

RESEARCH PAPER

# WOMEN IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND PEACEBUILDING IN YEMEN



**MAHA AWADH AND NURIA SHUJA'ADEEN**  
**EDITED BY SAWSAN AL- REFAEI**

JANUARY 2019

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DECEMBER 2018





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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Prior to the crisis in 2014, according to the Gender Gap Index ([www.weforum.org](http://www.weforum.org)), Yemen was ranked lowest in the world in terms of gender equality (142<sup>nd</sup> out of 142 countries) and it remained so in 2017 (144<sup>th</sup> out of 144). The war and conflict has added additional layers of vulnerability for women and girls, exacerbating existing gender inequalities that limit access to basic services and livelihood opportunities, and contributing to violence against women. Women and girls in Yemen have carried the brunt of the resulting poverty, violence and weakened community resilience. Widespread displacement has also affected the safety of women and girls, as has a growing reliance on negative coping mechanisms that include extreme forms of child labour, begging and child marriages.

Despite prevailing traditional gender norms and relations in Yemen, this paper shows evidence of positive changes in the roles and responsibilities of women and men as a direct consequence of the prolonged conflict and war, including changing perceptions of so-called appropriate behaviour. There is also evidence of an increased appreciation of women's roles in responding to the effects of conflict, both inside homes and outside in communities.

The report unfolds the multiple challenges women face to play a meaningful role in peacebuilding and sets out current patterns of women's involvement in peacebuilding, including women's role in tribal governorates. Stories told by women interviewed for the

purpose of this report offer evidence on how women utilise the privileges of customary law and tradition to perform peacebuilding activities during conflict. In many cases, women engaging in peacebuilding activities have leveraged their socially protected status being categorised as *du'afa*<sup>1</sup> (meaning weak and perceived as defenceless or unarmed) to further their peacebuilding and conflict resolution efforts.

Data from key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) highlights women's dual negative and positive roles during conflict. Although there are instances where women instigate conflict by pushing their male relatives to take revenge or contribute to causes they deem just, this research and that of others indicate that women are more often found engaging with their families and communities to resolve conflicts and prevent further bloodshed and violence.

Field data shows that in governorates where women were historically engaged in peacebuilding, they have continued to play this role since the eruption of the most recent phase of the conflict in 2015. Conversely, in areas where generally women did not have an active role, they typically play a very limited role during more complex times.

This report, while documenting success stories and Yemeni women's roles in various levels of conflict resolution and peace, also proposes advocacy strategies to influence communities and key power brokers.

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1 Cf. Definition in the Lexicon of Yemeni Arabic Terminology section.

# افتتاحية

## بقلم مارتا كولبورن، المدير القطري لبرنامج هيئة الأمم المتحدة للمرأة في اليمن

• «النساء اليمنيات يبنين السلام في زمن الحرب» وهو فيديو وثائقي مدته ١٠ دقائق تم إنتاجه من قبل هيئة الأمم المتحدة للمرأة بالعمل مع نهج للاستشارات وأفلام قمره (أغسطس ٢٠١٨م) والذي يعرض قصص أربع نساء يتحلين بالشجاعة، ويسلط الضوء على جهودهن الناجحة لحل الصراعات وتقريب وجهات النظر، ويبرز الفلم الطريقة التي تعمل بها النساء كقدوة لمجتمعاتهن خلال فترة الصراع والأزمة الإنسانية الحالية في اليمن.<sup>1</sup>

وبهدف تعزيز هذه الدراسة، عمدت هيئة الأمم المتحدة للمرأة إلى دعم نتائج الدراسة من مصادر أخرى بما في ذلك من الملفات والاقتراسات الناتجة عن المقابلات مع عضوات التوافق النسوي اليمني للأمن والسلام المعروف اختصاراً باسم «التوافق»<sup>2</sup>. وقد تم ذلك بغية الجمع بين مصادر المعلومات لتسليط ضوء بشكل أكبر على صناعات السلام. ومع اشتداد وطأة الحرب وسعي الكثير من الأطراف في مختلف أنحاء العالم لتقديم الدعم والاستفادة والربح من الحرب، لا يبقى اليمينيون صامتون في وجه هذا الدمار. ففي مختلف أنحاء البلد، يسعى عدد لا يحصى من اليمنيين رجالاً ونساءً، شباباً وشابات، أولاداً وفتيات لبناء السلام في بيوتهم ومجتمعاتهم، وهم يفعلون ذلك بطرق إبداعية وابتكارية متحدين كافة المصاعب والشدائد. حيث تسعى هذه الدراسة لتسليط الضوء على كيفية مساهمة النساء اليمنيات في الأدوار الرئيسية لحل الصراع وبناء السلام.

## ملخص تنفيذي

قبل أزمة العام ٢٠١٤م، وبحسب مؤشر الفجوة بين الجنسين (<http://www.weforum.org>) كانت اليمن تُصنف باعتبارها أقل الدول في العالم من حيث المساواة بين الجنسين (المرتبة ١٤٢ من أصل ١٤٢ دولة) وبقيت اليمن على حالها في عام ٢٠١٧ (المرتبة ١٤٤ من أصل ١٤٤ دولة). لقد أضاف الصراع والحرب أبعداً أخرى من الهشاشة والضعف في أوساط النساء والفتيات، وفاقم من حالة عدم المساواة بين الجنسين التي تحد من قدرة النساء على الوصول إلى الخدمات الأساسية وفرص العيش، وساهم في تغذية العنف ضد النساء في اليمن. لقد تحملت النساء والفتيات في اليمن من مآسي الفقر والعنف وضعف قدرة المجتمعات على الصمود، كما أضاف النزوح بسبب الصراع تأثيرات سلبية على سلامة النساء والفتيات، وفاقم من

<http://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2018/9/1-women-set-examples-for-peacebuilding-in-yemen>

<sup>2</sup> أنشئ التوافق النسوي اليمني من أجل الأمن والسلام (توافق) كمنصة شاملة للمرأة اليمنية من أجل تنظيم ومناقشة وإيجاد أرضية مشتركة والاستفادة من أصواتها الجماعية للدعوة إلى استمرار مشاركة المرأة في صنع القرار العام. يهدف التوافق إلى: إنهاء العنف؛ تحسين ظروف المعيشة، وتعزيز مشاركة المرأة في عملية السلام. وتضم قائمة أعضاء «التوافق» قيادات نسوية تمثل مختلف الأحزاب السياسية، والمجتمع المدني، والنشطاء الاجتماعيين من داخل اليمن وخارجه. ويشارك في تمويل «التوافق» كل من وزارة الخارجية الهولندية والمكتب البريطاني للكونموند.

تُنشر هذه الدراسة في لحظات فارقة حيث تجري مفاوضات السلام التي استؤنفت في ظل استمرار الحرب لأكثر من ثلاث سنوات في اليمن. إنها أيضاً لحظة تغلغل فيها أثر الحرب والصراع في الوضع الإنساني، وفي تفاصيل الحياة اليومية وأرواح الشعب اليمني. وأمام التدهور الكارثي للوضع الإنساني، تعالت الأصوات المحلية والدولية مؤخراً بضرورة العودة إلى عملية السلام في اليمن، والتي نتطلع أن تكون خطوة ثابتة نحو تحقيق السلام المستدام لليمن. وهنا يهمننا الإشارة أن دور النساء في بناء السلام وحل الصراعات هو دور يستحق الدعم والإشادة.

حيث توضح هذه الدراسة (في الصفحة ١٨ منها) أنه وعندما يتم إشراك النساء في عمليات السلام تزداد فرص أن يكون السلام أكثر استدامة. في مشاورات السلام التي عقدت في جنيف وفي السويد، حضرت ثمان نساء كمستشارات لدى مكتب المبعوث الخاص للأمم المتحدة إلى اليمن، وفي ذلك إشارة إيجابية إلى أن إشراك النساء في عملية السلام يعد أمر ذو أهمية بالغة، ويجب أن يبقى من أولى أولويات كافة الأطراف الساعية لإنهاء الصراع في اليمن. إن السلام الشامل لن يتحقق ببساطة من دون وجود المرأة ومنظورها على طاولة السلام.

كما تم مؤخراً تنفيذ العديد من الدراسات التي تركز على موضوع النساء وحل الصراعات وبناء السلام في اليمن (أنظر للملحق هـ. للاطلاع على المصادر التي تمت الاستعانة بها)، بما في ذلك دراستين منشورتين مؤخراً من جانب هيئة الأمم المتحدة للمرأة توثقان دور صناعات السلام في اليمن وتُمثلان إضافة للأدبيات الموجودة وتتم الإشارة إليهما في هذه الدراسة:

• «نساء على الخط الأمامي لحل الصراع والمفاوضات: أصوات من المجتمع: من سوريا والعراق واليمن» للكاتبتين حنان طبارة وجاريت روبين (يونيو ٢٠١٨م). وتعزز هذه الدراسة الحالية النتائج التي صدرت عن الدراسة الإقليمية بما في ذلك النتائج التالية:

○ في السياقات الأمنية الهشة، تضطر النساء عادة إلى إخفاء هوياتهن والالتزام بالسرية كطريقة للعمل لحماية أنفسهن وأعمالهن؛

○ الصلات والروابط الشخصية والمركز الاجتماعي هي مصادر أساسية تستمد منها النساء الشرعية، التي تستخدمها العديد من النساء كأداة - وليس كمرتكز - لبناء الثقة والمصداقية والوصول؛

○ تستخدم النساء في بعض الأحيان التنميط الجندي لمصلحتهن، وعلى الأخص عند التعامل مع الأطراف المسلحة.

اعتماد السكان على طرق التكيف السلبية التي تشمل أسوأ أشكال عمالة الأطفال والشحادة وزواج الأطفال.

وعلى الرغم من العادات والعلاقات التقليدية في اليمن فيما يتعلق بالنوع الاجتماعي، إلا أن هذا التقرير يُظهر أن هناك تغييرات إيجابية في الأدوار والمسؤوليات التي يتولاها النساء والرجال كنتيجة مباشرة لاستمرار الحرب والصراع، بما في ذلك تغير الانطباعات حول ما يسمى بالسلوك اللائق. كما أن هناك أدلة على زيادة التقدير والاحترام لدور النساء في مواجهة آثار الصراع سواء داخل المنزل أو في المجتمعات عموماً.

ويكشف التقرير التحديات المختلفة التي تواجه النساء في سعيهن للعب دور فاعل في بناء السلام، ويحدد الأنماط الحالية لمشاركة النساء في عملية صنع السلام، بما في ذلك دور النساء في المحافظات القبلية. تكشف القصص التي ترويها النساء اللواتي تمت مقابلتهن لأغراض كتابة هذا التقرير عن كيفية قيام النساء بالاستفادة مما تحظى به من ميزات في الأعراف والتقاليد لتنفيذ أنشطة بناء السلام أثناء النزاع. وفي العديد من الحالات استفادت النساء المنخرطات في أنشطة بناء السلام من الحماية الاجتماعية التي توفر لهن باعتبارهن من «الضعفاء»<sup>3</sup> لتدعيم جهودهن الهادفة لبناء السلام وحل النزاعات.

أظهرت البيانات المستسقة من المقابلات مع المعنيين الرئيسيين ونقاشات المجموعات البؤرية، الأدوار المزدوجة السلبية والإيجابية التي تمارسها النساء أثناء النزاع. وعلى الرغم من وجود حالات تحرض فيها النساء على النزاعات من خلال دفع أقاربهن الذكور نحو الانتقام أو مناصرة القضايا التي يعتبرنها عادلة، إلا أن هذا البحث والأبحاث الأخرى تشير إلى أن النساء ينخرطن أكثر مع أسرهن ومجتمعهن في حل النزاعات وتفادي إراقة الدماء والعنف.

تظهر البيانات الميدانية أنه في المحافظات التي انخرطت النساء فيها تاريخياً في صناعة السلام، استمرت النساء بلعب الدور نفسه مع بدء الحرب في ٢٠١٥م. وبالمقابل، فإنه في المناطق التي لم يكن للنساء دور نشط، ظل دور النساء دوراً محدوداً للغاية أثناء الأزمات الصعبة.

إن هذا التقرير، الذي يقدم توثيقاً لقصص النجاح وأدوار نساء اليمن على مختلف مستويات حل النزاع وبناء السلام، يقترح -كذلك- مجموعة من استراتيجيات المناصرة للتأثير على المجتمعات ومتخذي القرار ووسطاء السلام الرئيسيين.

3 حسب التعريف المنصوص عليه في معجم المصطلحات العربية.



# ACRONYMS

AQAP	Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula
CARE	Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere
CARPO	Centre for Applied Research in Partnership with the Orient
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
CSSF	Conflict, Stability and Security Fund
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FGM/C	Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GPC	General People's Congress
HNO	Humanitarian Needs Overview
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and Syria
KII	Key Informant Interview
LNG	Liquefied Natural Gas
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MOPIC	Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation
NDC	National Dialogue Conference
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
OSESGY	Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen
PDRY	People's Democratic Republic of Yemen
PTI	Peace Track Initiative
ROY	Republic of Yemen
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
SLC	Saudi-Led Coalition
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UK	United Kingdom
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
US	United States
WFP	World Food Programme
WILPF	Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
WUA	Water User Association
YAR	Yemen Arab Republic
YLDF	Youth Leadership Development Foundation
YWU	Yemeni Women's Union

# LEXICON OF YEMENI ARABIC TERMINOLOGY

*Akil Al-Hara* – (Neighbourhood Chief) is an influential government appointee whose primary function is to keep peace in his assigned neighbourhood or area and liaise with police if crimes occur. Appointees are usually male and their duties include coordinating on matters of marriage, births and deaths and other government-related issues.

*Ashraf* - Descendants of the Prophet Mohammed.

*Diya* – (blood money) is indemnity money paid to the victim, or their heirs, by the party that caused bodily injury, an Islamic legal practice observed in many countries as a form of social insurance. In Yemen, the rate of *diya* is periodically adjusted for inflation and the amount paid depends on the circumstances surrounding the death or injury, and the profile of the victim.

*Du'afa* – (the weak – singular *da'if*) in the Yemeni lexicon is a category assigned to women, religious and ethnic minorities, *nuqqas* (the deficient or lacking), or *naqis al-asl* (lacking origin). Those seen as *du'afa* are accorded tribal protection due to their unarmed status.

*Hijrah, haram or hawta* – (inviolable enclave) is a common tribal and Islamic practice found in urban areas throughout Yemen where various tribes and protected groups can safely interact. Many settlements in Yemen have *hijrah* status – Sana'a, Sa'adah, Amran, Khamir, Kawkaban and Manakha, as well as Shibam and Tarim in the Hadramawt. These cities and market towns functioned as neutral territory and home to many religious elites, scholars, judges and service providers.

