaeda operative convicted of the USS Cole bombing was released by Yemen despite US protests. In a remarkable piece of bungled timing, the Yemeni government announced his release hours before the US Ambassador to Sana'a was due to unveil a large aid package for Yemen under the Millennium Challenge Account, to which Yemen's candidacy was once again suspended.¹²

However, given the threat of a resurgent al-Qaeda in Yemen, the US government has recently begun to prioritise its relations with Yemen, labelling its new strategy as one of 'stabilisation' and in late 2009 announced two 'flagship' programmes, the Community Livelihood Project and the Responsive Governance Project which have been allocated USD \$121 million from 2010 to 2013 and will be implemented by USAID. It is envisaged that both of these programmes will not only involve capacity building at the national and local levels but will also be underpinned by a democratisation approach that will aim to improve oversight of development by Yemen's democratic institutions and civil society. USAID has also been allocated funding of just over USD \$1.2 million over two years to undertake 'conflict mitigation' projects to address mounting protests and violence directed against the Yemeni government. Such an approach goes some way towards addressing local concerns that the US government is committed to strengthening Yemen's security forces without consideration of the consequences for democratic reform. The US will also continue to provide core support to NDI activities in Yemen.

Among NGOs, the US is regarded as the most flexible external donor, unafraid of working with or funding NGOs that have frequently incurred the wrath of the government through their persistence in arguing against government policies. Contrary to their European counterparts, the US MEPI programme established good working relations with Islamist civil society networks, including those firmly opposed to broader US foreign policy in the region. Generally, despite widespread criticism of other aspects of US foreign policy in the region, US democracy assistance has won the respect of most political parties and NGOs in Yemen. The US has also been praised for taking a more unequivocal stance on human rights violations against political and civil society activists in Yemen than European donors.

European democracy assistance

Unlike the US, the EU and its member states have gained a reputation as a more consistent and generous donor to Yemen. In 2006 the EU sent a high level delegation led by Baroness Emma Nicholson, a Member of the European Parliament, to monitor presidential elections. EU institutions have played an important role in encouraging reform in Yemen as well as monitoring events there, not least with regards to human rights. Like the US however, EU leverage has been somewhat limited by the greater dependence of the Yemeni government upon its Gulf neighbours for assistance – countries which have viewed the democratisation of Yemen with alarm rather than enthusiasm – as well as conflicting views between EU member states which have undermined efforts to harmonise a common position between European embassies in Sana'a. The French Embassy in Sana'a has frequently adopted a strictly 'non-interventionist' approach to its relations with Yemen when other EU member states urged a common stance following the indefinite suspension of parliamentary elections in 2008 and an escalating trend of human rights abuses, preferring instead to focus on security issues such as cooperation on counter-terrorism. This particularly affected EU coherence during the Slovenian and French EU Presidencies of 2008 during which time the French Embassy in Sana'a took the political lead.

European democracy assistance in Yemen follows a familiar trend whereby France and southern EU member

¹¹ See <http://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/gratis/SeligsonGraphics-19-2.pdf>

¹² S Jeremy Sharp, 'Yemen: Background and US Relations', Congressional Research Service, <http://www.usembassy.it/pdf/other/RL34170.pdf>

states have not added their own funds to support democracy promotion efforts championed by a few northern EU countries including the UK, the Netherlands and Denmark (Sweden is conspicuously absent). At the EU level democracy promotion and governance projects make up a significant amount of the total assistance provided to Yemen, just over EUR 20 million of the EU's EUR 70 million budget for its initial 2007–2010 Multi-annual Indicative Programme. As well as providing funding to enable Yemen's 2003 and 2006 elections, the EU has also supported programmes aimed at building capacity at the Supreme Council for Elections (EUR 4.8 million) and supporting judicial reform and the development of local human rights NGOs (EUR 14.8 million).¹³ Working together with the government of Denmark, the European Commission has provided programme funding for parliamentary training. Some EU officials acknowledge that this largesse has not borne fruit; that a lack of political will due to increasing security and economic challenges has weakened the democratic process. The indefinite postponement of parliamentary elections in 2008 has been overshadowed by immediate EU security concerns, namely the threat from *jihadi* groups boosted by the return of veterans of the *al-Qaeda* campaign in Iraq, growing chaos in the South linked to long-standing grievances from the civil war of 1994, an insurgency in the northern province of Saada and the imminent bankruptcy of the government as oil revenues decline. One EU diplomat has observed that 'nobody talks about democratic elections anymore – the crisis is that deep'. From 2010 onwards EU diplomats speak of a reduction in democracy assistance in favour of meeting 'more basic humanitarian needs', including the fall-out from conflict and a deepening economic crisis.

