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### Local Environment

for Community
Accountability in Yemen

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Policy paper

# **Executive Summary**

This paper aimed at evaluating the general community environment necessary for implementing the community accountability principle in Yemen through analyzing to what extent the main pillars of accountability are available to adapt the community accountability's patterns, expressions and tools used to match with the Yemeni society. This paper has concluded that the general legislative framework of civil society's involvement in the development process including the community accountability is, to some extent, the suitable atmosphere for an effective partnership between the government and NGOs despite the fact that implementation of partnership between both parties is still limited and the community accountability has not been accepted by different institutions of State, with emphasis on the international NGOs' ability to implement community accountability using various tools in this regard although they faced difficulty in access to information and are greatly depending on external financing via non-government foreign organizations.

In view of the citizens' recognition of their inherent right to hold the government institutions accountable, their actual participation in this respect is still poor. The study has come up with numerous recommendations focusing on introducing the community accountability within the country in a way that suits the social, political and economic contest, being a substantial element of development, and also on training, capacity building and diversification of community accountability's mechanisms and tools as well as enhancement of local organizations' financial sustainability and minimizing dependence on external financing as far as possible.

# General Introduction

The economic, political and social changes have shown, at international, regional and local levels that the development process along with its different dimensions is no longer the issue of the State only as it cannot solely encounter the development challenges and meet the local population and communities' needs of necessary social services such as education, health, water and roads etc. This matter entails partnership between the State, private sector and civil community. Hence, the community accountability concept has emerged, being one of the modern concepts among the new trends of development. The community accountability concept is greatly based on the popular involvement of individuals in holding the decision-makers accountable depending on the relevant civil community institutions' organization, management and coordination.



On the other hand, the participatory method is based on the participation of relevant parties in evaluating and identifying the upcoming needs and trends though conducting focus group discussions and individual interviews with the concerned institutions' persons in charge.

Based on the World Bank 's (1) definition of community accountability which reads "A wide range of actions and tools through which citizens can use for State accountability. Also, the actions taken by the Government, civil community, media and other effective parties to encourage or facilitate such efforts". Arguably, the concept of community accountability is based on a number pillars, which collectively represent the general environment necessary for applying accountability. Such pillars are represented by the (government) public institutions responsive to accountability and associated freedom, easy access to information, effective and aware citizens, in addition to the active community organizations eligible for mediation between the citizens and the government institutions to enable build effective models for accountability that should observe the social environment and adapt the patterns of community accountability within a framework targeting the aspects of reform and building, and keeping away from destruction, overturning of general provisions and defamation of institutions and individuals.

Whether the community accountability pillars are available or not, they, nevertheless, represent the main indicators of public and community environment through which the community accountability principle can be applied as one of the main principles for good governance that meets the individuals' aspirations and community's needs.

The community accountability is important and one of the main tools for boosting the administration and quality of governance and enhancing the development efficiency by means of improving the public services, formulating policies of wide-range awareness, strengthening the citizen's voice and encouraging dialogue and partnership between the community's effective parties. Consequently, enhancement of citizens' ability to hold the public institutions, mainly the ones concerned with providing public services, accountable is a key factor for improving the quality of ultimate services in a way that meets their needs and expectations. This will also promote the trust between the citizens and their governments and, as a result, the public institutions performance is improved and the local citizens' participation in decision-making is increased. Furthermore, it will raise creativity with the service-rendering institutions, limit the rampant corruption and improve the decisions concerning allocation and distribution of resources among various sectors. Overall, such benefits and alike resulting from community accountability would further increase the political and social stabilization and realize national security.

This paper aims at evaluating the general community environment necessary for applying the community accountability principle in Yemen through analyzing whether or not the key pillars of accountability are available and how to pave the way for the patterns, expressions and tools of community accountability in accordance with the environment and nature of the Yemeni society using a compound methodology covering the descriptive analytical method based on evaluation and analysis of studies and reports and the previous experiments in the area of community accountability whether in Yemen or abroad.

#### Government Institutions' Response to Community Accountability

In order to measure, identify and assess the response of government institutions and public authorities to accountability, three main benchmarks will be focused on. The first one measures the extent of giving the chance to citizens to participate in public policies in view of their willingness and ability to build partnerships whereas the second one measures the degree of decentralization and delegation of authority to the local authorities in a way that enables them provide public services satisfactorily and deal with their suggestions and views. The third one, however, deals with the degree of government institutions' commitment to provide information on their activities and/or powers. Provision of data and information represents the real start of community accountability.