*Jahl* – (ignorance) is a key driver in the exclusion of young women and men, whereby their ideas and opinions are perceived as not well-reasoned and therefore not listened to. The concept is evident in the Arabic word for child, which conjugates into *Jahiliyyah*,

referring to pre-Islamic Arabia when society was perceived as ignorant of divine guidance.

*Mahr* – variously translated as dowry, bridal payment or bride-wealth, is a payment from the groom to the bride at the time of the marriage contract.

*Mazayinah* – (singular *muzayyin*) are tribal service professionals including barbers, butchers, those who perform circumcisions, drummers and musicians.

*Muhammasheen* – (marginalised – singular *muham-mash*) are a highly discriminated group who were traditional servants of African origin occupying the lowest rungs of the tribal social stratification hierarchy in Yemen prior to the 1960s revolutions in North and South Yemen.<sup>1</sup>

*Muwalladeen* – (of mixed ancestry – singular *muwal-lad*) is a derogatory term that refers to Yemenis of mixed ancestry, with those with African and Indian mixture being the most negatively viewed.

*Qat* – a mildly narcotic leaf, chewed daily in Yemen by the vast majority of men and an increasing percentage of women. This drought-tolerant evergreen plant, cultivated either as a shrub or tree, can reach up to 10 metres in height. Qat is also grown and used widely in countries on the Horn of Africa (Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and Kenya).

*Sulh* – (truce, or contractual ceasefire – singular *sulhah*) in Yemeni customary law is a multi-staged mediation process designed to repair relations within or between

<sup>1</sup> The Republic of Yemen (ROY, henceforth referred to as Yemen) located on the south western corner of the Arabian Peninsula, was created on 22 May 1990 with the unification of the former Yemen Arab Republic (YAR, referred to here as North Yemen) and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY, subsequently referred to as South Yemen).

parties following disputes. Traditionally initiated by the offending party, the *sulh* generally begins with the formation of a community council tasked with establishing a truce and ensuring a cessation of hostilities. This truce is guaranteed by a mutually-agreed sum of money to be paid should the peace be broken. The council then undertakes a series of consultations with both parties until an agreement is reached, at which point a public reconciliation ceremony is held to mark the resolution of the dispute.

*Tadreek* – (suspension of hostilities) is a temporary measure to stop fighting in order to seek a third party to arbitrate.

*Tahkeem* – (arbitration) in Yemeni customary law, this tribal process occurs when both parties to a dispute or conflict agree on one person, usually a tribal leader or public figure, to make a judgment in a conflict and propose a solution. Each party then provides the arbitrator with physical guarantees (which can be in the form of guns, money, cars or expensive daggers) to ensure that the two disputing parties will not commit further offences and will abide by

the arbitrator's decision. The parties then present an account of the case and their allegations and the arbitrator makes a decision. While there are options for appeals, in general the outcome of this process is considered final.

*'Urf Al-Qabala*, or for short *'urf* – (tribal customary law from the root meaning 'to know or to be aware') refers to common knowledge embodied in age-old practices, precedence, agreements and the wisdom of judges and mediators. Transmitted through oral and written texts, *'urf* functions to channel, minimise and resolve conflicts between individuals and groups. *'Urf* is the largely unwritten tribal law which lays down individual responsibilities within a tribe and the collective responsibilities of the tribe with regards to its members, other tribes and non-tribal entities.

*'Ayb aswad* – (black shame) is a tribal tradition which shames any act of assault on women especially during conflict. This law protects women and places severe consequences if they are kidnapped, injured or killed during conflict and enables them to perform tasks which men in the same position are not safe to do.



# FOREWORD

By Marta Colburn, UN Women Yemen Country Programme Manager

This paper, produced by Nahj Consulting, is being published at an opportune moment when peace negotiations are resuming following more than three years of open conflict. It is also a moment when the conflict has deepened the impact of the devastating humanitarian crisis on the daily lives of the Yemeni people. In the face of the catastrophic deterioration in the humanitarian situation, local and international voices have raised the need to return to the peace process in Yemen, which is essential in achieving sustainable peace for the country. At this moment, it is important to highlight that the role of women in peacebuilding and conflict resolution is worthy of support.

As pointed out in the study (see page 10), when women are involved in peace processes there is a probability that the peace is more sustainable. We applaud the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen (OSESGY) for appointing a Women's Technical Advisory Group to his office, including numerous members of Tawafuq,<sup>2</sup> who have attended the Geneva and Swedish peace consultations. However, it is also important to note that women's inclusion in the peace process is of critical importance and must remain a top priority for all those seeking to bring the conflict to an end.

Recently there have been a number of studies highlighting the topic of women and conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Yemen (see Annex E for Resources Consulted) including two recent UN Women knowledge products documenting Yemeni women peacemakers adding to this body of literature and referenced in this study:

“Women on the Frontlines of Conflict Resolution and Negotiation: Community Voices: From Syria, Iraq and

Yemen,” by Hanan Tabbara and Garrett Rubin (June 2018). The current study echoes findings from this regional study including:

- In fragile security contexts, women often rely on anonymity and secrecy as a modus operandi to protect themselves and their work;
  - Personal connections and social status are a critical source of legitimacy that many informants use as a tool – rather than as a crutch – for building trust, credibility and access;
  - Women sometimes use gendered stereotypes to their advantage, especially when dealing with armed actors.
- “Yemeni Women Building Peace in Times of War.” This 10-minute video documentary was produced by UN Women Yemen, working with Nahj Consulting and Comra Films (August 2018) presents the stories of four courageous women and their successful efforts to solve conflicts and bring people together, highlighting the way that women work as role models to support their communities during the current period of conflict and humanitarian crisis in Yemen.<sup>3</sup>

In order to strengthen this study, UN Women has supplemented findings from other sources, including profiles and quotations from interviews with members of the Yemeni Women's Pact for Peace and Security, also known as Tawafuq. This was done to bring sources of information together to shed light on the phenomena of women peacemakers. As the war rages on, with many around the globe providing material support and profiting from the war, Yemenis are not passive in the face of devastation. In all parts of the country, countless men, women, young people, girls and boys are building peace in their homes and communities. They are doing this in creative and thoughtful ways, often despite overwhelming odds. This study seeks to highlight how women in Yemen are contributing to the essential task of conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

<sup>2</sup> In October 2015 the Yemeni Women's Pact for Peace and Security (Arabic: *Tawafuq*) was established as an inclusive platform for Yemeni women to organize, debate, find common ground and leverage their collective voices to call for women's continued engagement in public decision-making. Its goals are threefold: end violence; improve living conditions; amplify women's inclusion in the peace process. Tawafuq's members include women leaders representing different political parties, civil society, activists, and social activists from inside and outside of Yemen. Tawafuq is co-funded by The Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

<sup>3</sup> <http://arabstates.unwomen.org>.

# 1.

# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1

## Background on Women and Conflict in Yemen

Following the escalation in 2015, when the Saudi-led coalition (SLC)<sup>4</sup> intervened on behalf of the internationally recognised government against Ansar Allah, aligned with former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, the poorest country in the region has fallen into a spiral of hunger and conflict, with civilians trapped in the middle.

Yemen's split between the internationally recognised government of Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi and Ansar Allah, who allied with the General People's Congress (GPC) political party of ousted president Ali Abdullah Saleh and formed a self-proclaimed government, has rendered pockets of the country a safe haven for Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). In some areas, as for time immemorial, tribes continue to serve as de facto authorities in the absence of a functioning state.

After more than three years of fighting, the warring parties have achieved neither lasting territorial gains nor clear political advantage. With the newly appointed Special Envoy to the Secretary-General in early 2018, there are renewed efforts to bring the parties to the conflict to the negotiating table, although unsuccessfully to date with each side enjoying some form of external support for the continued war effort. A further dimension of the conflict is the intensifying Southern grievances against Northern rule and the internationally recognised government led by President Hadi.<sup>5</sup> Maintaining the illusion that either

President Hadi and his allies, or the alliance between Ansar Allah and Saleh's loyalists, are representative of all the warring groups in Yemen would be a mistake. Tensions are rife within both coalitions.

Because of the wide variety of local dynamics and grievances, Yemen risks seeing the current conflict end only for the country to be consumed by a series of complex so-called small wars that are open to exploitation by national and regional actors.<sup>6</sup>

Between 26 March 2015 and 9 August 2018, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) documented a total of 17,062 civilian casualties: 6,592 dead and 10,470 injured. The majority of these casualties resulted from airstrikes carried out by the SLC.<sup>7</sup> Approximately 82 percent of these incidents took place in five governorates: Taiz, Sa'adah, Al-Jawf, Hajjah and Sana'a.<sup>8</sup>

Since the start of the current conflict in 2014, frontline fighting has been confined to several largely static battlefields, with many actors increasingly focused on the internal politics of individual territories rather than on the wider conflict. The most dynamic aspect of Yemen's multidimensional conflict in 2017 was the fracturing of the troubled alliance between Ansar Allah and Saleh loyalists, a showdown ultimately resolved in Ansar Allah's favour in December. Despite the ongoing turmoil caused by the war, the movement of commercial goods and people in general

4 Members include the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Qatar, Sudan and the United Arab Emirates.

5 Nadwa Al-Dawsari (2017). "Breaking the cycle of failed negotiations in Yemen." Project on Middle East Democracy.

6 Peter Salisbury (2016). "Yemen: Stemming the rise of a chaotic state." Chatham House.

7 <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23439&LangID=E>.

8 OCHA. Yemen Humanitarian Needs Overview 2018.

continues, albeit sometimes using alternative routes. The “chaos state,” as some have described Yemen, still contains its own internal logic, economies and political ecosystems.<sup>9</sup>

At the time of this writing, Yemen resembled less a divided country than a collection of mini-states engaged in a complex intraregional conflict. The role of third parties – in particular Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Iran, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US) – were key factors in initiating, escalating and prolonging the war, thus adding to its complexity. The presence of Salafist fighters, AQAP and the local affiliate of ISIS, and the apparent disagreement between UAE- and US-led forces, has added further layers of complexity to any attempt at resolving the conflict.<sup>10</sup>

### Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen<sup>11</sup>

Even prior to the current conflict, 80,000 people in Yemen were displaced due to localised conflicts. An additional 335,000 Yemenis remained in protracted displacement, mainly in the North.<sup>12</sup> In late 2014, Yemen faced high levels of humanitarian need, with 16 million people (61 percent of the population) requiring humanitarian assistance as a result of years of under-development, environmental decline, intermittent conflict, weak rule of law, and widespread violations of human rights.<sup>13</sup>

According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), since the end of March 2015, the escalation of the armed conflict in Yemen has created one of the largest humanitarian crises worldwide. Today, continuing conflicts have resulted in the displacement of over 2 million people

across Yemen, with an additional 1 million returnees experiencing poor conditions in their homes. These numbers are predicted to continue to increase as the conflict in Al-Hodeidah escalates.<sup>14</sup>

Humanitarian needs have risen sharply across all sectors since the escalation of the conflict in 2015, exacerbating already high levels of poverty and accelerating the collapse of public institutions. Millions of Yemenis are at great risk of death as they face the threat of conflict, famine, cholera and economic decline.

As of December 2017, in the Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) the UN estimated that 22.2 million Yemenis are in need of some kind of humanitarian or protection assistance, including 11.3 million who are in acute need – an increase of more than one million people in acute need since June 2017. Approximately 17.8 million people are food insecure and of this total, approximately 8.4 million people are severely food insecure and at risk of starvation. This figure has jumped from 6.8 million in 2017, translating to a worrying increase of 24 percent. Some 1.8 million children and 1.1 million pregnant or lactating women are acutely malnourished, including approximately 400,000 children under the age of five who are suffering from severe acute malnutrition. Sweeping restrictions on imports, movements and financial transactions have had a profoundly negative impact on Yemeni people’s lives and hindered the delivery of humanitarian aid. The import of basic commodities, the maintenance of public services and the payment of civil servants have been further obstructed by collapsing public finance and depleted foreign exchange reserves.

Yemen is experiencing a massive collapse of essential basic services and the institutions that provide them. This has left 16 million people lacking adequate access to clean water, sanitation and hygiene. The health system is almost non-functional in many areas in Yemen, with more than 50 percent of health facilities either closed or partially non-functioning.

9 Peter Salisbury (2017). “Yemen: National Chaos, Local Order.” Chatham House.

10 Ibid.

11 Much of the data from this section comes from OCHA “Yemen Humanitarian Needs Overview 2018,” unless otherwise stated. The UN is currently conducting the HNO for the 2019 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) for 2019, which will provide an updated snapshot of the humanitarian crisis.

12 Singh, Simran; Mollet, Howard; Quay, Isadora (2015). “Rapid Gender Analysis of Yemen.” CARE International.

13 OCHA (2015b) “Draft Humanitarian Needs Overview for 2016.”

14 IOM (2017). “Yemen: Task Force on Population Movement (TFPM).” IOM and UNHCR, Protection Cluster.

This has contributed to the unprecedented scale of the cholera outbreak.<sup>13</sup>

Close to 2 million children are considered to be out of school, and more than 4 million children need assistance to ensure the continuation of their education. During the conflict, 1,413 schools have been partially damaged, affecting children's access to education. In 2017 alone, 256 schools were totally damaged due to airstrikes and shelling. Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are currently sheltering in 150 out of 686 schools which have been used for this purpose since the beginning of the conflict for lack of alternative shelter, and many schools are occupied by armed groups. Teachers in 13 governorates have not received any salary since October 2016 and an estimated 4.5 million children were unable to resume their education at the start of the last school year in October 2017.<sup>14</sup>

Om-Kalthoum Al-Shami, a Tawafuq activist from Sana'a, set out her concerns on women's stake in peace being less political and closer to ground level. *"The majority of women care about four major things: food, water, safety and dignity. The role of Tawafuq now isn't to work internationally or with international organisations, but to work in the field with women. I always recommend starting at the grassroots as it is more effective than working top-down. If you can change how women think, you can change society, bit by bit."*

## 1.2

### Status of Women and the Impact of Conflict

Prior to the crisis, the situation for women and girls was very challenging: in 2014, Yemen was ranked lowest in the world in the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index (142nd out of 142 countries) and it remained so in 2017 (144<sup>th</sup> out of 144).<sup>15</sup> Conflict has added additional layers of vulnerability for women and girls, exacerbating existing gender inequalities that limit access to basic services and livelihood opportunities, contributing to violence against women. War has also exacerbated inequalities, shrinking the space for inclusive consultative processes and narrowing the role of civil society as the culture reels under the weight of violence and conflict.