The Netherlands is the most prominent EU member state donor to Yemen in terms of democracy projects. For 2010, the Dutch government has earmarked EUR 6–7 million of an overall development budget of EUR 25 million towards democracy assistance. The Netherlands has also been a generous contributor to UN agency programmes on governance, providing just under USD 1.7 million in funding for a UNDP project aimed at strengthening Yemen's electoral process from 2004–2006. The UK has also been a significant contributor to UNDP governance and electoral projects, preferring to build capacity within Yemeni Ministries to manage public finances rather than the elected institutions. The UK has developed projects aimed at building capacity within the government for more transparent and efficient use of public resources, together with UNDP and the Netherlands on Public Financial Management to which it contributed GBP 1.1 million from 2006 to 2009.¹⁴ Another priority area for the UK has been reform of the judiciary and policing sectors where it has been supported to a lesser degree by France and Germany, contributing GBP 7 million from 2005–2013.¹⁵ Initially much of the UK's funding of justice sector reform was in partnership with UNDP but this relationship has been considerably damaged by considerable acrimony over allegations of mismanagement by UNDP of the Integrated Justice Sector Development (IJSJ) programme and Public Financial Management (PFM) programmes which constituted the bulk of the UK's governance assistance to Yemen. The current UK-Yemen Justice and Policing Programme (JPP) begun in 2008 is being implemented independently of any UN agency partnership.¹⁶

A nevertheless, aside from capacity building projects, the UK and Germany have been conspicuously absent in comparison to the US and the Netherlands in providing support for more overt democracy promotion programmes aimed at supporting political party development, legislative reform and enabling the activities of local NGOs dedicated to increasing government transparency. UK officials in Sana'a acknowledge that democracy promotion is simply not a UK priority right now with more attention being paid to immediate security and humanitarian concerns. UK democracy promotion institutes such as the Westminster Foundation for Democracy are not active in Yemen.

In recent years the German technical development agency GTZ's programmes have been predominantly directed towards poverty reduction rather than governance. GTZ has however provided assistance for some small projects, focused on anti-corruption and providing information on legal rights for citizens. In 2010 governance is strongly back on GTZ's agenda due to a shift in government policy towards Yemen. GTZ is increasing its support for the Supreme National Authority for Combating Corruption (SNACC) and to the Central Organisation for Control and Auditing (COCA), a Yemeni government initiative to improve management of the public finances, in coordination with the governments of France, the Netherlands, Canada, and the World Bank who have provided support to COCA since 2006. GTZ also plans to commit more funds towards

¹³ Commission of the European Communities, 'Multiannual Indicative Programme – Yemen: 2007–2010', accessed at http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/yemen/csp/mip_07_13_en.pdf

¹⁴ See UNDP Yemen's Project database, http://www.undp.org/ye/project_database.php

¹⁵ See DFID, 'Yemen Country Plan', <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Documents/publications/DFIDYemenProgrammePolicyFocus.pdf>

¹⁶ See Jon Bennett, Deb Duncan, Ines Rothman, Sushila Zeitlyn and Ginny Hill, 'Evaluation of DFID country programmes in Yemen', www.dfid.gov.uk/Where-we-work/Middle-East--North-Africa/Yemen/

support for civil society and gender awareness programmes in 2010 and 2011.

An effective German commitment to the Yemeni reform process is the activities of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) in Yemen, although their programmes are limited by a lack of financial support. FES has concentrated on providing small grants to Yemeni NGOs of USD 10,000–20,000, cautioning that even the best Yemeni NGOs have a limited absorption capacity. In mid-2009 FES also conceded that it was increasingly considering reducing its political reform activities towards a focus on poverty reduction, believing that the former is proving increasingly fruitless while the latter merits more urgent attention.

The only Scandinavian country with a significant democracy promotion presence in Yemen is Denmark, which has funded an extensive project on human rights in recent years. This project, with funding from the Danish development agency DANIDA of just under EUR 2.5 million for two phases, 2006–2007 and 2009–2010, was established to provide support for the Ministry for Human Rights and a network of six of Yemen's strongest democracy/human rights NGOs. Denmark, Canada, the Netherlands and the UK collectively donated EUR 1.1 million towards a UNDP-managed human rights project between 2003 and 2007. From 2003–2008 Denmark provided the largest amount of funding: just under USD 500,000 for a UNDP-managed project on decentralisation and local development, with lesser contributions coming from France, Italy, and the US.

Aside from such relatively small projects France and Italy have played a negligible role in providing democracy assistance to Yemen, while the contribution of Germany and the UK has been reduced in proportion to a relative increase in other assistance. Aside from some support for UNDP local governance projects and public finance management, French governance assistance has generally been very limited, reflecting a preference for poverty alleviation projects through the Yemeni Social Fund for Development and training the Yemeni security forces.¹⁷ Today, only Denmark and the Netherlands retain democracy promotion as an explicit priority of their overall aid to Yemen.

International democracy institutes

There are a limited number of international NGOs working on democracy promotion which maintain a presence in Yemen. Following the 2003 elections, the US-based National Democratic Institute (NDI) expanded its parliamentary training programme, training local journalists as well as introducing a controversial new programme aimed at reducing conflict among Yemen's tribes and integrating them into the democratic process. Although NDI has previously played a mediatory role between the government and the opposition parties, an uncompromising commitment to democratic standards has seen NDI occasionally fall foul of the government. The government has also registered its unease with NDI's tribal conflict resolution programme accusing it of meddling in local politics. NDI country directors have enjoyed mixed relations with the government, with the latter regularly seeking to limit NDI's engagement in areas it deems inappropriate.