As for the citizens' and NGOs' participation at public level, it is apparent that the Republic of Yemen's constitution guarantees citizens' right to participate in political, economic, social and cultural life. It also guarantees the freedom of thought and expression of opinion by word, pen and image within the law. It further gives citizens the right to organize themselves in the political, vocational and trade-union fields and form scientific, cultural and social organizations as well as national federations(3)

In this context, and in implementation of the mutual responsibilities between Yemen's government and donors signed by Yemen's government in Riyadh Conference in September Y-1Y, the government approved the partnership document between the government and NGOs late in Y-17 as a general framework to regulate the relationship between the two parties aiming at providing a suitable environment for NGOs, being an active partner of the government, building bridges of trust between the two parties and upgrading the level of formulation, execution and assessment of policies and programs. It further aims at providing public services in a way that meets the community's needs and realizes the overall sustainable development goals through involving and representing the NGOs in setting, execution and assessment of general policies and maximizing the partnership parties' involvement in conducting studies and surveys in order to identify the community needs of various services and projects. Besides, the transparency principle should be activated and the data of various NGOs-related activities should be provided and be easily accessible to them.

In embodiment of State's announced trends for enhancing the development partnership with NGOs to realize an integrated system for community involvement in various development activities, a special chapter has been allocated for the civil society within the framework of economic and social development and poverty alleviation plans during the past years of 2015. Such plans aim at enhancing NGOs' participation in preparing, executing and following up the national strategies and poverty alleviation programs, realizing fair distribution through exploring a legal and legislative framework for the NGOs' network; consistent with their role as an active partner for the development process, building database for NGOs, improving their human capacities as well as establishing partnership relation between NGOs' network and government for budgeting, following-up of plans, policy formulation, allocation of resources adequate to do so and working on involving the NGOs' network within the local councils to identify needs and prepare, follow up and evaluate plans (4). Nevertheless, implementation and partnership were at the minimum levels and confined only to participation in building and following up the general policies and national plans.

As far as the decentralization and delegation of authority are concerned, the Local Council Law has also emphasized the principle of administrative and financial decentralization through maximizing the popular participation in decision-making and local affairs administration in various areas of economic, social and cultural development. The local councils can suggest programs, plans and investment budgets for the administrative units, exercise their roles in implementing plans and development programs, popular monitoring, supervising the executive bodies of local authority and holding them responsible and accountable. The law also entrusts the elected local councils and administrative units with development of infrastructure and provision of public services. (6)

Finally and as for the government institutions' commitment to provide information on their activities and powers is concerned, the Access to Information Act secures and facilitates the citizen's right to get information without delay, maximizes exercise of rights and freedoms, enhances transparency, increases informed and responsible participation, enables the community develop capacity to further benefit from information and grants every natural and legal person the right to request for information<sup>(8)</sup>

<sup>(2)</sup> Constitution of Republic of Yemen, article 41

<sup>(4)</sup> Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation – 4th Five-Year Plan Project for Economic and Social Development and Poverty Alleviation, 2015-2011

<sup>(5)</sup> Law No 4 of 2000 regarding Local Authority, article 4

<sup>(6)</sup> Previous reference, article 14, clause C

<sup>(7)</sup> Law No. 13 of 2012 regarding Access to Information, article 3

<sup>(8)</sup> Previous reference, article 7

In view of above, the general legislative framework, which regulates the civil society's participation in the development process including the community accountability and what was done by the ex-governments, particularly before 2015, constitutes a favorable environment, to some extent, for an effective participation between the government and NGOs in all fields of development. However, the actual situation and practical application of partnership between the two parties, including the partnership in community accountability suggests a limited experiment and great challenges in the face of the partnership-related public environment. Many reports and studies evaluating actual civil society in Yemen, besides the outcomes of interviews conducted via this paper with a number of government parties and NGOs show that there are limited participations from the side of citizens and beneficiaries of NGOs in policy-making for various government authorities at both local and central levels. However, such limited participations fade away when preparing budgets for these authorities or following up such budgets and entirely disappear when questioning about the results of services rendered by the central and local authorities. This is due to enforcement of laws that

regulate the NGOs' activities randomly and selectively and, rather, repressively in some cases, especially since the end of 2014, under a conflict over power and associated circumstances thereof. As a result, it limited NGOs' participation in decision-making and building and design of public policies. (9)