In addition to conflict dynamics, a myriad of factors influence the role of women in the family, community and public sphere including the attitude of the male head of family, social class, economic status and geographic area. Women from marginalised groups, such as *muhammasheen*, *muwalladeen*<sup>18</sup>, or refugees and migrants from Africa,<sup>19</sup> struggle with multiple layers of vulnerabilities. According to a recent study conducted by Oxfam in Hajjah and Taiz, a substantial proportion of IDPs displaced by the current conflict are from marginalised groups.<sup>20</sup>

15 The epidemic in Yemen has recorded more than 1.1 million suspected cholera cases since April 2017, according to the latest World Health Organization figures, with more than 2,300 associated deaths. Children account for 30 percent of infections. <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/08/03/middleeast/yemen-cholera-hodeidah-intl/index.html>

16 Education cluster report 2017.

17 Available from: [http://www.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2017.pdf](http://www.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2017.pdf)

18 Cf. Definitions in the Lexicon of Yemeni Arabic Terminology section.

19 Despite the conflict in Yemen the movement of refugees and migrants coming from the Horn of Africa remains high; according to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees more than 87,000 new arrivals were recorded in 2017, mainly refugees and migrants who crossed from the Horn of Africa to Yemen. <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/unhcr-alarmed-horrific-conditions-facing-newly-arrived-refugees-and-migrants-yemen>

20 Gressmann, Wolfgang (2016). "From the Ground Up: Gender and conflict analysis in Yemen." Oxfam, CARE International, GenCap (IASC). p.10.



The following are examples of the systemic, structural and institutional discrimination faced by women in Yemen:

- Unequal legal standing and unequal access to the formal legal system and customary law.
- Cultural norms which preference boys and men over girls and women in educational and employment opportunities, resulting in a significant gender gap in key indicators such as literacy and poverty levels.
- Gender segregation practices which limit female mobility, access to basic services and employment opportunities, as well as contribute to women's low level of political participation in community and national public life.
- Women's heavy burden of reproductive responsibilities (fertility from a young age, raising children, cooking and cleaning), as well as productive roles, particularly in rural areas, which include primary responsibility for many agricultural tasks as well as fetching water, fodder and firewood for cooking.
- Destructive practices such as early and forced marriage, Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C), Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) and other forms of violence against women.

A cultural concept at the heart of prevailing inequalities between men and women is that of *du'afa*, meaning weak, influencing dynamics in the home and the public sphere and the way female opinions, ideas and voices do not carry the same weight as those of a man.

A key source of exclusion for young women is the concept of *jahl*, meaning ignorance, which results in their ideas and opinions being perceived as not well-reasoned and thus not listened to.<sup>21</sup> The age when young men and women are seen as rational adults is 18, when Yemenis legally qualify for their own national identity card.

A further cultural issue of specific relevance in the marginalisation of women in Yemen is the concept of 'honour,' a norm which can translate into a loss of mobility, employment and educational opportunities for women and girls.

21 Cf. Definition in the Lexicon of Yemeni Arabic Terminology section.

Women and young persons in Yemen suffer from a culture which equates voice and value most to those who contribute to the family's economic well-being. Both are affected by the principle that rights and privileges emanate from economic contributions, influencing dynamics of inequality. Thus, as long as women and young people do not work, they are relegated to silence in decisions that critically affect their lives such as choice of spouse, marriage timing or the subject of academic study.

Many of these factors contribute to the reality that women face significant obstacles to participation in politics and public life. This is exacerbated by the vicious cycle of lack of education, relevant work skills, experience and employment opportunities, which further limits their role in the family as well as their individual agency.

Prior to the conflict, the Government of Yemen had made efforts to improve the rights of women through various mechanisms, including the establishment of a Women's Government Machinery and the issuing of the National Women's Development Strategy (2006-2015)<sup>22</sup> and other gender-sensitive sectorial strategies. However, due to numerous factors including cultural and religious norms, gender disparities in accessing educational and work opportunities, and discriminatory laws, Yemeni women continued to face inequalities and discrimination based on their gender.<sup>23</sup>

The protracted conflict has weakened community resilience and multiplied pre-existing vulnerabilities. Vulnerable groups who have been the most negatively impacted by the conflict are women and girls, particularly those who have been displaced. Due to deep-rooted socio-cultural and economic inequalities, conflict has affected women and girls, men and boys differently.

During this conflict, the conditions of women and girls have worsened as it has dragged on. Consequently, as the social fabric, economic situation and security

22 UNFPA (2008). "Women Development Strategy." UNFPA, Supreme Council for Women, Women's National Committee.

23 Rohwerder, Brigitte (2017). "Conflict and gender dynamics in Yemen." Helpdesk, Governance and Social Development Resource Centre.

and safety in most areas in Yemen has deteriorated, women and girls have been increasingly exposed to risks of violence, abuse and exploitation.<sup>24</sup>

There is a proven link between high levels of gender inequality pre-conflict and higher risks of SGBV during conflict. There is also a demonstrated connection between high risk of SGBV and limited access to public spaces, thus reinforcing gendered systems of political domination.<sup>25</sup> For this reason, gender inequalities are drivers of further vulnerability in Yemen. The recent OHCHR report by the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts documented various types of SGBV as a result of the conflict primarily focusing on sexual violence “targeting vulnerable groups, including foreign migrants, internally displaced persons and other vulnerable groups, including women and children.”<sup>26</sup>

Risks are further heightened due to protracted displacement, particularly for IDPs and host community households headed by females, as well as the more than 16,000 households headed by girls under eighteen. The humanitarian crisis in Yemen is, at its heart, a protection crisis that threatens the life, safety and well-being of millions, not least those already vulnerable and struggling to survive. The combination of all these factors has forced a growing number of conflict-affected families to resort to negative coping mechanisms.

Some negative coping mechanisms which have a particularly deleterious impact on women and children include early marriages of girls, in an effort to reduce the number of mouths to feed, generate a *mahr*<sup>27</sup> for the purchase of food or basic necessities, and protect girls and young women from the risk of SGBV. Another example is forcing widows of those killed in the conflict, particularly if they have children to support, to marry (often as a second wife) in order to ensure financial support. Other negative coping measures

include child labour and begging by children and women to contribute to family income, and often puts them at higher risk of SGBV. Negative coping measures also impact young men, including recruitment by armed groups to contribute to family income and forced marriage of young men prior to heading off to fight, which both are frequently mentioned by Yemenis. While such practices are commonly cited, to date there has been limited documentation, due to the extremely sensitive nature of such practices.

Particularly during conflict, addressing mental health and psycho-social support needs is critical for the displaced, survivors of SGBV and conflict-affected vulnerable populations. If unaddressed, affected individuals may suffer from various emotional, cognitive, physical, behavioural and social problems, as well as from the impacts of negative coping mechanisms. Resilience in Yemen is a continuing feature, both personally and in communities, despite the duration and intensity of the crisis. However, unaddressed psycho-social needs can deeply impact such capacities which have been stretched by the protracted conflict, and negative coping mechanisms may proliferate.

Men and boys make up the vast majority of direct victims of armed conflict, primarily as war casualties and victims of forced recruitment and arbitrary detention, while women and girls, who in normal times run the household, during war become increasingly vulnerable and are more likely to be exposed to different forms of SGBV. They are more exposed to malnutrition because they have limited access to resources. They typically work longer hours or more days to increase their income or improve their access to services.

Many women in Yemen have lost access to family planning services, exposing them to potential unplanned pregnancies in perilous conditions, with the heightened risk of communicable disease outbreaks, including of dengue fever, bloody diarrhoea and measles.<sup>28</sup>

24 UNFPA (2015).

25 Davies, S.E; True, J. (2015). “Reframing conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence: Bringing gender analysis back in.” *Security Dialogue*, 46(6). p.505.

26 Human Rights Council (2018). “Situation of human rights in Yemen, including violations and abuses since September 2014.” p. 13.

27 Various translated as dowry, bridal payment or bride-wealth, is a payment from the groom to the bride at the time of the marriage contract.

28 IASC (2015) Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen: Gender Alert July 2015.

### 1.3

## Impact of Conflict on Gender Roles and Norms

Gender dynamics in Yemen have traditionally assigned women and girls to reproductive roles, working as the primary caregivers of children, the elderly and other members of the family. However, in rural areas, in addition to reproductive roles, women have a significant role in agricultural work, with women and girls providing 60 percent of the labour in crop cultivation and more than 90 percent of manual labour in tending livestock, while earning 30 percent less than men.<sup>29</sup>

Because of their caregiving roles, women are expected to sacrifice for the family. When war hits or families sink into poverty, women will sacrifice for their children. For example, when food is scarce, females are the first to eat less as a coping mechanism, particularly in rural areas.<sup>30</sup>

The reproductive roles of women, expected and non-paid, have limited their engagement in paid work. For girls, responsibilities at home or on the farm cause widespread dropping out from school (girls represent 63 percent of school drop-out children).<sup>31</sup> Gender roles also attribute time-consuming tasks to girls (for example, fetching water, animal fodder or wood fuel for cooking in rural areas), which, combined with a general lack of appreciation for girls' education, also contributes to lower school attendance rates. Girls are the first to be withdrawn from school to save the family money or to enter into early marriage.<sup>32</sup>

The reality is that when men head off to fight, are injured or killed, the burden of household and agricultural work falls on women and girls. Additionally, in such circumstances, women are often forced to become heads of household and the primary breadwinners. Similarly, in the past when Yemeni men were absent for long periods of time as migrants working

in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf,<sup>33</sup> women often took on additional responsibilities in the home and, in rural areas, in agriculture as well. While there were some changes in gender dynamics, as out-migration began tapering off in the mid-1980s and men returned to their villages, the longer-term impact on such relations remained limited.<sup>34</sup>

In many parts of the country, women's freedom of movement is constrained by cultural barriers, which can have a debilitating impact on meeting family needs when men are absent due to migration or war. During the current crisis, women face significant barriers to access essential humanitarian assistance. Further, a lack of money for transportation or skills and connections to access the labour market have increased the risk of exploitation and abuse of women and girls, thus exacerbating vulnerabilities and resulting in negative coping behaviours.<sup>35</sup> Weak governance institutions and protection systems disproportionately affect women, boys, and girls, magnifying vulnerabilities and exposing them to grave violations of their rights.<sup>36</sup>

29 Singh, Simran; Mollet, Howard; Quay, Isadora (2015). "Rapid Gender Analysis of Yemen." CARE International.

30 Jadallah, Alma Abdul Hadi (2015). "Conflict Analysis of the Republic of Yemen." United Nations Country Team.

31 Singh, Simran; Mollet, Howard; Quay, Isadora (2015). "Rapid Gender Analysis of Yemen." CARE International.

32 Ibid.

33 The phenomenon of Yemeni migration to diverse destinations around the globe has shaped the country's history, economy, politics, social relations, ethnicity and development. Tradition has it that the first migration wave from Yemen was following the collapse of the Mareb Dam in the sixth century AD (Mareb was the capital of the Sabaean Kingdom and home to the famed Mareb dam which stood over 2,000 feet long, 52 feet high and irrigated the desert of Arabia for over a thousand years), although some scholars note it is likely that such movement substantially predated this catastrophic event [Swanson, J. (1979). *Emigration and Economic Development: The Case of the Yemen Arab Republic*. p 47]. It is estimated that in the 1970s one fifth of the former North Yemen and one third of the former South Yemen labour force worked abroad, particularly in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf.

34 Remittances began tapering off in the mid-1980s and their 1990 level of 26 percent of GDP was abruptly curtailed with the expulsion of an estimated 800,000 to 1 million Yemenis from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries as a result of Yemen's perceived support for Iraq in the 1991 Gulf War.

35 IASC (2015) *Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen: Gender Alert* July 2015.

36 Jadallah, Alma Abdul Hadi (2015). "Conflict Analysis of the Republic of Yemen." United Nations Country Team.

Traditionally, men and young boys are the breadwinners in the family and have responsibilities for the financial support of their families. As a result of the conflict, the economy has collapsed and since August 2016 an estimated 1.25 million civil servants have only been irregularly paid their salaries.<sup>37</sup> In this situation, men have faced hopelessness with the inability to provide for their families. This has caused an increasing number of male children and young men to join armed groups, who in addition to their ideological and political affiliation, are driven by need and hunger. Young men joining armed groups receive salaries or financial support from the groups or their supporters and thus have greater access to limited resources, such as fuel or food. In some cases, recruitment by armed groups is supported by their mothers, wives and sisters for the same reason. When men stay at home, their limited ability to earn an income, forced idleness and helplessness can often lead to domestic violence.

It is important to point out that gender stereotypes for men and boys during conflict can also have a negative impact. Gender analysis has shown that men and young boys are expected to be strong and fearless during war. Therefore, they are often socially coerced to take up arms to protect their communities or earn an income for their families. There are also power dynamics between older men in decision-making roles and younger men who are required to follow orders, which may increase a sense of frustration among young men.<sup>38</sup>

As men and boys are expected to be engaged in combat, in conflict areas men and boys may experience the threat of being perceived as combatants, even if they are not. In addition, due to instability and a pervasive lack of security, it is not only girls and women who are vulnerable to SGBV but also men and boys.

37 With an average family size of 6.7 members, the lack of public sector salaries has left more than 8.4 million families economically vulnerable, thus affecting over a quarter of the population. OCHA "Humanitarian Needs Overview 2018."

38 Saferworld (2017). "Building inclusive peace: Gender at the heart of conflict analysis." SaferWorld, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and Oxfam. December 2017 Briefing.

Because of established gender norms, men and boys are under further pressure to keep silent.<sup>39</sup> Men and boys are subject to humiliation and denigration at the hands of armed groups, as well as arbitrary detention and summary execution.<sup>40</sup>

Social norms globally and in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region have tended to link masculinity and male status with the role of the family breadwinner and protector. The ability of men to meet such expectations is undermined by conflict. A recent study conducted by UN Women in MENA found that the effects of conflict and unemployment were frequently cited as reasons for, or aggravating factors in, depressive symptoms among men.<sup>41</sup> Three categories have been described of men's response to the shift in gender relations: while for some men this results in frustration and the urge to reassert male control that is seemingly under threat and stress, others adapt pragmatically to the changes (e.g. by sharing household chores or supporting the economic activities of female household members). A third group of men embrace changing gender roles wholeheartedly.<sup>42</sup>

It is important to note that the conflict in Yemen has also challenged the stereotype of women not engaging in active combat. Ansar Allah and affiliated groups have increasingly recruited women for military training and in the use of weapons. Female fighters carrying babies, rocket launchers and machine guns have on occasion taken to the streets of the Yemeni capital of Sana'a to protest the SLC's involvement in the conflict.<sup>43</sup>

39 Carpenter, R. Charli (2006). "Recognizing gender-based violence against civilian men and boys in conflict situations." Security Dialogue. p. 88.

40 Gressmann, Wolfgang (2016). "From the Ground Up: Gender and conflict analysis in Yemen." Oxfam, CARE International, GenCap (IASC). p. 14.

41 UN Women (2017). "Understanding Masculinities: Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) – Middle East and North Africa – Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, and Palestine." UN Women and Promundo-US. www.unwomen.org.