IFES has been in Yemen since 1999 and played a crucial role in providing training that facilitated its 2003 and 2006 elections. More recently however, the increasing alignment of the Supreme Council for Elections and Referendums (SCER) with the government has called into question the viability of its work without a consensus between the political parties on mechanisms to hold future elections. IFES projects have been funded by the US government and other OECD DAC countries, but these may have to be scaled down in 2010 due to the prospect of a major reduction in donor support. IFES has also received some funding from UNDEF which supports its Youth Civic Awareness Project. IFES currently sees its role as providing training to a cadre of officials who will have the skills to run fair elections once the political will to do so is there. Its Director describes their work as 'tinkering with nuts and bolts [...] If there is a screw loose, then the reform process cannot move forward when the time is right', although he acknowledges that Yemen is the most complex country he has ever worked in. In 2009 and 2010 IFES activities were greatly hampered however by a reduction in funding which meant it had to considerably scale down its presence in Yemen. In addition to NDI and IFES; the International Republican Institute has included Yemen in occasional regional conferences and training seminars but lacks country-specific programmes and a representative office. Meanwhile, the Washington DC-based Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE) offers frequent advice and training on corporate governance and the role of business within a democratic society.

Beyond conventional European and North American democracy donors, only the newly formed Jordan-based

¹⁷ See 'Document Cadre de Partenariat France-Yemen – (2007-2013), http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/pays-zones-geo_833/yemen_426/france-yemen_1256/presentation_5022/document-cadre-partenariat-france-yemen-dcp-2007-2011_51514.html

Foundation for the Future and limited assistance from the government of Indonesia to the Supreme National Authority for Combating Corruption (SNACC) can be said to have played a significant role in promoting democracy in Yemen. The Qatar-based Arab Foundation for Democracy has yet to make Yemen a priority. Some Yemeni activists feel that the failure to do so is a result of a long-standing Gulf hostility towards Yemen's democratic movement, lest it act as a template for reform in the region.

Save the Children is one of the few international NGOs working to alleviate the fall-out from the conflict in Saada Province, in the north of the country. However it is also playing a minor but respected role in working on civil society and youth empowerment projects. Article 19, an international NGO dedicated to supporting press freedom, is supported by the National Endowment for Democracy provides small grants and training opportunities for Yemeni journalists and civil society activists. The National Endowment for Democracy is generally perceived as a generous and consistent donor of small grants to Yemeni NGOs engaged in democracy promotion. The Foundation for the Future, a creation of the Forum for the Future – an initiative for Middle East reform that has dissipated in momentum in recent years – has also begun to provide small grants to Yemeni NGOs including Islamist organisations and those politically opposed to the government.

Intergovernmental organisations

UNDP has been an important supporter of political reform in Yemen, working on projects to strengthen the Shura council, providing critical support for electoral assistance and focusing on projects to promote a human rights culture within the Yemeni government, security forces and judiciary. UNDP has also developed projects aimed at improving NGOs' capacity to ensure government transparency, and has worked with the government on improving Yemen's performance with regard to Public Financial Management. The World Bank, together with GTZ and USAID, have provided technical assistance to the newly established Supreme National Authority for Combating Corruption (SNACC), liaising with civil society on improving government transparency but not providing significant financial assistance to NGOs. Plans to implement EITI have not progressed; although Yemen is a candidate country it still has to progress beyond preliminary steps to ratify this initiative. The World Bank has also played an important role alongside UNDP, the UK and the Netherlands in supporting reform of public finance management. In 2008 UNDEF funded a USD 250,000 project on women's leadership led by the Club of Madrid, an organisation made up of 70 democratic former heads of state and government, aimed at strengthening women's leadership in Yemen.

Yemeni democracy and human rights NGOs

The proliferation of Yemeni democracy and human rights NGOs at the turn of the century reflected the optimism of that time as well as a response by some more entrepreneurial individuals to the influx of Western democracy aid at that time. Today, many of these organisations are struggling, either due to a weak capacity to implement projects or because of poor relations with the government, which has moved to obstruct their activities. NGOs in more rural provinces have suffered most in recent years, due to escalating conflict and a decline in overall funding from Western donors for democracy projects, as well as Western officials' tendency to disproportionately allocate funding to Sana'a based organisations with a working knowledge of English due to restrictions on their movements beyond the capital and the relatively short duration of their postings. One of the largest NGOs is the Yemen Women's Union, led by Ambassador Ramzia Abbas al-Eryani, whose family is identified with the more secular, liberalising wing of the GPC. The YWU claims to have over 675,000 members and 163 centres in all governorates of the country working on issues such as women's education, human rights awareness, the promotion of micro-finance and family planning services. The YWU also runs a legal protection programme for women. The YWU has been widely praised for its dynamism but like other NGOs has suffered from Yemen's descent into regional conflict. It has also been vigorously opposed by the growing Salafi trend within the country, with conservative MPs such as the powerful Sheikh Abd al-Majid al-Zindani. Although YWU programmes are very impressive on paper, some interviewees expressed doubt regarding their depth, believing YWU's activities to be limited in range and scale.

The Democracy School led by Jamal Abdullah al-Shami in Sana'a is focused on youth civic education, working in all governorates and linked to NDI and IFES. The Democracy School also acts as a forum for

discussing the political reform agenda and monitoring elections. The School receives support from the EIDHR, Denmark, MEPI and FES. The UK has ceased its support in recent years. The Human Rights Information and Training Centre (HRITC), based in the city of Taiz, is one of Yemen's most active NGOs, receiving support from MEPI, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Foundation for the Future, and the Dutch government. The UK has recently ceased its support to HRITC. The Social and Democratic Forum (SDF) was established in 2005 and works on human rights, anti-corruption and gender issues. SDF also acts as the local representative of Transparency International. It relies upon funding from MEPI, FES, NED and the Arab Youth Network for Human Rights. SDF is a relatively small organisation with young leadership and lacks the funds to develop beyond the free time its volunteers can put in.