When asking to which extent the State's institutions accept the community accountability principle, most of NGOs pointed out that various institutions of State refuse the community accountability principle by 62.5% against 25% of NGOs, which viewed that the State's institutions do not refuse this principle. According to the NGOs' viewpoint, the State's institutions refusal of the community accountability principle was because of the widespread financial and administrative corruption in government's institutions, critical political, security and social conditions due to the conflict and war, and the allergy towards the word 'accountability' demanded to be changed into 'community dialogue', in addition to the poor community awareness about the importance of accountability, being one of the political rights guaranteed by constitutions and laws in force.

<sup>(9)</sup> Sustainability Index of NGOs – 2017

<sup>(10)</sup> Mansour Al-Basheeri, Najwa Noman, Tawfeeq Al-Janad: Reality of Community Accountability in Yemen, Resonate! Yemen, Sana'a, August 2018

<sup>(11)</sup> For example, authorities of Marib asked Marib Dam Organization to change the name of its project (Community Accountability Tent) to (Community Dialogue Tent) while maintaining the program content, targeting decision-makers with gathering leaders

As for the degree of decentralization and delegation of authorities to the local authorities in a way that enables them provide public services satisfactorily and deal with their suggestions and views and in spite of the positive reactions of many local councils with the NGOs that organized community accountability-related activities in a number of governorates and districts, however, it has been noticed that the local councils' ability to deal positively with the NGOs and citizens regarding public service-related issues and promoting their quality are still limited due to the discrepancy between local councils law and many other laws. As a result, it led to a conflict of jurisdictions between the local and central authorities in terms of distribution of roles and taking responsibility for providing services, in addition to the local councils' limited financial local resources, limited financial independence and the central units' control over major part of public investment funding. The recent developments of conflict and war since 2015 have minimized the local councils' role in development and provision of public services for citizens due to the increasing changes of local leaders by the dispute parties, plans of projects and services were hampered due to lack of budgets necessary for implementing development programs, failure to collect the financial revenues because of conflict and war and some influential parties' control over major part of such resources.

Finally, in view of the government institutions' commitment to provide information on their activities and/or powers, most of the government institutions do not have guidebooks to help the beneficiaries on how to deal with them and make their service-related information and functions available. They, rather, work according to unwritten road maps represented by unit heads' directives. This matter, however, has made it difficult to hold them accountable for not having information on their functions. A previous study (14) showed that only 5 ministries have modern information networks of admin information systems regarding payrolls 75%, finance system 67.7%, personnel data 60%. According to the study, out of 26 ministries covered by the study, only 16.2% were not connected online with their branches in other governorates and did not follow the electronic filing system to gather data and information and retrieve them easily 18.1%.

Arguably, there is a rigid structure in the Yemeni government institutions that does not cope with the modern developments in field of information due to the absence of information-related strategies, resistance of senior managements to establish electronic systems at their institutions, weak IT development and training programs of personnel, some IT centers confine their services to provide audience with outgoing and incoming correspondences, lack of information systems for their own, in addition to the fact that many government officials deliberately withhold and hide lots of information pertaining to issues of public interest.

<sup>(12)</sup> Regional Center of UNDP, Cairo - Sharing Opinion and Accountability for Improved Service Delivery - October 2010

<sup>(13)</sup> Waddah Al-Awlaqi, Majed Al-Madhaji: Challenges of Local Governance in the Midst of War. Reconceptualization of Yemen's Economy Project, July 2018

<sup>(14)</sup> Murad Al-Awadhi, Reality of Information System in Some Government Institutions, Republic of Yemen, a Study Presented in Seminar on Reality of Information in Yemen, December 2013

<sup>(15)</sup> Ghamdan Al-Dagai, Constraints of Access to Information in Yemen, available on http://adenobservor.com/read-news

### Non-Government Organizations(NGOs)

## are able to

### Implement Community Accountability

The NGOs in Yemen are among the most viable and active organizations in the Middle East and North Africa, particularly after 2001 and the subsequent transitional period up to 2015. These years have created a new reality for the NGOs through which they could participate constructively with the government and donors in the programs of economic and social development and various national reforms including community accountability-related issues. Many NGOs implemented various accountability-related activities and functions during the period from 2012-2014 covering improvement of partnership aspects with the local authorities with a view to improving services, being provided by such authorities to citizens and promoting concepts of accountability among people and other NGOs and peace-building projects, in addition to promoting democracy and other projects.