42 Inhorn, M.C. (2012). "The new Arab man: Emergent masculinities, technologies, and Islam in the Middle East." Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

43 Pasha-Robinson, Lucy (2017). "Female Yemeni fighters carry babies and machine guns at anti-Saudi rally". Independent. 18 January.

Nonetheless, recent research shows that there have been some positive changes in the roles and responsibilities of women and men as a direct consequence of the prolonged conflict, including evolving perceptions of so-called ‘appropriate behaviour’ or work for women and men. A study conducted by Oxfam in 2016 found that informants felt that as a result of the conflict there had been an “Increased appreciation of women’s and men’s roles, and an improved sense of how gender roles are mutually reliant. As one male participant in Hajjah stated: “*When we had to stay at home, we saw how difficult it was for our wives to take care of all the family issues, especially*

*getting firewood and water.’ More men are now taking on these roles which were previously done only by women.”<sup>43</sup>*

The increased contribution of women to household income is leading to a shift in women’s perspectives on joint ownership of household assets. This observed trend is higher in rural settings than urban settings. This sense of ownership may be perceptual rather than factual but participants in this Oxfam-led study felt that joint ownership might contribute to increased domestic tensions between women and men at the household level.<sup>44</sup>

## 1.4

# Women’s Role in Decision-Making and Peacebuilding

The era following the uprising in 2011 and continuing into the National Dialogue Conference (NDC) has been described by women activists as a golden time for women’s participation in the public sphere. Women and young people played strong leadership roles in the uprisings and prominent women leaders were instrumental in shaping the transition period.<sup>45</sup> Women achieved 28 percent representation in the NDC, and women leaders were influential in setting the NDC agenda despite opposition. Women also participated effectively in drafting a new constitution that unfortunately was never ratified due to the ensuing political crisis in late 2014. Since 2015, Yemeni women have generally been excluded from the formal peace process and have not participated in high-level peace talks, with few exceptions.<sup>47</sup> Yemeni women face obstacles from the parties to the conflict,

from UN bodies, from Yemeni society and even internally from other Yemeni women.<sup>48</sup>

In 2015, UN Women, in cooperation with the OSESGY, initiated the Yemeni Women’s Pact for Peace and Security (*Tawafuq* in Arabic). This group of nearly 60 women is a representative body of women from different political backgrounds, with a majority of independent women, female activists and academics advocating for the meaningful representation of women in an inclusive peace process. However, this body is still struggling to receive adequate support from other politically active women and from the parties to the conflict which are taking part in peace talks.

In the 2016 UN-brokered peace negotiations in Kuwait, women were also significantly underrepresented. Despite the fact that seven *Tawafuq* women were invited by the Special Envoy to Kuwait, their role was unclear and they were not accepted by parties to the conflict including by the three party women participating. These women were even criticised and described on social media as “opportunists.”

44 Gressmann, Wolfgang (2016). “From the Ground Up: Gender and conflict analysis in Yemen.” Oxfam, CARE International, GenCap (IASC).

45 Ibid.

46 Aoláin, F. Ni (2016). “The ‘war on terror’ and extremism: Assessing the relevance of the women, peace and security agenda.” *International Affairs*. P. 271.

47 In the Geneva and Biel peace talks, Ms. Faiqa Al-Saeed represented the GPC Party while both Ms. Mervet Mejalli and Dr. Nihal Al-Awlaqi represented the internationally recognised government of Yemen.

48 Anderson, Kristine; Myrntinen, Henri (2017). “Now is the time: research on gender justice, conflict and fragility in the Middle East and North Africa.” Oxfam.

There have been other examples of women-led initiatives seeking to influence the peace process at various levels in Yemen including:<sup>49</sup>

- The Peace Track Initiative (PTI), a newly established non-profit organisation incorporated in Canada in October 2017. The initiative was founded by Rasha Jarhum, a South Yemeni women's rights and peace advocate. Jarhum has been working on peacebuilding on a voluntary basis since 2015, when the war escalated in Yemen. Jarhum decided to institutionalise her work and volunteerism and escalate her peacebuilding efforts by establishing the PTI.
- The Women Solidarity Network is a women-led network of women inside and outside Yemen, from both South and North Yemen. The Network is open for individuals and women-led organisations. It aims at bringing women together to support and protect each other, and at uniting efforts to advocate for women's rights. The Women Solidarity Network sent a joint letter endorsed by regional and global women-led Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to the newly appointed UN Special Envoy to Yemen highlighting priorities for peace and demanding the inclusion of women.
- National Agenda on Women, Peace, and Security in Yemen: By mobilising and coordinating the efforts of 76 Yemeni women leaders inside and outside Yemen, working remotely and through an innovative online approach, a first draft of the National Agenda for Women, Peace, and Security was developed. The agenda was shared with relevant stakeholders in November 2016, including the UN Special Envoy, the UN Secretary-General, the UN Security Council, and ambassadors to Yemen (18 ambassadors are sponsors of the peace deal in Yemen). A second version of the National Agenda was validated at the local level with support from Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). The validation process included holding consultation meetings with 111 Yemeni women at the local level in Aden, Taiz and Sana'a.

49 The following three examples of women-led initiatives were provided by Rasha Jarhum.

Globally, there is increasing evidence of more positive outcomes in negotiations that involve the meaningful participation of women's groups, and there is a positive correlation between the involvement of women in peace processes and their more positive outcomes.<sup>50</sup> Research from a recent study by the Geneva Graduate Institute demonstrates that when women's groups were able to effectively influence peace processes, a peace agreement was almost always reached and the agreement was more likely to be implemented. The Broadening Participation project "examined the roles of women's groups (and other groups) in 40 peace and transition processes. New statistical research involving a larger dataset also shows that women's participation increases the probability that the peace agreement will last longer."<sup>51</sup>

When considering the impact of gender equality and relations on conflict, it is important to reflect on the original rationale behind United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325<sup>52</sup> regarding the prevention of – and not simply ending – conflict, as well as "The prevention of gender-based harms that precede and result from political violence." Women's participation in peacebuilding and gender equality is central to the prevention of conflict.

During the current conflict, women have demonstrated high levels of resilience and an impressive ability to carve out space for their participation despite significant challenges and barriers. This has somehow changed the public perception of women from being focused on the domestic sphere to being more active in the public realm.

Despite their limited role in the public sphere as decision makers, yet there is an increasing role throughout Yemen for women in humanitarian efforts. Such

50 Johansson-Nogués, E. (2013). "Gendering the Arab Spring? Rights and (in)security of Tunisian, Egyptian and Libyan Women." *Security Dialogue*.

51 O'Reilly, Marie; Ó Súilleabháin, Andrea; Paffenholtz, Thania (2015). "Reimagining Peacemaking: Women's Roles in Peace Processes." *International Peace Institute*. p 1.

52 Nduwimana, Françoise (2017). "United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security. Understanding the Implications, Fulfilling the Obligations." OSAGI, DESA, ECA.

engagement has been well-documented.<sup>53</sup> Women have participated throughout Yemen in distributing community-level humanitarian assistance, hygiene promotion, leading on SGBV protection projects and facilitating women's access to services.

Despite the systematic marginalisation of women in formal decision-making processes, women in several cases have served as first responders and informal peacemakers at the community level, providing representation to women in front of community leaders and resolving everyday problems.<sup>54</sup> Yemeni women have contributed to peacebuilding by helping to release detainees, preventing child recruitment and sending aid to besieged cities when international organisations have failed to do so.

A prominent example of the dedicated work of women in peacebuilding is the work of the Association of Mothers of Abductees and Detainees. The group, directed by women volunteers affiliated to the Al-Islah political party, have tirelessly worked to track male political detainees. The association began work in April 2016 and now has departments for research and public relations to campaign for the release of men. It has a team of people discreetly tracking down missing persons in areas of the country controlled by Ansar Allah, and that team has also started communicating with families of detainees in other regions, including non-Islahi detainees in the South.<sup>55</sup>

In this study, the perceptions of women informants were often shaped by their caregiving role. Many women think that their role in peacebuilding is limited to supporting fighters by providing food, nursing the wounded, smuggling weapons and even taking up arms or contributing to military strategies.

There are models for this sort of role. One such historical Yemeni figure was Queen 'Arwa Bint Ahmad Al-Sulayhiyya (1048–1138) a long-reigning ruler of

Amat Al-Salam Al-Hajj is a member of *Tawafuq* and head of the Association of Mothers of Abductees and Detainees. Her understanding of the role of women as peacebuilders is based on simple demographics: *"Women make up half of society and they are suffering the most from war. Because of this suffering, women are quick to work for peace."* Amat sees her work with the Association as a means to ease the burden on other women. *"Mothers and the relatives of abductees are going through immense suffering because of abductions. These are not prisoners of war, they are civilians: journalists, doctors and professors. We are asking the world to stop the suffering of their mothers, wives and children."*

Yemen, firstly as the co-ruler of her two husbands and then as sole ruler from 1067 until her death in 1138. Queen 'Arwa and her mother-in-law Queen Asma bint Shihab were the only female monarchs in the Muslim Arab world to have had the *khutba* (Friday prayer sermon) proclaimed in their name in the mosques – the ultimate recognition of Muslim monarchical status. Queen 'Arwa was not only a popular ruler, but also recognised as a sophisticated military and political strategist.<sup>56</sup>

In more contemporary times there are numerous instances of women taking up arms in defence of their country. Um Al-Shahid Abdullah Al-Lagiya was a heroine who died while defending the revolution in the North of Yemen in the 1960s. In the South, it is estimated that there were 200 women active in opposing British rule serving as couriers, distributing revolutionary leaflets, smuggling weapons, raising anti-British consciousness and leading demonstrations in schools. Women not only provided political and moral support but also took up arms and fought. Rahdah was the first noted Yemeni woman to carry a weapon against the British. Two officially proclaimed heroines who died in the revolution were Daara from

53 Anderson, Kristine; Myrtilinen, Henri (2017). "Now is the time: research on gender justice, conflict and fragility in the Middle East and North Africa." Oxfam.

54 Ibid.

55 Carey, Glen (2018). "Women Lead the Hunt for Abducted Men in Yemen." Bloomberg, 22 February 2018.

56 Mernissi, Fatima; Mary Jo Lakeland (2003). *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*. Oxford University Press.

Radfan and Khadija Al-Haushabi who had been a unit commander.<sup>55</sup>

There is limited appreciation of the linkages between women's involvement in humanitarian response and improved outcomes for relief efforts and conflict resolution. This is reflected in the challenge of mainstreaming gender in humanitarian action. With the emphasis on rapid response to massive humanitarian needs, gender-sensitive responses addressing the needs of women, vulnerable groups and youth

are limited. According to the UN, women and girls in Yemen often remain invisible to humanitarian actors and miss being targeted with aid assistance.<sup>56</sup>

The implication of this cycle of women's exclusion from the peace process, humanitarian action, governance bodies and other arenas of decision-making will result in poor outcomes both for gender equality and for post-conflict recovery and stability. This consequence echoes a key motivation for the codification of UNSCR 1325 more than 25 years ago.

## 1.5

# Role of Women in Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution

Although there are historical examples in Yemen of women taking a role in peacebuilding and conflict resolution, there is agreement that this role has neither been well documented nor sufficiently recognised by society.<sup>57</sup> Despite gender inequalities, in Yemen the roles for women in resolving conflict are significant, although such participation varies based on numerous factors. In the late 1990s in Munabbih, in western Sa'adah, one scholar found women actively taking part in mixed-gender mediation. Women from Al-Jawf have observed that in the past they were able to mediate an end to a conflict, but today such interventions are less common.<sup>60</sup>

Select roles that women traditionally play in peace-making include:

- In the home, educating her children to resolve conflict peacefully.
- Convincing male family members to seek mediation when conflicts arise and to avoid the path of revenge.
- Helping the injured in a conflict or contributing to relief efforts in a natural disaster or crisis in the community.
- In tribal areas in the past, there were four ways for a woman to resolve or stop a conflict: 1) cutting her hair; 2) taking off her veil and placing it with the opponents; 3) taking weapons away to stop the fighting; and 4) invoking *tadreek* (suspension of hostilities) a temporary measure to stop fighting in order to seek a third party to arbitrate, or by going to the opposing tribe to ask for *tahkeem* (arbitration).<sup>61</sup>
- The principle of weakness can serve as a protective factor for women and can contribute to their role as peacemakers. For example, women can travel with men who are a target for revenge, as traditionally no one would take his revenge on his opponent if he is accompanied by a woman. The impulse to protect women – unlike men – can provide space to address conflict issues.

57 Colburn, M. (2002). *Gender and Development in Yemen*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Amman Jordan. p. 91. For southern women fighters see: Molyneux (1982). *State policies and the position of women workers in the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, 1967-77*, International Labour Office, Geneva. p. 17-18. For a list of many Yemeni women who participated in Yemen's independence struggles see Ba-Abbad, Noor (1997). "Women and Revolution in the PDRY." *Yemen Times*. September 29th-October 5th, Issue 39, Vol. VII.

58 OCHA (2015). *Draft Humanitarian Needs Overview for 2016*.

59 Javins, Lauren (2018). "Translating Presence into Influence: Security, Agency and Peacebuilding among Women in Yemen."

60 Adra, Najwa (2013). "Women and Peacebuilding in Yemen: Challenges and Opportunities." NOREF Norwegian Peace Building Resource Center. p 8.

61 Cf. Definition in the Lexicon of Yemeni Arabic Terminology section.



There is evidence that women often use the privileges allowed by social customs to perform meditative activities during conflicts. In most acknowledged cases of women engaging in peacebuilding activities, women leverage their social categorisation as *du'afa*, which has accorded them protection based on the cultural stereotype of them as defenceless,<sup>62</sup> or unarmed.<sup>63</sup>

But some women defy this stereotype and are able to play a role in mediation from a more empowered position. For example, the case of Laila Lutf Al-Thawr, a Sana'a-based social activist who has participated in prisoner exchange negotiations since 2015.<sup>64</sup> Another well-known example is Sumaya Al-Hussam, who resolved an 11-year conflict between two tribes in Hajjah Governorate which had left more than 60 people dead and 130 injured, including women and children.<sup>65</sup>

In tribal areas, a *sheikh* or social figure usually mediates to get parties to choose an arbitrator or multiple arbitrators. The tribal system of customary law, or *'urf*,<sup>66</sup> gives the parties to a conflict the chance to appeal twice at higher tribal arbitration levels before the verdict becomes final and binding.<sup>67</sup> Every phase of the conflict management process involves the parties to the conflict bringing guarantees to the

mediators and arbitrators. This could be in the form of daggers, guns, or money that is presented as a symbol of the commitment of the parties to implement the arbitrator's verdict. Ultimately, the tribes are responsible for the actions of their members and for forcing them to implement verdicts. If a member of a tribe does not abide by the verdict, he might be denied his rights, including protection and support as a member of his tribe.<sup>68</sup>

Traditionally, women who intervene in conflicts often do so based on their family connections, however, there are occasions when respected older women without such credentials resolve violent disputes between tribes.<sup>69</sup> Women have long benefited from social traditions and customs that safeguard non-combatants or protected groups. This protection includes those from higher social categories including descendants of the Prophet Mohammed or judges,<sup>70</sup> as well as those from lower social strata and women.