The human rights network HOOD is one of Yemen's most vocal, and by many accounts, its most effective NGOs, despite having a staff of just seven and a team of volunteer lawyers. Its director describes its mission as one of being 'transparent, strong and direct. We are not here to make people happy.' However, a dispute with the Yemeni government over registering as a legal entity meant that HOOD's legality was in question for many years before being finally resolved in 2009. Many European embassies and UN agencies have been concerned that HOOD was perceived as overtly aligned with the opposition parties and questions over its legal status meant that they refused to fund it. Hence HOOD received funding from only one European country, Denmark, working with the Danish Human Rights Institute. Despite its strong criticism of US policies on human rights, HOOD has a surprisingly good working relationship with MEPI officers for the region, and received a small grant to improve its website, as well as other small grants from the human rights organisations Article 19 and FrontLine.

The women's organisations Women Journalists Without Chains and the Sisters' Arab Forum for Human Rights have gained a strong reputation as vocal and well-organised NGOs, although they owe much to the forceful and charismatic respective leaderships. Both have suffered varying degrees of harassment by the government and Islamist groups and like most other NGOs much of their activism has been limited to Sana'a. Another women's NGO, SOUL, is perceived as strongly linked to the al-Islah opposition party, and works to provide economic development opportunities to Yemeni women as well as advocating a more active political role for women. Other important organisations that work on women's rights include the Media Women's Forum (MWF) and the Youth Leadership Development Foundation (YLDF).

Other important Yemeni democracy and human rights NGOs include the Civic Democratic Forum which works on legislative reform on freedom of association, receiving grants from ICNL and the European Commission among others, and the Yemeni Organisation for Defence of Rights and Democratic Freedoms (YDRF). YDRF leads on campaigning for the 'disappeared', the thousands of Yemenis believed to be arbitrarily arrested every year and detained without recourse to the courts and has called for the dissolution of the security courts in addition to wide-ranging reforms of Yemen's judicial system.¹⁷ The Political Development Forum (PDF) acts as a centre of intellectual thinking on Yemen's political system, although opposition activists tend to outnumber those supporting the government. The PDF publishes regular bulletins and reports on prospects for political reform.

The Yemen Journalist Syndicate is regarded with some scepticism by many within the trade for its alleged silence in the face of abuses against journalists from newspapers such as *al-Ayyam*, *al-Shura* and *al-Wasaf* which have all been closed or had journalists arrested in recent years.¹⁸ Consequently some journalists have established their own NGOs, such as the Center of Training and Protection of Journalists' Freedom which has received support from NDI and USAID as well as working with FES and Transparency International. They have also relied upon the Arab Network for Human Rights Information to publicise abuses against journalists.

¹⁷See Human Rights Watch Report, 24 October 2008, <http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2008/10/24/disappearances-and-arbitrary-arrests-armed-conflict-huthi-rebels-yemen-0>.

¹⁸See Reporters Without Borders – Yemen, <http://www.rsf.org/en-pays165-Yemen.html>

Local perspectives on external democracy assistance

A major donor weakness identified by interviewees was a lack of knowledge and institutional memory among donor representatives, not least due to relatively short-term deployments of personnel and limitations on movement due to security fears. Donors were also generally said to lack a long-term approach; few seemed to undertake follow-up studies on the efficacy of their efforts and were unwilling to tailor their programmes according to local advice. The agenda for democracy promotion is set in home capitals rather than through interaction between Embassy staff and local NGO leaders. There is also a widespread impression that European governments, with the exception of Denmark, succumb to Yemeni government pressure not to fund NGOs who have fallen foul of the government for upholding democratic principles. Activists suspect that short-term European security interests against al-Qaeda are prioritised over the need for Yemen to implement further reforms to address the roots of its internal conflicts.

Surprisingly given the US-led 'war on terror', the US government has continued to build relationships with a wide range of NGOs, including those deemed illegal or aligned firmly with the political opposition and its diplomats have, perhaps counterproductively, expressly declared democratic reform a means of countering terrorism in the long-term.¹⁹

Many interviewees were also concerned that numerous Western embassies were over-reliant upon the decision-making of less than impartial local staff who favoured some NGOs due to personal contacts rather than merit.²⁰ In addition, Western embassies proactively support projects aimed at easing some of the most serious threats to Yemen's stability and democratic evolution, namely the war in Saada and grievances in the South. Some NGO leaders were especially surprised that, given its historical connection with the region, the UK did not speak more strongly on behalf of injustices perpetrated against NGOs in Aden and elsewhere in the south. This was a criticism also levelled at international NGOs, who provided welcome relief but did not offer counsel or mediation on easing internal conflicts and, with a few honourable exceptions, did not apply sufficient pressure upon the government.