Despite the important previous experiments of community accountability practices and other activities and functions implemented by NGOs during the years before war in Yemen or during the years of war in which the economic, social and developmental role of such institutions at both local and central levels, the NGOs' ability to implement various activities and functions of community accountability require a number of standards through which this ability can be identified. The most important standards from the writer's point of view are as follows:



To have a clear view



Able to Access to information

Able to mobilize people, convey their voices and negotiate to seek government authorities' response and use several tools to address audience



Type of funding

As for the 1st standard and in view of the outcomes of 2018 community accountability study in Yemen, whose writer was one of its members, as well as the interviews conducted with a number of NGOs, which implemented some community accountability-related activities and functions, it is apparent that all NGOs (100%) have their own rules and regulations and this is in itself a positive indicator and around half of these organizations have objectives and provisions pertaining to participation and general accountability within their bylaws despite of the newness of this community accountability concept in both Yemen and the region. In addition, about 87.5% of the total number of NGOs' staff are well-versed in community accountability concept. They gained this knowledge through training courses, capacity building of each organization staff member and, nevertheless, the recent war has caused unstable security and political environment and rendered the NGOs' strategic views and long-term plans impractical and made lots of NGOs guit their plans and programs and move to temporary works of humanitarian relief and other programs.

As far the NGOs' ability of access to information is concerned, majority of the interviewed organizations (63%) stated that it was difficult for them to have information in Yemen for many reasons, mostly attributed to government officials' non-response to provide NGOs with the data and information they need, in addition to the fact that most of the government authorities, particularly at local level, do not have websites on internet. This problem has further been complicated during the recent years of war due to the power disconnection at majority of government institutions and absence of their personnel. On the other hand, the limited number of admin cadres at majority of these NGOs and lack of funding sources are among the constraints in the face of NGOs when seeking access to information.

<sup>(16)</sup> This information was obtained from interviews conducted by the researcher with a wide range of NGOs, which implemented community accountability-related projects

<sup>(17)</sup> Mansour Al-Basheeri and others, Reality of Community Accountability in Yemen, reference previously mentioned

<sup>(18)</sup> Sustainability Index of NGOs, previously mentioned

As for the 3rd standard regarding the NGOs' ability to mobilize people, convey their voices and negotiate to seek government authorities' response, the outcomes of study analysis, which dealt with the civil society in Yemen, showed that the NGOs in Yemen are among the most viable and active organizations in the region . These NGOs operates in different and various developmental and humanitarian fields covering education, health, human rights, freedoms, women, youths and other sectors. According to interviews conducted, the NGOs had used different and various tools to mobilize audience and raise their awareness on issues related to development, human rights and humanitarian relief. As far as the community accountability is concerned, a set of tools were used; varying between community meetings, consultation sessions, community radios, questionnaires, community score cards, citizen charter, training sessions, brochures etc. This suggests high capability of NGOs in diversifying their programs and various tools to influence citizens and mobilizing them to support the issues adopted.

Concerning the funding, which is considered as one of the main indicators of continuity and sustainability of various activities of NGOs, the outcomes of interviews conducted with NGOs working in the area of community accountability showed that around 99% of NGOs depend on external funding via non-government foreign organizations to implement their different activities whether related to accountability or other activities. Thus, it is a serious indictor and great challenge before the civil society in Yemen as the foreign funding is mostly of a short-term and unsustainable fund and most likely reflects foreign organizations' approaches and views towards priority issues. As a result, local organizations are vulnerable to the foreign non-government organizations' views and agendas, which may not necessarily go in line with the priorities and needs of development and national issues. Furthermore, depending on external financing threaten the civil society's activities to stop in case the external financing is stopped.