It is a great dishonour for tribesmen to harm the protected, and amends for such an offence can be up many times higher than the normal *diya* (blood money),<sup>71</sup> depending on the circumstances. It is considered a *'ayb aswad* (black shame) to target women during conflict,<sup>72</sup> or even to target a man who is accompanied by a woman. Thus, women can move in and out of conflict zones without being targeted.<sup>73</sup> This set of norms has traditionally enabled women to engage in community-level activities that men are no longer able to perform. In this way, women have historically and continue to engage in activities of mediation, helping the injured and providing humanitarian aid.

62 Women in the former South Yemen were active in the army and police force. However, since the Unification policewomen have largely worked only in desk jobs. In 2010, 1.7 percent of police were female, with 16 women having reached the rank of colonel, 17 the rank of lieutenant colonel, three the rank of captain and two were lieutenants. Cook, Joana (2014). "Background information prepared for Saferworld Gender, Peace and Security workshop series."

63 While this stereotype persists, Yemeni women have often carried arms, particularly in tribal areas. For example, in Mareb, with its strong tribal structures, women have been known to drive cars, carry guns when on their way to the fields [Heinze, Marie-Christine; Stevens, Sophie (2018). "Women As Peacebuilders in Yemen." p. 25.]

64 Presentation of Dr. Suhair Atef of Sana'a University's Gender and Development Research and Studies Centre at a conference on Academic Approaches on Peace and State building in Yemen. Amman, Jordan, November 2017.

65 Al-Arabiya English (2017). "Yemeni woman resolves long bloody conflict between two tribes." 31 October.

66 Cf. Definition in the Lexicon of Yemeni Arabic Terminology section.

67 Al-Dawsari, Nadwa (2012). "Tribal Governance and Stability in Yemen". Carnegie Papers.

68 Ibid.

69 Al-Dawsari Nadwa (2014). "Case Studies on Women and Conflict in Tribal Yemen, Al-Jawf" 2014.

70 Descendants of the Prophet Mohammed are held in high regard due to their respected religious which has contributed to the legitimacy of many historic leaders including the Zaydi Imamate, as well as the founders and leader of Ansar Allah. This group of Yemenis and judges often serve as arbiters and mediators in tribal conflicts.

71 Cf. Definition in the Lexicon of Yemeni Arabic Terminology section.

72 Ibid.

73 Al-Dawsari, Nadwa (2014). "Case Studies on Women and Conflict in Tribal Yemen, Al-Jawf" 2014.

For example, in Al-Jawf Governorate, a conservative tribal area, women have played important roles in solving family disputes, preventing and resolving conflicts between the government and tribes, and averting conflict between influential tribes. The women who wielded influence in changing the course of such conflicts were often those who were present in the public sphere as professionals or civil workers, or those descending from influential tribal families, particularly those with close family ties to tribal leaders.<sup>74</sup>

Evidence shows that women play a role, both negative and positive, in conflicts. Women sometimes instigate conflicts by pushing their male relatives to take revenge. However, women seem to be more actively involved in resolving conflicts than in fuelling them. Although women do not usually take the position as direct mediators or arbitrators, they are sometimes able to influence tribal leaders who carry that responsibility, as well as the parties to the conflict or those who have influence over them.<sup>75</sup>

In non-tribal areas, during conflict women often fill the vacuum in community leadership and are present on the frontlines and in besieged areas delivering humanitarian aid. Women are working on complicated issues such as releasing detainees, combating terrorism through promoting social cohesion, and the de-radicalisation of young people. Women are also working to revive the economy through collective saving groups, farming and social entrepreneurship.<sup>76</sup>

One important aspect raised by FGD and KII participants is that women can also play a role in instigating

Arwa Rabad is a Sana'a-based political and human rights activist and a founding member of the Al-Amal Coalition for Women's Political Participation. She cautioned against focusing solely on how women build peace, but also on how they can destroy it. *"We shouldn't just focus on the role of women in the peace process, but also the role of women in war. Women are selling their gold to support those fighting on the frontlines. I know a woman whose nine sons were killed fighting. I know women who, after they lose one son, say that they would have three or four more to fight. If we can get these women to believe in peace and push for it, we can stop at least 50 percent of the war,"* she said.

and prolonging conflict. Women in the North of Yemen sometimes encourage their sons (as young as nine years old) to join the frontlines as combatants. They also mobilise other women to send their sons to the frontlines through sessions held in women's gatherings and mosques. It is also important to mention that Ansar Allah has also 'militarised' women as a tactic to increase popular support and give a false image of the active participation of women in their movement. Armed female members of Ansar Allah, the Descendants of Zainab,<sup>77</sup> perform tasks which men cannot do according to local traditions, such as arresting women, beating women protestors, and detaining young boys and women.

74 Ibid.

75 Al-Dawsari, Nadwa (2014). "Case Studies on Women and Conflict in Tribal Yemen, Al-Jawf." Yemen Tribal Voices [Blogspot](#).

76 Ungierowicz, Quintiliano; Abdenur, Nathalia; Erthal, Adriana (2017). "Interview with Rasha Jarhum, Yemeni Activist." [Revista Diaspora](#).

77 Al-Arabiya English (2017). "Who are the 'Descendants of Zainab', the Houthis' all-female brigade?" [Al-Arabiya English](#). 11 December.

## 2.

# METHODOLOGY

The research team followed a qualitative methodology using the following techniques:

- Desk review of relevant studies and reports.
- In-depth interviews with key informants (primarily female local leaders).
- Focus Group Discussions' (FGD) sessions with female and male community members.

FGDs and KIIs were conducted in nine Yemeni governorates – Aden, Al-Baydha, Al-Dhale', Al-Jawf, Hadhramawt, Mareb, Shebwah, Sana'a Governorate and Taiz – using pre-designed tools. Through referrals, the research team selected four to five female leaders from each governorate to conduct in-depth

interviews on the role of women during conflict and peacebuilding.

In each governorate, the research team conducted four FGDs (two for women and two for men) with around 10 participants in each group. The research team made every attempt to identify community leaders, activists, local Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and local authorities knowledgeable about women working in conflict resolution and peacebuilding to serve as Key Informants and FGD participants.

The detailed methodology and data collection tools can be found in Annex B. The list of resources consulted for the study can be found in Annex D.

## 2.1

### Study Limitations

The study had some limitations, which can be summarised as follows:

- **Security:** Field work began in early December 2017. At the same time, clashes took place in Sana'a. Due to security concerns, the researchers were not able to travel to all governorates but instead mobilised teams of local researchers in each governorate to conduct FGDs and KIIs, while in-depth interviews were done remotely with support from the field-based team. This caused some variation in the depth and quality of data collected in the field.
- **Access:** Some of the women identified during KIIs and FGDs to be included in in-depth interviews lived in extremely remote areas and researchers were

not able to reach them to get more information on their stories. Further, a few women identified for follow-up moved from their home areas and left no onward contact information. Some women identified for follow-up refused to be interviewed and requested that interviews be coordinated through local authorities.

- **Limited examples in some areas:** Women are contributing to conflict resolution and peacemaking were gathered during field work from certain governorates, specifically Al-Dhale', Al-Baydha and Hadramawt. This absence does not mean that women play no such roles, but rather that there were limitations accessing such areas and gathering women informants for the research.

### 3.

# FINDINGS

### 3.1.

## Types of Conflicts and Main Actors

The following section summarises findings from KIIs and FGDs. Participants in FGDs identified various types of conflict in the targeted governorates. Conflict between individuals occur in all governorates over land ownership (particularly common on lands located along tribal borders in Mareb, Al-Jawf and Shebwah) and water.<sup>78</sup> Some informants noted that extractive industries (mines or petroleum products – oil or gas) or infrastructure project had also contributed to conflict. Individual conflicts in Aden, Al-Dhale', Hadhramawt and Shebwah are usually over assets owned by private citizens from the North who held positions of power in the former Saleh regime.<sup>79</sup> FGD participants in Aden highlighted that confiscation of individual property increased after the 2015 eruption of war due to the collapse of security and the rule-of-law system. Possession of assets also occurred as a form of so-called political revenge by different parties to the conflict. In Hadhramawt, participants said that disputes are usually over government land that has been sold to more than one citizen.

Other individual conflicts arise from the usual types of conflict that happen between citizens, such as conflict over divorce, custody, inheritance and other social issues. However, the impact of these cases is magnified by the war due to the difficult economic situation and the suspension of public salaries. This has put Yemenis under massive pressure in order to feed their families. In the governorates of Al-Jawf, Mareb and Sana'a, revenge was the most commonly cited as a driver of conflict. In addition, political polarisation of individuals and multiple political affiliations in the same household were described as a main cause of conflict and even cause for divorce.<sup>80</sup>

In multiple governorates, with the exception of Hadhramawt and Shebwah, informants reported a rise in what they termed "sectarian" conflicts, between Shia'a and Sunni. Evidence from recent research on women as peacebuilders by Marie-Christine Heinze and Sophie Stevens found that there have been changes in the religious environment affecting women, particularly a rise in radical religious rhetoric and an increase in the influence of Islamist actors. "*In some areas (Taiz and Lahj), this has resulted in severe threats and violence against women activists and restrictions on women's movement.*"<sup>81</sup>

78 The pattern of conflict over water and land is one which pre-dates the current conflict. "According to Government of Yemen estimates, violence accompanying land and water disputes results in the deaths of some 4,000 people each year, probably more than the secessionist violence in the South, the armed rebellion in the North, and Yemeni Al-Qaeda terrorism combined." Yemen Armed Violence Assessment. "Under pressure Social violence over land and water in Yemen." Small Arms Survey, Issue Briefing #2. October 2010. <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/G-Issue-briefs/SAS-Yemen-AVA-IB2-ENG.pdf>

79 Unruh. Jon D. (2014). "Land rights and the Arab Spring: The case of Yemen." Conference Paper, Identity and Conflict in the Middle East and its Diasporic Cultures. University of Balamand, Lebanon.

80 Mentioned in Arhab, Khawlan and Nehm districts.

81 Heinze, Marie-Christine; Stevens, Sophie (2018). "Women As Peacebuilders in Yemen." Produced for the UK Foreign Commonwealth Office CSSF. Social Development Direct and Yemen Polling Center. p. 7.

Discrimination was mentioned as a key cause for conflict at the community level (particularly in Shebawah and Sana'a) where groups are categorised into several social strata such as *ashraf*, *muhammasheen* and *mazayinah*.<sup>82</sup> Participants noted that the same takes place in the South where communities practice discrimination between persons based on where they come from.<sup>83</sup>

There was unanimous agreement among participants that the lack of accountability of those in power in important positions in the government, as well as different political ideologies, are a root cause for conflict. The war economy was also cited as a main cause of conflict between parties to the conflict in different areas of Yemen. Participants noted that when profit takes precedence over humanity, the Yemeni people will suffer.

Low literacy rates and a lack of adequate awareness on citizenship and good governance were also mentioned as contributing to different types of conflicts in Yemen. The abuses of the authoritarian regime in the North and the totalitarian one in the South have also influenced political and social cultures and entrenched the concepts of patronage politics<sup>84</sup> and competition over public resources.

Another important root cause for conflict is the absence of reliable rule of law (judiciary and law enforcement) systems which make citizens resort to force to seek what they perceive as their legal rights.

This is prominent in areas where the government presence is non-existent and tribal laws prevail, especially in Sana'a, Mareb, Shebawah, Al-Baydha, Al-Dhale' and Wadi Hadhramawt.

The absence of government institutions and the prevalence of corruption, combined with weak security systems, has led to the spread of weapons and crime. The plethora of armed groups and easy recruitment of idle and poor young men have contributed to extremism (mainly in Al-Baydha, Hadhramawt and Aden).

Main actors:

- The main actors in the current conflict are both "external" and "domestic." This is how participants described the conflict which has elements of a civil war, with various parties, as well as external interventions by the SLC, Iran and other actors contributing to the continuation of hostilities.
- In addition to groups that are armed and others who take the form of "militias," other groups who identify themselves as ISIS or AQAP are also present and are part of the conflict (mainly in Hadhramawt, Al-Baydha and Shebawah).
- Tribal leaders were also identified as contributing to conflict in some areas.
- Warlords were also described as people of power who control the black market for arms, petrol, diesel, cooking fuel and hard currency.

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82 Cf. Definitions in the Lexicon of Yemeni Arabic Terminology section.

83 South versus North origins, and other forms of discrimination.

84 For a concise explanation of patronage politics see: Longley-Alley, April (2010). "The Rules of the Game: Unpacking Patronage Politics in Yemen." *The Middle East Journal* 64(3). p. 385-409.

## 3.2

### Means for Conflict Resolution

Yemeni history is rich in Islamic and tribal practices of mediation, negotiation, conflict management and resolution and peacebuilding such as:

- The protection of non-combatants in the ‘sacred enclave,’ variously called *hijrah*, *haram* and *hawtah*, is a common practice found in urban areas throughout Yemen where various tribes and protected parties can safely interact.<sup>85</sup>
- Tribal law has very clear principles to safeguard non-combatants or protected groups, such as those from higher social categories such as descendants of the Prophet Mohammed or judges<sup>86</sup> or those who are seen as *du’afa*. For tribesmen it is a great dishonour to harm the protected and amends for such an offence can be up to eleven times the normal *diyya* (blood money).<sup>87</sup>
- A number of capacities for peace have been identified in Yemen including: a culture of dialogue, a willingness to engage in mediation and arbitration, an openness to acknowledge other groups’ grievances, a culture of empathy and charitable support for the vulnerable, and a recognition of common concerns and aspirations.<sup>88</sup>

This research identified *tahkeem*, or tribal arbitration, as a process used in all target governorates except for

Aden.<sup>89</sup> This local practice is a method used in tribal areas when mediation, negotiation and dialogue between conflicting parties has failed.