The US government has enjoyed a mixed reputation as a democracy donor in Yemen. Firstly, receiving US funding is in itself potentially dangerous for Yemeni NGOs, and there have been instances of Yemeni conservative Members of Parliament and newspapers 'outing' US-backed NGOs and accusing their directors of spying for the United States. The US Embassy has therefore tried to be relatively discreet in its funding practices. MEPI has been widely praised for the flexibility of its funding arrangements, training NGOs to meet reporting requirements where necessary and engaging with those which have been harassed by the government. MEPI has also been commended for offering sophisticated training programmes for public representatives and reform of human rights legislation. USAID governance and democracy promotion, although usually on a larger scale in terms of grants than the small MEPI grant system, are crucial to maintaining civil society activities and pressure on the government to implement reforms. However some interviewees felt that this support was overly linked to the US anti-terrorism campaign and that the US focused on the al-Qaeda threat from Yemen at the expense of other reform needs. Several interviewees also claimed that USAID had disproportionately funded a significant number of NGOs that were closely aligned with the President, rather than being independent entities.

EU funding for democracy and civil society promotion, while broadly welcomed in principle, was heavily criticised for being overly-complicated in practice. Interviewees also complained that many of the applications and reporting had to be completed in English rather than Arabic; immediately excluding the majority of NGOs who do not have this foreign language capacity. Many NGO representatives also voiced their concern regarding the transparency of the bidding process managed by the local European Commission delegation; some suspected that local staff were very biased towards a few NGOs at the expense of others. There was also general discontent over the role of the Ministry of Human Rights in selecting projects for the EU to fund, granting large sums to GONGOs rather than to more independent entities. A group of Yemeni NGOs recently took the step of complaining directly to the European Commission in Brussels that EU funds were not being granted in a consistent and transparent manner, but did not receive a response. According to some interviewees, many of the activities of the EC Human Rights Programme have been cancelled while it has

¹⁹Osman Mirghani, 'Interview with US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice', Asharq alawsat, 2 February 2006.

²⁰To what degree this is due to general chagrin at being overlooked for a grant or legitimate grievance is difficult to discern

²¹See European Union Electoral Observation Mission to Yemen – Presidential and Local Council Elections, http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/human_rights/election_observation/yemen/final_report_en.pdf

been difficult to implement others. An EUR 5.5 million EC electoral assistance project has been indefinitely suspended due to a lack of progress and engagement on the part of the government. A number of Yemeni NGOs were also disappointed by the relatively positive tone of the EU electoral observation mission in 2006, which deployed only to limited parts of the country due to security concerns, claiming that the government had broken all international norms on electoral standards and that the EU delegation did not listen to Yemeni democracy activists who had more widely monitored the polls: 'Its like getting 5 Fs for different sections of an exam but still getting an overall high mark'.²¹ The opposition party *al-Islah* claim they have a poor relationship with the EC delegation and accuse local representatives of being biased towards the government despite increasing human rights abuses and a clear disregard for democratic standards.

The UK has in the past limited its funding of democracy and governance initiatives to a few large projects and does not have a programme similar to that of MEPI, providing many small grants to Yemeni NGOs. Occasionally the Embassy supports some local initiatives such as the setting up by several NGOs of a 'corruption hotline'. The UK until recently was generally regarded as having neglected Yemen, with only one DFID representative based in the country and an annual aid budget hovering just above or below GBP £20 million. This has changed, as Yemen is now a 'fragile state' priority for UK foreign policy and overseas development assistance has almost doubled to GBP £50 million. However, the increased funding and personnel have mostly been allocated to poverty alleviation and the provision of basic services. Most interviewees regretted the lack of UK engagement on democracy assistance, although some expressed their appreciation that the UK Ambassador was raising the issues of human rights and corruption with the government at a senior level.

The Embassy of the Netherlands in Sana'a was regarded by many interviewees as being one of the most proactive on democracy promotion. The flexibility of the Dutch application process was also widely acknowledged and several NGOs found the Dutch Embassy to be the most approachable of the EU member states' embassies. Despite having no official Embassy to Yemen, the Danish government has provided extensive funding to UNDP activities and also facilitated an important human rights network run by the Danish Institute for Human Rights. However some activists, while appreciating the support offered by Denmark and the utility of the human rights network, found DIHR to be an over-bearing funder, viewing the local Yemeni NGOs 'more as workers than partners'. Nevertheless, the training and activities run by DIHR were generally viewed with overall satisfaction.

Although the German development agency GTZ was viewed favourably by many interviewees, there was a general disappointment that it did not engage more on governance in the past. This constituted a very small part of its activities, funding projects on anti-corruption and citizen's education on legal rights. GTZ previously ran several large governance projects but now has largely abandoned this commitment, believing its efforts have failed to produce tangible results. Many Yemeni democracy and human rights NGOs feel neglected by the German government, and believe that Germany's lack of support exacerbates French disinterest in democracy promotion. The French insistence on viewing human rights and the reform process as 'internal matters' for the Yemeni state was widely resented by NGO activists. Internal debates between EU member states opposed to the French stance and those in favour often result in watered-down statements or silence in the face of mounting human rights abuses, to the disillusionment of civil society activists. French scepticism towards European democracy promotion in Yemen also affects the work of the EC delegation which is caught between the differing views of its member states. This position contrasts to that of the US, which has been comparatively quick to condemn human rights abuses and urge the government to reform. However, this may be linked to a more negative perception of the Yemeni government and its alleged 'blind eye' to some al-Qaeda leaders, following the bombing of the USS Cole and Yemeni citizens' involvement in subsequent al-Qaeda attacks.²²

Opinions on UNDP programmes in Yemen have been varied. Some activists have complained about the inflexibility of UNDP funding rules for making grants to Yemeni NGOs, while others have accused the UNDP of working too closely with the government and GONGOs. The varying experiences and perceptions of UNDP programmes make it difficult to draw clear conclusions as to an overall perception of Yemeni civil society of its performance. There were some common questions on the consistency of its approach however,

²² Robert F. Worth, 'Yemen strikes difficult truce with terrorists', The Yemen Post, 4 February 2008.

with varying performances and views held by respective programme officers.