<sup>(19)</sup> World Bank – Pre-assessment document of Partnership Project between government and NGOs – October 2013 and also Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation – Overall Framework of Partnership between Government and NGOs – September 2013

## Positive and Aware Citizens

The citizens ranked third, beside the government organizations and NGOs in implementing the community accountability, being the main stakeholders and No. 1 beneficiaries of public services and ultimate goal of government policies and budgets. Therefore, the citizens' awareness of political rights, which should be provided by the government, and their knowledge of ways and means of holding such organizations and their officials accountable are a significant step in making NGOs and other community-based mechanisms successful so as to save the community accountability principle in a way that contributes to the development of services rendered to citizens and enhancement of trust in government institutions and, finally achievement of the desired community peace and security.

Based on the outcomes of the aforementioned study regarding the actual community accountability in Yemen and its opinion questionnaire covering six Yemeni governorates, the degree of citizens' awareness of community accountability can be identified through the questionnaire outcomes, which show a high percentage of citizens (90%) considering the community accountability principle as one of the citizens' rights whereas the ones who are fully aware of their rights that should be provided by the government were 73%. Furthermore, around 72.3% of the target group view that each citizen is responsible for raising concerns for rectifying the government institutions' practices whereas 82.8% thereof view that the citizens themselves are responsible for demanding improvement of services rendered by the government units.

In view of the positive outcomes of citizens' awareness of their inherent rights to hold the government accountable and their viable and important role in demanding their rights, the outcomes of the said questionnaire and study

suggest an actual limited exercise of community accountability in Yemen. According to the outcomes, 83.5% of the sample group that said thev did not attend any accountability-related training courses or activities before. As far as the availability of organizations and civil society initiatives concerned with community accountability is concerned, it is apparent that 64.4% of the target group do not know about the availability of such organizations whereas 35.6% only confirmed their knowledge of same. That is to say the relationship between the citizens and accountability-related organizations is weak. The study reveals that the citizens' participation in general accountability is still poor in terms of actual exercise as 26.6% of the target group participated in anti-corruption-related activities and demanded their rights from the government authorities without being aware of the community accountability i.e. majority of the sample group (73.4%) did not participated in any anti-corruption-related activities.

On the other hand, and in a simple overview of a number of local and international indicators that measure out the political, economic, social and cultural reality in Yemen, the degree of citizens' awareness of their rights and ability to participate in community activities and demand such rights from the official authorities can be evaluated. The local reports suggest a high percentage of illiteracy in Yemen reaching a record of 47% of the total population and the poverty raise to a percentage of 52% of population(22) Furthermore, the international reports show that Yemen is among the group of least developed countries with a human development index of (0.452), ranking 168 out of 188 countries. Also, Yemen is among the group of non-free countries in accordance with the freedom index (14/100) and among the group of most corrupt countries ranking 176 out of 180 countries. That is to say the Yemeni citizen has a limited awareness and ability to demand his various rights and there are many issues and challenges that limit his ability in this regard.

<sup>(20)</sup> The sample group members were around 812 in Sana'a city and governorates of Aden,

Hadhramout, Hodeida, Ibb and Marib
(21) Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation – 2013 National Human Development Report

<sup>(22)</sup> World Bank – Yemen Economic Prospects Report - October 2018

<sup>(23)</sup> UNDP - 2016 Human Development Report

<sup>(24(</sup> Transparency International – 2018 Corruption Perceptions Report

## Looking Ahead

#### to Enhance Reality of Community Accountability in Yemen

Looking ahead to enhance reality of community accountability in Yemen depends on the available strength elements at the current community accountability environment and how to overcome the challenges and obstacles it faces. Arguably, there is a good constitutional and legal framework that enables both NGOs and citizens enhance the local practices of community accountability, particularly, in terms of laws related to community accountability and access to information. This matter requires reform of the government practices pertaining to enforcement of such laws through raising awareness, introducing accountability principle and its importance for both government institutions and citizens and/or through training and building capacity of government institutions in the areas of transparency, accountability and their associated information infrastructure in a way that enables them quickly interact with the rest of partners.