Citizens do not resort to police or judiciary systems in target governorates (except for Hadhramawt). Due to the collapse of security and government systems, most Yemenis in these governorates use traditional methods of conflict resolution such as mediation or *tahkeem*. For example, participants in Aden Governorate KIIs stated that administrative procedures are extremely long in Aden police stations, which discourages citizens from accessing such services. The Directorate in Aden in some areas had a negative impact on neighbourhoods, as each quarter has its own military leader who has to approve all steps in a procedure. Overall in Aden, police stations play a very weak role.<sup>90</sup>

The main actors who play a major role in conflict resolution include tribal leaders in most governorates except for Aden and Taiz, which are perceived to be less tribal. Public figures such as social and religious leaders were referenced in most governorates to solve community disputes – this also includes local council members and *Akil Al-Hara*.<sup>91</sup> The latter two were only reported in Hadhramawt Governorate, possibly because the local governance system there has been less affected by the conflict. In the Governorate of Taiz, civil society organisations were mentioned as playing a prominent role in conflict resolution.

85 Cf. Definition in the Lexicon of Yemeni Arabic Terminology section.

86 Descendants of the Prophet Mohammed are held in high regard due to their respected religious status which has contributed to the legitimacy of many historic leaders including the Zaydi Imamate, as well as the founders and leader of Ansar Allah. This group of Yemenis and judges often serve as arbiters and mediators in tribal conflicts.

87 Cf. Definition in the Lexicon of Yemeni Arabic Terminology section.

88 UNICEF (2014). “Situation Analysis of Children in Yemen 2014.” ROY, MOPIC and UNICEF. p 272. See Annex A for further details.

89 Mojalli, Al-Migdad (2015). “Traditional tribal justice trumps state laws for many in Yemen. *Middle East Eye*. 26 November 2015.

90 In Aden, traditional means for conflict resolution are followed in the districts of Mualla, Tawahi and Crater, while in other districts such as Sheikh Othman, Dar Saad and Boraika Resistance leaders are usually the ones who have the final say in conflicts in these areas.

91 Cf. Definition in the Lexicon of Yemeni Arabic Terminology section.

### 3.3

## Impact of Conflict on Women and Gender Roles

Participants in both FGDs and KIIs expressed that the economic impact of war was most significant for women. Many expressed that the conflict has added a huge burden to women and girls. Women in many cases had to work to support their families because the male head of the household is either fighting in the frontlines, injured, has no salary or has been let go from his job. Women were also responsible for coping with the shortages of gas, fuel, electricity, and in many cases, drinking water. Girls had to walk long hours to fetch wood or water for the household, and in many cases, had to drop out of school.

Women also suffer great psychological pressure due to poverty and the recruitment of their sons and, in many cases, breadwinners, by armed groups. Women in active conflict areas live in fear of being forced to leave their homes, which they feel will increase risks of SGBV for themselves and their daughters. Women also have become victims of the social impact of conflict including increased rates of divorce and the disappearance of husbands. Many women reported having miscarriages due to psychological pressure. Further, it was noted that many women have become disabled due to direct injury from airstrikes or missiles.

Yemeni women have expanded beyond socially acceptable roles as a result of the conflict, often moving into the broader public sphere as they have become more active in public life, regardless of their ideological or political affiliations. As a result of the war, informants shared that women who had previously been confined to the home have started their own businesses or sought employment. More women engaged in civil and community activities, thus improving the status of women in general. Women often described how their male relatives and their communities have become more accepting to their work and travel and free movement, despite the complex security situation due to the conflict.

In the absence of men, women have also had to step up and manage agricultural land, small businesses and even follow up with cases in law courts. It was also noted that women have been working with local governance structures and that local leaders are open to such female involvement in public institutions. However, participants also noted that women are still generally excluded from formal decision-making and political structures.<sup>92</sup>

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92 Heinze, Marie-Christine; Stevens, Sophie (2018). "Women As Peacebuilders in Yemen." Produced for UK Foreign Commonwealth Office CSSF. Social Development Direct and Yemen Polling Center. p. 7.

## 3.4

# Impact of Conflict

## Political dimensions

Political divisions have widened and become more severe due to the conflict. Political and ideological polarisation has increased, even among those with no prior engagement in political process. The ability of civilians to maintain neutrality in many communities is increasingly complex. In many parts of the country, if citizens seek to promote peace or avoid choosing sides, they are treated with suspicion and at times punished for not contributing to war effort.

Conflict has changed the political dynamics not only at the national level but also at the local level. Community members often do not understand who is in control and who has authority. The formation of new power centres that were not present before has confused communities and exploited vulnerabilities.

In contrast to the inclusion of nearly 30 percent women in the NDC process, the peace process subsequent to April 2015 has been very limited. Eight Yemeni women were selected to serve as advisors to OESGY for the renewed consultations in Geneva, Switzerland, in September 2018 (including three members of *Tawafuq*), and a further four women attended as civil society activists, including another *Tawafuq* member. The

Eman Shaif, an Adeni activist former NDC delegate and member of *Tawafuq*, describes the exclusion of women from peace processes, whether at the local or national level, as detrimental to the potential success of such processes. *“We all know that women are the source of peace, they deal most with the problems on the ground and they will benefit the most from peace,” she said. “Ignoring women and marginalizing their role in the peace process will lead to the marginalization of very important social and humanitarian issues that won’t even be considered by men and the parties to the conflict because they will be focusing on political issues.”*

SE is working with the support of the international community to pressure the parties to the conflict for the meaningful participation of women on their delegations. Many Yemeni women and men are working to fulfil the NDC commitment of not less than 30 percent women to be included in all aspects of the peace process – from the ceasefire phase through the political transition and state-building process.

## Economic dimensions

The conflict has led to collapse of the country’s economy. The siege on Yemeni ports and closure of the main airport have led to a shortage of medicine and other basic goods. War has led to the bankruptcy, or severely distress, of many businesses and many workers have been let go from their jobs. In addition, public salaries have not paid regularly since August 2016 due to general budget deficit and issues around the function of the central bank of Yemen.

The conflict, combined with the severe humanitarian crisis, has forced many men and young males to join one side or another. Compensation for such positions varies over time, depending on factors including the recruit’s experience and which party to the conflict is hiring. As men have joined the frontlines or been killed, women have become the primary breadwinners in many households. According to OCHA, female-headed households are at greater risk of food insecurity, with an estimated 30 percent of displaced women now heading their families. Among female-headed IDP and host community households, nearly 21 percent are headed by females below the age of 18.<sup>93</sup>

The emergence of the war economy has resulted in wildly fluctuating costs for basic commodities, which has accelerated the polarisation of economic classes. Three years into the war, this has deeply divided the rich and those with some resources from those who are displaced, starving and with few assets.

93 OCHA (2018). “Yemen: 2018 Humanitarian Needs Overview 2018.”



With massive profits being made from the war both inside Yemen and outside, such a reality is negatively impacting the peace process. According to a Yemeni researcher, “All the armed groups, the guys with guns, the politicians in Sana’a and Riyadh, they are actually profiting from the war. Diplomats from the West look at the war and the humanitarian crisis and they think they must want it to stop. But big money is being made and if the war ends the money stops. So why stop now?”<sup>94</sup>

### Social dimensions

The lack of basic services such as water supply and electricity has also caused several social disturbances. This context of deprivation is tied to interviewee reports of increased conflict between husbands and wives as a result of female household members earning income and managing the household, while men often see themselves as being forced to take on traditional female domestic responsibilities in the household, including collecting water, cooking and childcare. Domestic violence by men was mentioned to include verbal and physical abuse of women and children.

The psycho-social impact of the conflict on the population is impossible to assess, but as the war drags on the damage done is incalculable, particularly for children. With the education system struggling in all locations and collapsing in areas hard hit by frontline fighting, parents struggle to promote normalcy, particularly while huddling in basements and caves to avoid airstrikes and shelling.

The conflict has also affected the role of women in civil society, a sector where women have played a leadership role since Unification. Issues include increasing interventions by local authorities, security issues and funding focused almost exclusively on humanitarian programming. Such issues have been highlighted by other research including a publication by AWAM Development Foundation in Partnership with Oxfam and Youth Leadership Development Foundation (YLDF), entitled, “The Impacts of War on the Participation of Women in Civil Society Organizations and Peacebuilding.”<sup>95</sup>

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94 Peter Salisbury (2017). *Yemen and the Business of War*. Chatham House.

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95 Noor Addin, Ahmed; Shujaa Addin; Hassan; Al-Shami, Mohammed (2017). Translated & edited by: Shujaa Addin; Asem Al-Homaidi. General Supervision: Abouosba, Bilqis. “The Impacts of War on the Participation of Women in Civil Society Organizations and Peacebuilding.” AWAM Development Foundation in Partnership with Oxfam and YLDF.

## 4.

# STORIES OF YEMENI WOMEN, CONFLICT AND PEACEBUILDING

The following section synthesises stories shared on women, conflict and peacebuilding, primarily from this field research, but also supplemented from other sources. These are the stories of Yemeni women that were shared during the research on women who have had a role in peacebuilding.

### 4.1

#### SANA'A<sup>94</sup>

Women informants in Sana'a Governorate<sup>97</sup> expressed that they have a role in conflict resolution on a limited scale at the governorate level, but more influence in the city of Sana'a. One example provided was a dispute over a piece of land that led to an armed conflict between two large families, resulting in many deaths and injuries on both sides. The wives of the two main family leaders organised a meeting to resolve the problem.

96 Sana'a Governorate, including the City of Sana'a, is the fourth most populous in the country, and consists of 16 districts. Due to proximity to the Capital City of Sana'a, and the centre of the economy and government, many aspects of the current conflict have impacted the area. Two districts in the Governorate – Nihm and Arhab – have both seen heavy fighting and air bombardments since March 2015 due to proximity to Sana'a Airport, access to Sana'a City and as they host major military camps. They have been frontlines at multiple times since March 2015. Other districts in the Governorate have also been deeply affected by the conflict and the humanitarian crisis for various reasons including being identified as supporters of parties to the conflict or strategic military locations.

97 The study targeted Sana'a Governorate mainly in northern tribal areas and Sana'a City, where the context is completely different.

Om-Kalthoum Al-Shami, a *Tawafuq* activist from Sana'a, shared her concerns that women's stake in peace are less political and closer to community needs. *"The majority of women care about four major things: food, water, safety and dignity. The role of Tawafuq now is not only to work at the international level, but to work in the field with women. I always recommend starting at the grassroots as it is more effective than working top-down. If you can change how women think, you can change society, bit by bit."*

*"In Darb Obaid, Arhab, the area was almost empty of men and young males. They were all either on the frontlines fighting, killed or arrested. Women in my area were able to move more freely and were able to have the space to play a role in protecting the area. I recalled the stories of my grandmother Mahdia who was said to be 'as strong as Noqom Mountain' and this encouraged me to step up and do something."*  
Fatima Al-Obaidi, Arhab District

Women in Sana'a Governorate stated that one successful means to establish peace is by creating family ties between conflicting parties. This could take place following negotiation, when a son of one of the families would marry the daughter of the opposing family to create blood relations between them. Consent of the younger generation involved in this settlement was not an issue highlighted by the women interviewed. However, it is understood that forced marriage for political or prudential reasons is not a rights-based approach and it should not be encouraged, even in seeking to resolve conflict.

Fayza Al-Mutawakel, an engineer from Sana'a and a member of *Tawafuq*, summarised the situation for women as one of increasing strain and decreasing protection: *"Women are under a lot of pressure within families and society. And while the laws are on our side, they are not being upheld."*

When women found themselves alone in conflict situations, either with men on the frontlines or when fleeing a conflict, they had to step in and play a role to protect their area or family. This necessity has contributed to the roles of women as peacemakers and has helped many women gain experience and confidence.

The research noted an incident in Arhab District, an area on the outskirts of Sana'a City which in 2014-15 was a key battleground as Ansar Allah moved down from Sa'adah. When several men from Arhab District were killed it was women who negotiated with Ansar Allah to retrieve the dead bodies and return them to their families for burial.

Women in the Al-Makarib area of Arhab District were also successful in preventing Ansar Allah forces from burning valuable construction equipment and tractors belonging to officials from the Al-Islah political party. They did this by climbing onto them and announcing that the equipment provided income for their families and could not be destroyed.

A prominent example of women's roles is the case of Laila Al-Thawr, the head of Sam Organization in Khawlan District, an area southeast of Sana'a City, who was

*"I was a member of the revolution committee, but everyone told me it was impossible for me to do anything in such circumstances. They said men were not able to resolve the issue of prisoners. I was able to do it! I contacted all parties and was able to complete the prisoner exchange process with all guarantees being in place and signed documents and even with prisoner IDs and photos being documented."*

Laila Al-Thawr, Khawlan District

part of a very tough negotiation process to secure the release of a missing child. She had to go through several rounds of negotiations with both parties until the child was released. She was also part of a group negotiating a prisoner exchange between Mareb Governorate and southern governorates.

Several stories told by women from Sana'a emphasise that existing social patterns and structures are often used to resolve conflicts between families, such as revenge killings or land disputes. The stories shared by women showed that they themselves perceived their role as mediators or peacebuilders as within their traditional roles as caregivers. Women used their cultural and traditional protected status to seek to prevent others from being harmed.

Women's roles as portrayed by informants to this study recognised family or neighbourhood boundaries in many cases. Their approach to conflict resolution used family relations rather than their own personality or skills to contribute to peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Research participants saw such relationships as more accessible to them. This has allowed women to play a role in resolving disputes over land, water resources, manslaughter and SGBV.

It is worth mentioning that women in rural areas of Sana'a Governorate have been affected longer than women in other governorates by mobility restrictions which emanate from increased proximity to outsiders. Research in Yemen has shown that when a road is paved into a more remote community, women suddenly see their world and mobility shrinking. It was

also the case in the former North Yemen when roads arrived in rural areas, and so did the *niqab* (face veil) and *sharshaf* (black layered external covering), where previously women had only worn a headscarf.<sup>98</sup>

Compared to rural women, in Sana'a City women are more educated, have more leisure time, are exposed to broader cultural and social influences and have more employment and political opportunities. Such influences have provided space for women to play leadership roles in civil society organisations and many gained expertise in mediation and peacebuilding as a result.

In rural areas of Sana'a Governorate, women are confined more by conservative local customs and norms and therefore their mobility is limited and they are unable to mix with men in public venues. However, informants stated that conflicting tribes would often utilise women to play the role of the messenger between them and that women have more access to conflict frontlines due to their protected status.