NDI has played a very prominent role in Yemen, not least due to its highly volatile relationship with the Yemeni government. Many civil society activists were concerned that NDI was playing an overtly political role and 'what Yemen did not need was another political party'. NDI is more of an implementor than a donor. However when NDI did make grants or establish partnerships, some NGO activists complained that the process was not transparent enough, that the same activists were always rewarded. Opinions were divided as to whether NDI's bold tribal mediation project in Marib and other governorates was positive or negative: some regarded it as a helpful interlocutor in easing the worst of Yemen's regional tensions, while others thought that NDI was acting more like a powerbroker than a mediator. Most activists however agreed that NDI was easily the most vocal international democracy institute in applying pressure on the government to live up to its reform commitments and that its absence from Yemen would be a considerable blow to prospects for further reform. Many interviewees felt that IFES had an important enabling presence for the prospect of future reforms, and that its departure would be a powerful sign that the reform process had effectively died. IFES has been criticised however by other interviewees for maintaining contacts with the Supreme Council for Elections and Referendums, despite the fact that it is clearly perceived as being dominated by government supporters and has lost even more legitimacy since the aborted elections of 2008.

The Friedrich Ebert Stiftung's activities in Yemen were regarded as generally positive, although some interviewees complained that FES had a tendency to micro-manage projects. Some also felt that progress on the FES electoral reform agenda had been gravely damaged by a lack of will on the part of the government to engage with them. The legal advice provided by the Washington DC based International Center for Non-Profit Law (ICNL) was regarded as very helpful by several activists interviewed. However, questions were asked regarding whether their projects on legislative reform in-country were getting value for money. The Foundation for the Future, a rare newcomer to democracy promotion in Yemen, is seen as a very welcome and open donor, as is the National Endowment for Democracy. By contrast, Transparency International is perceived to have neglected Yemen. NGOs have not received sufficient support from the EITI's Secretariat in Oslo since Yemen became a candidate country in 2007. The activities of the Club of Madrid, although limited in scope, were seen as valuable in that the high-profile democratic former presidents and prime ministers who led their dialogues with civil society gave exposure to the grave future challenges facing women's rights in Yemen. Of all the international NGOs working in Yemen, Save the Children received the most consistently positive feedback from interviewees. This is partly because the organisation works at a grass roots level to promote youth education, poverty reduction and humanitarian relief. Many interviewees also referred to the excellent management and relations which Save the Children enjoyed with local organisations.

Local Factors Weakening Donor Assistance

There are significant local factors that limit donor activities in Yemen, not least a propensity for violence and on-going insurgencies. However, donors and recipients interviewed mostly concurred that the greatest factor that limits the efficacy and scope for democracy assistance is a lack of will on the part of the government. A widely held view among the diplomatic community of Sana'a is that the government simply feels too unstable and is therefore keenly aware of the need not to threaten the prevailing interests of its supporters by undertaking difficult reforms. Reform in either direction risks alienating the GPC's base, whether that be the tribes, religious conservatives, the military or the business elite. The clout of liberals within the GPC is believed to be on the wane while pressure is building on the president to placate the Islamist constituency. Yemen's reform process has been top-down, its fate resting ultimately on the president's desire to keep a space for civil society open. This space is now narrowing considerably and donors do not see the point in investing resources in democracy assistance if the government has no political will to continue reforms.

Donors also see the Yemeni state as caught in a paradox: it is too weak to risk moving away from corrupt rentierism; yet it is this very misuse of dwindling energy revenues that alienates Yemen's youth from the government and corrupts tribal leaders, many of whom predominantly reside in Sana'a rather than their respective regions. Government contracts are not awarded transparently and Yemen's business elite depends upon the patronage of the state.

Prospects for judicial reform are increasingly limited; laws are at best vague and government interference is

common. New legislation such as the anti-terrorism law has been interpreted by some activists as an 'anti-democracy' law, as the government has increasingly rounded up its political opponents on charges of terrorist conspiracy and proceeded to incarcerate them indefinitely. Meanwhile the Ministry for Human Rights has effectively been sidelined having previously enjoyed a more prominent position in the Yemeni government. Many activists now see the Ministry's role as deflecting criticism away from the government rather than having the power to intervene to right wrongs committed by the security forces. The Yemeni parliament's record on upholding human rights is also quite poor. The Rapporteur of the Human Rights Committee is the son of the former Interior Minister, and the Chairman has also lost the trust of human rights activists, not least due to accusations of his personal involvement in human rights abuses as a tribal leader. Although it was only recently established, the Supreme National Authority to Combat Corruption (SNACC) has not yet made any significant findings against corruption by senior members of the government which would provide donors with some optimism that Yemen is serious about curbing corruption. The sudden and unexplained cancellation of the European-supported Forum for the Future in 2007 also led many donors to question the value of their efforts to support government-led reform.

