



Egyptian women show their ink-stained thumbs after voting in Cairo in March 2011. Fifteen Egyptian groups called on Wednesday for women's rights to be guaranteed in the new constitution, after a popular uprising that toppled the regime paved the way for a new charter.

*by Abeer El Saady & Mike Jempson*

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**Under the guidance of MDI trainers**, fifteen young online and print journalists in Egypt are developing new angles on the long awaited elections. Operating under effective martial-law, where even querying the timing of the ballot could land them in a military court, they have set out to discover what the vote might mean to the country's marginalised groups. Their editors have promised to publish the features they produce.

This is the first group of journalists which will, over the following 2 years, produce some 100 articles voicing the Egyptians who have never had an opportunity to have a say about their common future. The story production is part of a broader MDI programme funded by SIDA.

The thriving 'informal economy' encompasses many different sectors of society who lack recognition or representation. The constitution guarantees that 'farmers and workers' should hold 50% of the seats in the People's Assembly (lower house) but this does not include artisans and craftspeople, for example, or street traders, rubbish collectors and the homeless. Some religious groups, including Sufis, the Ba'hai, and Copts also face discrimination within democratic process, and some tribes inhabiting Egypt's vast border areas face total exclusion.

The journalists will be placing the predicament of these groups in the public eye often for the first time. The hope to have their pieces placed in the media houses they come from.

After an editorial meeting to discuss their progress, *Akhbar El-Yom* staffer Abeer Saady who is mentoring the journalists, said "They are discovering new things about society we never knew before."

Some are giving a voice to those silenced by tradition, prejudice or poverty – Nubian women forbidden to leave their homes in Upper Egypt, rural teenagers who have no access to the internet, and people with disabilities or disfigurements which put them outside 'polite society'.

Right from the start the journalists face hostility from the police and suspicion from their chosen subjects. For the most part mainstream media has been regarded as the mouthpiece of the regime, past and present. Yet, any journalist seeking to give voice to the dispossessed risks harassment and accusations of disloyalty. After the storming of the Israeli Embassy on 9 September the Military Council renewed its emergency powers and shut down Al Jazeera's Cairo office in what is seen as a tough stand against the media.



**Copts showing their anger over the lack of protection by Egyptian security forces against religious motivated attacks on the Coptic Christian minority in Egypt, Alexandria, that killed 21 people on 1 January 2011**

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