### MAREB, SHEBWAH and AL-JAWF

Although tribes are often referred to as a less favoured substitute for an absent or weak state,<sup>99</sup> tribes in Mareb, Shebwah and Al-Jawf continue to provide social order outside the formal system and have always been an important pillar of society. By some estimates, as much as 80 percent of the Yemeni population in these areas primarily resolves conflicts using customary law.<sup>100</sup>

Yemen's tribes are not homogenous, but they are territory-based entities held together by obligations of cooperation among their members with kinship being a key defining attribute.<sup>101</sup> While some urban populations still identify as tribal, Yemen's main tribal areas – those where tribal structures and customs dominate

Women from the village of Al-Malakha in Bani Al-Harith District involved in the local Water User Association (WUA) helped resolve a long-standing conflict over land and water. A rainwater catchment dam built in the area in 2002 caused a major conflict when one tribe was accused of consuming more than its share of water. The conflict escalated to armed clashes with several casualties. This led to a binding tribal ruling that no one was allowed to use the water and so it was wasted and lost via evaporation. Recently, the women in the Al-Malakha WUA proposed a solution which was accepted by all. The FAO Yemen Sana'a Basin Project then supported cash-for-work to dig a series of shallow wells connected to the dam via a piped network. The newly created wells did not belong to any tribe and were fed from the dam via gravity. This agreement and system was documented and a tribal decree was issued. For a short video created by FAO see: <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/1mbs8uxhubzta5v/AAB2ebcXUbQkaQuxkG9tI75ba?dl=o&preview=Almlekeh+Dam+Documenting+Final+.mp4>.

the social order with warrior capacities – are rural or located in less populous towns. In this research, tribal areas include parts of the north and northwest provinces of Al-Jawf, Mareb, Shebwah and Al-Baydha.<sup>102</sup> In these governorates, customary law protects the peace within and among tribes by resolving conflicts in ways that achieve reconciliation among antagonists and preserve social cohesion. The tribal conflict resolution system relies on compromise and mutual benefit, rather than on imposed punishment or losers and winners. The mediation process involves confession of wrongdoing, apologies, praising opponents' honour and good qualities, and forgiveness.

In both Shebwah and Mareb, it is recognised that conflict has been exacerbated by the political dynamics of the petroleum extraction industry and central government policies to use patronage pay-outs as a

98 Colburn, M. (2002). *Gender and Development in Yemen*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Amman Jordan. p 29.

99 Corstange, Daniel (2008). "Tribes and the Rule of Law in Yemen." College Park, Md.: Department of Government and Politics. p. 13.

100 Al-Zwaini, Laila (2012). "The Rule of Law in Yemen: Prospects and Challenges." Hiil

101 Salmoni, Barak A.; Loidolt, Bryce; Wells, Madeleine (2010). "Regime and Periphery in North Yemen: The Huthi Phenomenon." National Defense Research Institute.

102 Adra, Najwa (2015). "Don't Throw Out the Baby with Social Evolution: Revisiting 'Tribe' in the Middle East and North Africa."

way to buy off tribes to the detriment of local social cohesion. Such policies have created dependencies, fuelled corruption among tribal and political leaders,

and contributed to kidnapping, carjacking and road blocking as methods of extorting concessions from government and private sector interests.

## 4.2

### MAREB<sup>103</sup>

Limah Dharman is a 22-year-old activist living in Majzar District. Limah considers herself a pioneer in social activism because she continued her social activities despite family opposition and conservative local traditions. One year ago, she established a 22-member female youth association concerned with local conflict resolution. The association has been able to contribute to the mediation of at least 15 cases. The conflicts they have worked on include domestic disputes and conflicts over land and the valuable *sidr* trees.<sup>104</sup>

Fatema Taleb Akarm, living in Al-Wadi District, was behind the resolution of a land conflict which lasted more than six years. She mediated between parties through communication with the relevant authorities and community leaders without revealing her work to the conflicting parties. The parties to the conflict were surprised to know about her role in resolving the conflict when the success story was shared in a local radio program in Mareb.

*"I faced opposition from everyone who knew me in Mareb. They said that conflict resolution and peacebuilding is a dangerous thing for a woman to be engaged in. My relatives kept on saying that I have to stay home, because that is where I belong. I was mocked because they said that this job is tough even for tribal men and that I would not succeed in it. But I was able to persevere, and I gained respect of my community."*  
Limah Dharman, Majzar District

Young female activists in Mareb have worked against all odds. With time, the local communities have accepted their public role. However, their peacebuilding role is mainly at the community level, resolving conflicts such as revenge or disputes over land. Their role is recognised by their communities, which is significant given the complex nature of the tribal system which prevails in the governorate.

103 Mareb has emerged as an apparent success story since the beginning of the war. Away from the frontline in Sirwah, where fighting is ongoing, there has been little conflict elsewhere in the governorate since late 2015. Mareb is now almost entirely under the control of local authorities. Improvements in governance and service delivery in Mareb have been so marked that many Marebis say that the situation is better than before the war. In Mareb city, property prices have risen dramatically as the market has boomed. Several infrastructure projects are under way and electricity supply, historically limited to around four districts, now reaches nine out of 14 districts. An influx of IDPs fleeing the war has provided stimulus to the local economy, albeit while straining local resources. (Peter Salisbury: Yemen: National Chaos, Local Order. Chatham House. Dec 2017). This success story is despite the negative impact on conflict dynamics considered a result of the extraction of oil from the area starting in the 1980s.

104 Known botanically as *Ziziphus spina-christi* (and in English as the Lote tree, Christ's Thorn, Jujube or Nabkh tree, this drought-tolerant plant is highly prized for the honey produced by bees pollinating this ancient tree, as well as its many medicinal uses. <https://www.yemensidrhone.com/sidr-tree/>

As part of the research for this study, a video documentary was produced by UN Women Yemen, working with Nahj Consulting and Comra Films, entitled, "*Yemeni Women Building Peace in Times of War*" (August 2018).<sup>105</sup> The video profiles a young woman from Mareb, Fatima Ahmad, who is a local community mediator. Fatima was a delegate to the NDC and works to untangle community-level disputes by working with all parties to conflicts, sometimes very discreetly, in order to build peace in her own community. Her work is at times enormously challenging and progress is very slow, but Fatima believes that the work she is doing is vital, and her own way of having an impact on Yemeni society. "I feel a person should have a lasting influence on their community," she said.

105 <http://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2018/9/women-set-examples-for-peacebuilding-in-yemen>

### 4.3

## SHEBWAH<sup>104</sup>

Redda' Al-Tweelah is a prominent mediator in land conflicts in Al-Sharaf District. Aishah Hussien Al-Errseh, from the Yeshbim area, mediated in revenge cases by volunteering to pay the *diya* (or blood money) to the victim's family. One prominent story features Melook Bekarkar, a 70-year-old former head of the Yemeni Women's Union (YWU) branch in Shebawah. She is a social activist and a member of the Yemeni Socialist Party and has played an important role in gaining the trust of her community through her work in women's rights. She mediated and established dialogue on some very sensitive issues such as cases of honour crimes and SGBV. She was able to resolve these cases discretely through mediation between families while at the same time offering protection to women and girls involved in such cases, despite the area's conservative culture.

Saleha Faraj is a 50-year-old social activist and former YWU member in the Bayhan area of Shebawah. She lives in Nessab District and was able to mediate between two families from a very prominent tribe in a revenge case. She succeeded in establishing dialogue between the families and convinced the family of the killer to surrender to official forces to stop a blood feud that could have lasted years into the future.

These women have had to stand in the face of very strong traditions in Shebawah. Women with prior political experience or engagement, or those with stronger tribal family ties, were more able than others to play a role in conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

An interviewee stated that women's public roles have deteriorated following Unification in 1990, when the government presence decreased and communities became more reliant on tribal mediation to resolve conflicts. They also stated that there were successful female peacemakers, typically older and more educated women, who during the socialist era received state support in their conflict resolution efforts. Interviewees mentioned Melook Bekarkar and Saleha Haidera (see paragraph below) as women active in conflict resolution, although it was noted that their roles are still largely confined to resolving family issues within the traditional tribal system.

In a study published in June 2018 by UN Women's Regional Office for the Arab States, there is a profile of Sabreen, an educator and civil society leader in Yemen's Shebawah Governorate.<sup>107</sup> Sabreen's engagement in local mediation is a natural extension of her work in public schools in the area. Having spent years settling disputes between students, families and colleagues, Sabreen slowly became involved in larger and more complex cases. However, gendered limitations on her mobility and freedom of association, due to both the safety concerns stemming from the current conflict and pre-existing social and cultural norms, often mean that she works from behind the scenes to influence and shape the mediation process.<sup>108</sup>

Saleha Haidera, a social worker who has worked in the Women's Section of the Directorate of Government for 32 years, is also featured in the documentary video "*Yemeni Women Building Peace in Times of War*." She

<sup>106</sup> This former South Yemen Governorate was a battleground in 2015 between forces loyal to Ansar Allah and the internationally recognised government. Additionally, the area has struggled with the long-term presence of AQAP, with the area targeted for expansion. These more recent conflict issues have exacerbated historic conflict dynamics in an area which has seen considerable tribal conflict due to a variety of factors including the liquefied natural gas pipeline which runs through it to the LNG terminus and LNG plant in Balhaf on the coast of the Gulf of Aden. There has also been a large number of US drone strikes (<https://www.newamerica.org/in-depth/americas-counterterrorism-wars/us-targeted-killing-program-yemen>). An area that was typically underserved by government services, despite its critical contributions to the economy, a 2012 World Food Programme (WFP) study found that 25 percent of Shebawah households reported remittances from abroad as the main source of income, the highest in the country, versus the national average of 7.9 percent, demonstrating the lack of employment opportunities.

<sup>107</sup> Hanan Tabbara; Garrett Rubin. "Women on the Frontlines of Conflict Resolution and Negotiation: Community Voices: From Syria, Iraq and Yemen." UN Women Regional Office for the Arab States. June 2018.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid. p. 13.

comes from a family of peacebuilders: her father was a social worker and community negotiator. Saleha focuses on issues affecting women – early marriage, education, domestic violence – but her work brings her into situations where she must negotiate with men, in some cases meetings where she must negotiate with 60 to 100 men at a time. “When a woman has a strong voice and respect among men, the job is easy,” she said. Saleha believes that her personality is behind her ability to earn men’s respect, but for many other female Yemeni peacebuilders, external factors act as barriers.

In Shebwah Governorate, conflict has always been present as a result of various tribal, political, economic and social challenges. Conflict resolution mechanisms and key players have frequently shifted due to changes in the governing system in Shebwah. Mechanisms have passed through different stages, starting from totally relying on tribal modalities, to the absence of tribal system during the socialist era, and, following Unification, back to fully relying on the

*“We work to activate the positive aspects of tribal customs, especially when we find that [tribal leaders] are ...not showing good will to negotiate and resolve disputes. We target the elders. We sit with them and discuss with them in a way to activate their willingness to negotiate, and to think about the impact of disputes on the community.” Sabreen, “Women on the Frontlines of Conflict Resolution and Negotiation: Community Voices from Syria, Iraq and Yemen.”*

tribal system – a situation that prevails until the present day. Key players have changed from government employees and security forces to *sheikhs* and political and social leaders. The dramatic shift in Shebwah’s governance dynamics has weakened the role women play in conflict resolution, limiting them to creating a new generation of female activists.

## 4.4

### AL-JAWF<sup>109</sup>

Al-Jawf is among the Northern governorates that have strong tribal traditions. Tribal customary law is the main system used to resolve conflicts. However, an increase in conflict and a lack of development projects, among other factors, have put the system under tremendous stress. Corruption, poverty, unemployment,

competition over water and resources, as well as a lack of resources for education and a shortage of teachers, were all named as some of the root causes of conflict in the community.<sup>110</sup>

Saidah Al-Ghanemy is a well-known female leader in the Governorate. She is the mother of the current Governor and the wife of one of the most prominent tribal sheikhs in Al-Jawf. She is also the head of YWU in Al-Jawf. Her tribe and family as well as her community status enabled her to take bold steps in conflict resolution. She told the story of how two important tribes (Hamdan and Shawlan) had a dispute and placed heavy military machinery at the borders of their territories, flagging an imminent war. Saidah went to the tribal

109 A sparsely populated governorate northeast of the Capital City of Sana’a, Al-Jawf extends to the Empty Quarter bordering the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and occupies about 7.2 percent of Yemen’s land mass. It is one of the poorest and most isolated areas in the country and has been plagued by conflict and stereotyped as lawless and a haven for terrorism, a reputation bolstered by high-profile terrorist such as Yemeni-American preacher Anwar al-Awlaki, who was killed by a US drone strike in Al-Jawf in 2011. During the current conflict the area has been an active frontline, experiencing significant casualties and population displacement (<https://www.acleddata.com/2018/04/12/the-northeastern-front-of-the-yemeni-civil-war>). Al-Jawf hosts significant IDP populations from other parts of Yemen. Since Spring 2018, when the internationally recognised government with SLC support and aligned tribes regained control of significant portions of the Governorate, there has been some level of prosperity, similar to the situation in Mareb.

110 Al-Dawsari, Nadwa (2014). “Case Studies on Women and Conflict in Tribal Yemen-Al-Jawf.” Yemen Tribal Voices Blogspot.

sheikh of Hamdan and threw her black face veil<sup>111</sup> in his lap, requesting an immediate resolution and removal of all signs of hostility. She made the same visit to the rival Shawlan tribe leader. Her mediation resulted in the withdrawal of heavy armoury and launched a dialogue between the two tribes.

Saberah Al-Okaimy mediates in family and tribal disputes in her area. She is well known for an incident in 1995 when military government forces attacked Mueimarah village in Al-Mattoon District. The local tribes sabotaged military tanks and pursued soldiers for tribal vengeance. Saberah was able to provide refuge to the soldiers and prevent their capture by tribal forces. She also negotiated with the established local mediation committee to return the soldiers safely to their unit.<sup>112</sup>

Another anecdote from Al-Jawf describes how women from the area formed a 'battalion of peace' in order to stop a conflict. In 1996 in the Al-Timah area, in Khabb wa Al-Sha'af District bordering Saudi Arabia, a tribal conflict arose among the Hazm tribes which intensified until it became extremely violent, with many dead and injured. The two parties refused to settle the dispute, so a group of elderly women organised a sit-in and protested the continuation of the conflict, emphasising that the parties to the conflict were related to one another. The sit-in forced the parties to mediation and the conflict was halted.

Often the women engaged in conflict resolution or peacebuilding activities are older women who have social standing or tribal descent. These women have been able to use their social status and thus been accepted by their communities to intervene directly with tribal leaders and provide protection to parties

*"The situation was not easy for me. The tribes fighting were that of my tribe Hamdan and my husband's Shawlan. I observed as both our relatives were killed. My son Abdullah was killed brutally by my own family because he belonged to my husband's tribe. I thought that the time had come for me to stop this war and stop the bloodshed."* Saida Al-Ghanemy, Al-Jawf

to the conflict. These female leaders leverage customary law to access and influence tribal leaders. Nevertheless, due to conservative tendencies which have gained influence in the area in recent years, men do not always welcome women's engagement in such activities, especially younger women. This pattern of exclusion also pertains to younger males, who struggle to have their voices heard in many parts of the country.

It is worth mentioning that Al-Jawf's new generation of women faces more challenges compared to the older generation. They experience more extremist traditions influenced by extremist scholars, which limit women's participation in the public realm. The low literacy rate in the governorate is another important factor influencing the role of women in negotiation and conflict resolution beyond the scope of family conflicts.