Beyond a lack of political will, the complex Yemeni NGO landscape can also dissuade donors from maintaining funding there. The proliferation of small and weak NGOs rather than their consolidation has confused donors and many grantees struggle to live up to their expansive promises. Very few have the capacity to monitor projects and many attempt to duplicate the projects of others in order to gain the largesse of Western donors. Donors struggle to find suitable local partners to operate in the rural areas of the country even though that is where the majority of the Yemeni population is concentrated. Regional politics also makes donors reluctant to risk the government's ire by undertaking democracy projects in the neglected south of the country, lest this be seen as implicit support for secessionist movements. Due to the deteriorating security situation donors frequently prefer to pay exorbitant travel costs to fly Yemeni delegates to Amman or even further afield to receive training. The sheer cost of doing this compared to hosting a training seminar in Yemen reduces the value of funds spent on democracy assistance. A lack of follow-up in Yemen also means that donors have repeated the same programmes with the same actors. There is limited coordination of democracy assistance between the EU and the US. After repeated conferences and training seminars with little tangible benefit, donor fatigue has set in. Although the Ministry for Human Rights and Ministry for Planning and International Cooperation have generally been quite flexible in dealing with foreign donors, obstacles such as the requirement for NGOs to re-register annually with the government affect the relationship between donors and grantees. Moreover the government frequently tries to steer donors towards favoured NGOs, and their success in doing so has prompted many NGOs to try and cultivate good relations with the government to the detriment of perceptions regarding their independence. One frequently cited example is the case of an Italian NGO wishing to build a centre for recently released prisoners, which was directed by the Ministry for Social Affairs to purchase a site that, unbeknown to the NGO, was owned by a senior civil servant. Such allegations have fed donor mistrust of working with the government.

Conclusion

Yemen's contradictions and complexities have jaded the optimism of Western donors whose policies are now more informed by damage limitation. Western governments are unwilling to put pressure on President Saleh to adhere to his reform commitments during a time of a rising *al-Qaeda* threat. Such a short-termist approach risks ignoring the obvious irony that Yemen's woes are the fruit of a reform process that did not go far enough, that limited itself to cosmetic reform without actually ushering in the era of accountability and transparency necessary to lift Yemen out of its cycle of violence and poverty. Stagnant levels of poor governance have bred mistrust among many Yemenis citizens, precipitating violent protest and the retreat of the state behind tribal networks. Corruption and military involvement in the economy are seen as key conflict drivers that have led to the emergence of a mass protest movement in the south of the country.

Until the emergence of a more accountable state, Yemen will continue to be highly dependent upon external assistance indefinitely. Despite the indefinite postponement of parliamentary elections and increasing human rights abuses, it would be foolish to prematurely announce the death of prospects for democratic reform in Yemen. For all its structural and resource problems, Yemeni civil society is extremely active – the courage and resourcefulness of its best NGOs are a constant reminder of the potential of the country and its best

defence against encroachments against civil liberties. These organisations are heavily reliant upon the support they receive from Western democracy assistance. Donor exasperation with regards to a lack of political will on behalf of the Yemeni government does not mean that Yemeni NGOs should be blamed for these shortcomings. Rather there has been a lack of coherent pressure from donors to push the government to address the root causes of its many regional conflicts. If Yemen is to have a brighter future, its civil society will be a critical asset. To permit its demise due to the withdrawal of already limited funding would be highly counter-productive. However, this does not mean that donor practices should not be reformed. In considering the future of democracy assistance to Yemen the following recommendations by local activists might be taken into account:

- Democracy promotion must be undertaken not by template but by programmes that recognise the strength of the tribal system of governance within Yemen and work within this local context.
- The capacity of political parties is extremely weak. There are MPs from all the main the parties who wish to hold the government to account. Capacity building with the Yemeni parliament is urgently required.
- A high level dialogue with the Yemeni government is necessary in order to defuse increasing tensions in Yemen and the perceived further loss of legitimacy of the government. Civil society should be consulted during this process.
- Democracy projects need to reach out more to the youth at the grass-roots level and be integrated within wider reform of Yemen's educational system.
- Many democracy projects include too many conferences and not enough skills training. This needs to be reversed. The money spent on sending Yemeni activists to attend short events in Europe, North America or the Middle East should instead be used to build long-term training commitments in Yemen.
- 'Train the trainer' has its limitations as knowledge is frequently not passed on. It is seen as too much of a commodity. Training should be only the start of the process, not its end point. Donors should design follow-up activities to help its trainees maximise the benefit of their new skills.
- NGOs need to be able to apply for grants in Arabic. They also need more training and information on how to apply. Greater donor transparency is required during the bidding process.
- Small grants are much more effective than large amounts of money. Donors should recognise the limitations of Yemeni NGOs to spend large sums which can have a corrupting effect on their activities.
- Donors need to be more responsive to the needs of Yemeni NGOs and not the political trends of domestic capitals. Explicitly focusing on activities such as 'de-radicalisation' may be counter-productive if handled in the wrong way. Donors also need to be more flexible, realising that sometimes basic assistance such as building maintenance is also vital as well as programme funding.
- Donors need to ensure that they do not simply follow the government's guidance on which organisations they should fund but rather appeal to the government to stop harassing organisations who are defending human rights and democratic norms.
- The donor representatives need to go out into the field more to differentiate from 'real' and 'shell' NGOs. Donors need to put assistance where the population is – mostly in the rural areas.
- There is an obvious lack of donor coordination in Yemen. Donors should agree to harmonise their efforts under the auspices of the senior UN representative of the country, establishing a formal mechanism to share experiences on working with Yemeni partners. It is evident that coordination