The previous years showed how important it was the partnership between various institutions of State in one hand and the NGOs on the other hand, especially under the circumstances of conflict and war. The NGOs filled a considerable portion of void left by the low level of performance of various institutions of State in terms of social care and provision of basic services for citizens and the most serious affected groups of society. Consequently, this partnership can be used to enhance and strengthen the community accountability by taking advantage of the atmosphere of trust between the government institutions and NGOs as well as the trust gained by NGOs with both donors and citizens and shifting the community accountability framework from accountability of inputs (policies and services) to the accountability of outputs quality and achievement of their objectives.

Despite the fact that may government institutions and their officials are allergic of the word 'accountability,' a general acceptance to the community accountability was noticed, especially by the service institutions after great efforts, exerted by NGOs in introducing and raising awareness on community accountability with government institutions and removing the pitfalls and shortcomings-related concerns. As such, adaptation of expressions, practices and tools of community accountability, making them convergent to the nature of Yemeni local people and environment and compatible with the essence of accountability are extremely important for both government institutions and NGOs.

Together with the various government institutions and local people and in order to enhance the community accountability environment in Yemen, the NGOs are in a dire need for promoting their relations with various media, being the capable of spreading the community accountability concept in a better and faster manner, as this concept is relatively new and limited among both local people and government officials. In this connection, social media and information technology can be used for broadcasting such concepts to the largest population possible.

Financing has been and still one of the most important requirements for implementing various views and strategies and in case of absence or not being sustainable, the implementers whether individuals, organizations and governments will face one of the biggest challenges. Thus, it is important to enhance the local and self-financing sources of NGOs and minimize, as much as possible, depending on the external financing to ensure working according to national priorities based on the real needs of community.

## **Recommendations**



The NGOs operating in accountability in partnership with relevant government and foreign organizations should work on introducing the community accountability within the country in a way that suits the social, political and economic environment and ensure it is a substantial element of development.



The NGOs in partnership with the relevant international organizations should focus on training, capacity building and experience necessary for local officials' and citizens' qualifying to enable them shoulder their responsibilities, perform activities with self-confidence through their various tools and further promote their independence pertaining to decision and public policy making, focusing on local authorities, being close the citizens, and non-ignorance of the community leaders, who are active in the target environment to prevent any impediment in the face of their activities and projects.



The NGOs concerned with accountability should diversify their applied mechanisms and tools of accountability and not merely use certain specific tools. The practices of community accountability should be within organized initiatives not individual ones, taking into account the great role of media and press in introducing an alternative view for the audience using information technology, telecommunications and social media to promote the role of journalists (bloggers, field reports and famous websites).



The concerned government authorities in partnership with the NGOs should work on integrating the concepts of community accountability in the school curriculum and government's media and guidance programs.



The international organizations and donors should encourage and support the government institutions to enter into agreements with international organizations concerned with community accountability-related issues and benefit from the previous experiments such as the experiment of Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative.



The local NGOs should work on enhancing their financial sustainability by depending mostly on self-resource development and local donations and reducing dependence on external financing as far as possible.

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#### Appendix: List of Interviewed Parties:

- 1- Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation
- 2- Ministry of Finance
- 3- Central Organization for Control and Audit
- 4- Social Fund for Development
- 5- Attanweer Social Development Foundation
  - Ibb governorate

- 6- Qadra Foundation for Human Investment Aden
- 7- Khadija Development Foundation Ibb
- 8- Marib Dam Foundation for Social Development Marib
- 9- Youth Leadership Development Foundation Sana'a

#### عن مؤسسة رنين! اليمن

رنين!اليمـن مؤسسـة غيـر حكوميـة غيـر ربحيـة بــدأت بمزاولــة أعمالهــا كمبــادرة شــبابية فــي ينايــر ٢٠١٠ وســجلت رســمياً فــى وزارة الشــؤون اللجتماعيـة في أغسـطس ٢٠١١. تعمل المؤسسـة علـی خلـق منـاخ سیاسـی جدیــد یعنــی بتطویــر سياســات أكثــر اســتدامة، ويقبــل الشــباب كأحــد الشــركاء الأساســيين فــي تطويــر وتقييــم السياســات العامــة. تهــدفُ رنيــن اليمــن إلــى تقديم أصوات الشباب اليمني لخطاب السياسة العامــة فــي اليمــن ودعــم العمــل الشــبابي ذات البعد الوطني والدولي.

الجمهورية اليمنية - صنعاء - شارع حدة

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