among EU members states is generally on an ad hoc basis. Post Lisbon Treaty, the EU delegation in Sana'a should take a more robust role in harmonising European assistance. Meanwhile, Yemen Consultative Group meetings yield lofty communiqués on cooperation but these do not translate into improved coordination on the ground, most obviously between the GCC member states but also even among OECD DAC countries.

- Donors need to be aware of the consequences of a vast increase in funding and training for the military. The Yemeni security forces are widely believed to be a source, rather than a solution, to the problem of weak governance in the country, being heavily involved in human rights abuses and the misappropriation of economic assets. Democratic control of the armed forces by a civilian government should be a self-interested goal of donor policies in Yemen.

Appendix: Country Report Methodology

Scope and aims of this report

This report assesses external democracy assistance in one country according to the views of local democracy stakeholders.

The report does not aspire to provide an exhaustive record of external democracy assistance to the country in question. Neither does it aspire to be a representative survey among local civil society at large. The scope of this project allows reports to provide only a rough sketch of external democracy assistance to the country assessed, and of the tendencies of local civil society activists' views on the latter.

Sample of interviews

The report's findings are based on a set of personal interviews that were carried out by the author between spring and autumn 2009.

For each country report, between 40 and 60 in-country interviews were carried out. The mix of interviewees aimed to include, on the one hand, the most important international donors (governmental and non-governmental, from a wide range of geographic origins), and on the other hand, a broad sample of local democracy stakeholders that included human rights defenders, democracy activists, journalists, lawyers, political party representatives, women's rights activists, union leaders and other stakeholders substantially engaged in the promotion of democratic values and practices in their country. Wherever possible, the sample of interviewees included representatives from both urban and rural communities and a selection of stakeholders from a broad range of sectors. While governmental stakeholders were included in many of the samples, the focus was on non-governmental actors. Both actual and potential recipients of external democracy support were interviewed.

Donors

The term 'donor' is here understood as including governmental and non-governmental external actors providing financial and/or technical assistance in the fields of democracy, human rights, governance and related fields. Among all the donors active in the country, authors approached those governmental and non-governmental donors with the strongest presence in this sector, or which were referred to by recipients as particularly relevant actors in this regard. An exhaustive audit of all the donors active in this field/country is not aspired to as this exceeds the scope of this study. While many donors were very open and collaborative in granting interviews and providing and confirming information, others did not reply to our request or were not available for an interview within the timeframe of this study. While we sought to reconfirm all major factual affirmations on donor activities with the donors in question, not all donors responded to our request.

We do not work to a narrow or rigid definition of 'democracy support', but rather reflect donors', foundations' and recipients' own views of what counts and does not count as democracy assistance. The fact that this is contentious is part of the issues discussed in each report.

Anonymity

External democracy assistance to local activists is a delicate matter in all the countries assessed under this project. It is part of the nature of external democracy assistance that local non-governmental recipients, especially when openly opposed to the ruling establishment, fear for their reputation and safety when providing information on external assistance received to any outlet that will make these remarks public. In a similar vein, many donor representatives critical of their own or other donors' programmes will fear personal consequences when these critical attitudes are made public on a personal basis. In the interest of gathering a maximum of useful information from our interviewees and safeguarding their privacy and, indeed, security, we have ensured that all interviewees who requested to remain anonymous on a personal and/or institutional basis have done so.

Interview methodology

In order to carry out field work, authors were provided with a detailed research template that specified 7 areas of focus:

1. A brief historical background and the state of democracy in the country;
2. A short overview of donor activities;
3. A general overview of local views on impact of democracy aid projects on the micro, meso and macro levels (including best practices and variations of the local and international understandings of the concept of 'democracy');
4. Local views on specific factors that have weakened the impact of democracy aid;
5. Local views on diplomatic back-up to aid programmes (including conditionality; diplomatic engagement; donor coordination; relevance, quality, quantity and implementation of programmes, etc);
6. An illustration of the above dynamics in one or two key sectors of support;
7. A conclusion outlining the main tendencies of local views on external democracy assistance.

Along these lines, semi-structured one-on-one interviews were carried out by the authors in the country between spring and autumn of 2009.

Key sectors of support

Transitions to democracy are highly complex political, economic and social processes. No study of this scope could aspire to fully justice to them, or to external assistance to these processes. Aware of the limitations of our approach, we have encouraged authors to let their general assessment of local views on external democracy support be followed by a closer, slightly more detailed assessment of the dynamics in one or two key sectors of support. These were chosen by the respective authors according to their estimated relevance (positively or negatively) in the current democracy assistance panorama. In none of the cases does the choice of the illustrative key sectors suggest that there may not be other sectors that are equally important.