### AL-BAYDHA and AL-DHALE'

Al-Dhale' and Al-Baydha are governorates well known for conflict due to political issues between former South Yemen (People's Democratic Republic of Yemen – PDRY) and North Yemen (Yemen Arab Republic – YAR) during the 1970s and 1980s, before Unification. Such an unstable environment with high levels of violence limited women's activism and hindered them from actively engaging in conflict resolution outside the confines of the family. The central players in conflict resolution in the area are *sheikhs*, religious leaders and political leaders. The history of conflict in Al-Dhale' in the 1970s and 1980s and post-Unification patronage politics/conflict dynamics have contributed to insecurity in the area. This in turn has constrained women's role in the public sphere and often forced women to

111 Leveraging local traditions, a woman will throw or remove her veil (which according to custom is the symbol of protection and integrity) to signify a lack of safety or a desperate demand for peace. A woman can also influence an arbitration process by cutting a piece of her hair and taking it to the arbitrator as an indication that she has a demand. A good arbitrator and tribesman would honour the demand of a woman in that context. <http://yementribalvoices.blogspot.com/2014/04/font-face-font-family-arialfont-face.html>

112 Informants stated that Saberah received a call from the President at the time, Ali Abdullah Saleh, and was given a valuable necklace in recognition of the building efforts.



take on heavy burdens when their husbands, sons and brothers are killed or injured. Weak governance and rule of law has limited the protection of women and reinforced conservative cultural norms. These factors, combined with low levels of female education and literacy, have also limited women's influence in the government and the public sphere.

## 4.5

### AL-BAYDHA<sup>113</sup>

Fatimah Mohammed Omer Al-Mazaferi is a lawyer and divorcee and was the first female General Director in the Governorate Office. Fatima was involved in conflict resolution from the time she joined the YWU branch office in Al-Baydha. Despite the social stigma against her as a divorced woman, she has continued her work as a volunteer and civil society activist and her efforts to mobilise other woman to engage in social work.<sup>113</sup>

In addition to resolving complicated issues between families over land and the custody of children, Fatima has negotiated over the illegal detention of many individuals and resolved access issues for medical convoys.

Recently, Islamist groups have contributed to the conflict in Al-Baydha along with Ansar Allah and

Balquis Al-Lahabi's father was from Rada' in Al-Baydha, although she was raised in Sana'a. She is a well-known activist who was an NDC delegate and is a member of Tawafuq. Currently based abroad, her status in the Yemen diaspora has not prevented her from maintaining an active role as a peacebuilder. For Balquis, the chief concern is economic, and how long Yemeni women can maintain stability and work towards peace in the face of the crippling effects of war. *"Looking not at elites but at the level of average Yemenis, the country's long history of conflict has also proliferated mechanisms to manage it. After more than three years of this war, Yemenis are still able to help one another. Women in rural areas continue caring for their families and others with very limited resources. I worry that if the war continues, the poor will not be able to keep this up."*

pro-coalition forces. The area has seen active fighting during the current conflict, although the role of women in resolving conflicts in this governorate is limited compared to other governorates such as Mareb and Al-Jawf.

<sup>113</sup> Al-Baydha Governorate is an amalgam of districts formerly YAR and PDRY, bordering eight other governorates, a geographic nexus which lends itself to smuggling and an area with high levels of AQAP operations. Events of the Arab Spring brought Rada' into the limelight with the brief 2012 takeover of the town by AQAP, although the issue was resolved through tribal mediation. As a result of the persistent AQAP presence in the area, it has been plagued by numerous US drone strikes, resulting in civilian casualties in the area including the 2014 tragic death of 12 members of a wedding party. A poor, underserved area with limited employment opportunities, which has led to high levels of migration, with Rada' area having one of the oldest and highest migration rates in the former YAR. In the 1980 census, 46 percent of adult males in Rada' were living outside Yemen [Staub, S. (1989) *Yemenis in New York City: A Folklore of Ethnicity*. Associated University Press. p 78.].

## 4.6

### AL-DHALE'<sup>112</sup>

One story shared highlighted the peacebuilding efforts of Jannah Mohammed Qassim, who lives in Al-Hussein District. This mother was worried that her sons might be recruited to take an active role in the conflict. In 2015, one of her sons was affiliated with the resistance forces. The 18-year-old insisted on engaging

with the group with the aim of going to the front. Jannah tried her best to stop him from going. She went to the armed group that was trying to recruit her son and, accompanied by other mothers from her village, camped there for three weeks until her son and his colleagues changed their minds.

## 4.7

### TAIZ<sup>113</sup>

Field research found that women and female youth are actively engaging in peacebuilding activities in Taiz as humanitarian aid workers as individuals or members of civil society organisations. Their humanitarian work as well as their economic power has allowed them to gain not only access, but also social status and standing among the main political and security actors in the governorate.

One of Taiz's best-known women peacemakers was Reham Al-Bader<sup>116</sup>, a young female activist who was killed in 2017. Reham, who started her activism pre-2011, was a member of the Taiz youth movement and in 2013 founded the Nofoodh Organisation, which aimed to educate people about the outcomes of the NDC.

Reham's peacebuilding achievements are numerous and wide-ranging. She is known for mediating between two leaders (Hamoud Al-Mikhalafi, an Islahi resistance leader, and Abu Al-Abbas, a Salafi resistance leader in Taiz) in order to stop fighting in Taiz. She also worked with fellow youth activists to negotiate a ceasefire and to open civilian access corridors with resistance forces in the city. Local communities sought Reham's help to communicate with resistance officials to respond to community-level security issues and crimes. She was also successful in returning confiscated civilian property to its rightful owners. In one case, Reham negotiated the return of a car used by

114 Al-Dhale' was created after the announcement of Yemeni Unification from districts found in both the former North Yemen and South Yemen. Since 2007 the area has seen political violence carrying into the current phase of the war the battle for Al-Dhale' raged for over two months in 2015 between Ansar Allah and former President Saleh forces and those fighting for the internationally recognised government. Such battles were fought on Al-Dhale' soil as it is home to the command center of the 33rd Armored Brigade, the country's largest army unit that had been loyal to former Yemeni leader Ali Abdullah Saleh. As a result of the conflict in Al-Dhale' and due to its proximity to other conflict areas such as Taiz, there have been large numbers of IDPs.

115 Taiz, Yemen's third largest city and most populous Governorate (an estimated 11.6 percent of the population), is located in the fertile central highlands. The area has seen high levels of conflict and violence since the political transition began in the country in 2011, when the youth and activists from the city played a leading role in bringing down former President Ali Abdullah Saleh. A non-tribal area with a highly educated population and known for its traders and entrepreneurs, Taiz has suffered from some of the worst fighting for over three years. While an indigenous resistance has arisen as a result, the area has also suffered from massive civilian casualties, displacement, assassinations, increased criminality, chaos and AQAP-linked armed groups controlling significant areas.

116 A leading human rights activist killed in Yemen during a mission to supply aid to forces loyal to President Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi in the city of Taiz. Reham Al-Bader was killed by a sniper, along with another member of the humanitarian team. Al-Bader had been a major supporter of the 2011 uprising which saw former President Ali Abdullah Saleh driven from power by mass protests. She was an outspoken opponent of Ansar Allah and called for power to return to the internationally recognised government.

Taiz Al-Thawra hospital, which resistance forces had confiscated.<sup>117</sup>

Field data shows that women engaged in peacebuilding activities are usually female youth who, like Reham, have been civically active even before 2015. The level of access of young females is high, reaching senior resistance and security leadership as well as political decision makers. Youth activists like Reham typically engage with the main authority on the ground – resistance forces – where they appear to find acceptance and community support, but they do not interact with opposing national forces, where women are not accepted as part of the peacemaking process.

Recently Taiz has seen the appointment of a female *Akil Al-Hara*, Bishara Al-Senwi, who was appointed to the Ma'afer District. This District has been deeply affected by the conflict and Bishara has been active in resolving disputes in Ma'afer and also Turbah District. Local women have asked her to extend her role to reach to key party leaders to discuss peacebuilding-related issues.

It is worth mentioning that a probable cause of the increased role of women in peacebuilding in this Governorate is changing gender roles. Field data show that women have had to step outside the safe lines in Taiz and overcome the siege on the city to fetch water or get gas for cooking, with men either on the frontlines or displaced, fearing kidnapping and capture.

*“Women want to play a role in peacebuilding but their resources are limited. Only women activists and educated women are able to defy social traditions and force themselves on the reality of Taiz.”* Manal Al-Shaibani, Taiz

Maeen Al-Abidi, a lawyer, activist and *Tawafuq* member in Taiz, monitors and documents human rights violations against civilians. She also works to release detainees and prisoners and to open a humanitarian corridor to Taiz. Maeen explained that all of these goals require repeated visits to different parties to the conflict, facing many barriers. Maeen believes that women's involvement is critical to finding lasting peace in Yemen: *“I think women will be able to come up with a solution if they are able to articulate their points to the parties to the conflict. Women have historically shown that they can play a key role in peace processes – for example, look at Liberia. We as the women of Tawafuq aspire to do something for the people of Yemen by pressuring the parties to the conflict to end the war. This is our goal, to end the war and bring peace.”*

117 In another example of community-level conflict resolution, Reham mobilised a group of female and male activists to negotiate with Sheikh Ahmed Ali, who presented conservative and inciting speech against female activists from Taiz. She was part of the de-escalation delegation that mediated between then-governor Al-Ma'amari and resistance forces, and she was part of the group that initiated dialogue between Abu Al-Abbas, a Salafi leader in Taiz, and security forces following an attack on the local security centre. In 2015, Reham was detained by Ansar Allah forces in locations prone to airstrikes, which she fled from several times. See Ali, Mohammed (2018). "Reham Al-Bader: A Yemeni symbol of bravery in a city devastated by war." *Arab News*. 11 February 2018.

## 4.8

### ADEN<sup>116</sup>

The political dynamics of the South have influenced women in Aden, who, until recent years, generally enjoyed good status in their communities. They held positions in the Socialist Party and in different government institutions including the Ministry of Defence and the judiciary. This enabled them to play important roles in conflict resolution and mediation under the umbrella of the state. After Unification in 1994, female leaders continued to work but their role was undermined by new political dynamics. Leading up to the uprising of 2011, several prominent female leaders were engaged in the Southern Hirak movement,<sup>119</sup> and other well-known women worked in the government, humanitarian response efforts and civil society.

Participants in this study's FGDs and KIIs noted that the empowered position of women inherited from the Socialist era has not continued into the current conflict era, and they believe it is unlikely to return in the near future. They felt that empowered women are unwelcome in a society where faith-based political movements and extremist religious groups prevail in the political sphere. Such a context limits women's

Ekram Al-Aidros is a judge from Aden and a member of *Tawafuq*. Her view on Yemen's most pressing needs, shared by most women in this field study, are stability, security and the return of vital services and economic activity. Ekram's sense of how these ends should be achieved is reflective of her professional position: *"Following the devastation in Aden city, the Ministry of Justice has worked hard to rebuild itself from scratch, but all of this is hindered by the fact that there is no peace. Aden has started to make progress but it is slow due to obstacles put in the way of government and local authorities."*

*"Being a woman, I am welcome to speak to women and girls within families, which men can't do. I used to wonder why my neighbourhood was able to resolve many social issues compared to other neighbourhoods. I am a woman and I care about keeping the social fabric intact."*  
Fekriah Qaid, Crater Area, Aden

role in mediation and undermines efforts to engage in peacebuilding activities.

Fekriah Qaid Abdu is a mother of three and *Akil Al-Hara* of Al-Wahsh neighbourhood in Crater, Aden. She is a Yemeni peacemaker profiled in the documentary *"Yemeni Women Building Peace in Times of War."* In 2003, when she took the role, Fekriah was Aden's first female neighbourhood chief and she has served in that capacity to date. She has solved conflicts over local services and between the community and local government. She has played an important role in supporting the mothers of detainees in organising peaceful protests in front of Governorate offices and contacting the relevant government authorities to request the release of detainees.

Fekriah stated that, especially with some sensitive social issues, a woman is more able than a man to engage and resolve conflicts because she has more access to families and can help them resolve issues peacefully, without reverting to violence.

118 Aden is the Capital of the former PDRY and was a British crown colony until 1967. It is a city of great diversity which has suffered from periodic conflicts throughout its history, and since the start of the current conflict there has been wide-spread destruction of the urban landscape and loss of civilian life and livelihoods. The four-month long battle for Aden in 2015 (March-July) between the Ansar Allah-Saleh forces and local residents, Southern Movement militias, and Yemen Army units and militias loyal to Abdabbuh Mansur Hadi on the other side with close to 1,000 civilian deaths. Aden has an increasingly strong current of separatists and fractured political elites, interventions backed by UAE forces and weak governance on the part of the internationally recognised government. This situation has deeply affected the social fabric of Aden. With limited basic services and ongoing political violence and economic challenges, conflict dynamics are unlikely to change in the near future.

119 The Southern Movement initially was most active in the mountainous areas of Yaffa, Al-Dhale' and Radfan. As the government in Sana'a largely ignored the demands of the Southern Movement, the network built up further support. Although it has remained divided in terms of organisation, strategy, leadership and ultimate aims, it has benefited from the backing of Gulf States. Fighters allied to the Southern Movement are now the dominant force in the South.

## 4.9

### HADHRAMAWT<sup>118</sup>

The city of Tarim in Wadi Hadhramawt has a long history of Islamic scholarship and is claimed to have the highest concentration of descendants of the Islamic Prophet Muhammad (*sayyids*) anywhere in the world. The Sufi mystical traditions in Wadi Hadhramawt of revering and visiting the graves of scholars and mystics is well known, with numerous tombs of pious women including that of Shaykhah Sultana Al-Zubaydi in Shibam. Such religious traditions contribute to the reputation of the Hadhramawt as famed for its peaceful people.

Women's role in conflict resolution in Hadhramawt has not been documented sufficiently when compared to governorates in other parts of the country. The area is well known for stability and has experienced fewer conflicts than other parts of the country. Wadi Hadramawt is considered socially conservative, with women traditionally experiencing strict gender segregation and veiling practices and a high incidence of FGM/C.<sup>121</sup>

Conflict resolution in Hadhramawt is handled mainly by local sheikhs, religious leaders, tribal leaders and political leaders. Local traditions and customs have historically afforded women less space in the public

sphere, and accordingly there has been less need for women to venture beyond family-level conflict resolution.

Female interviewees in Hadhramawt stated that women in the area have low levels of literacy and education and confirmed that they are not engaged in the public domain. Local communities do not expect or trust in women's abilities to become decision-makers or leaders. Therefore, women are only engaged in disputes or conflicts within the scope of their families or in the community when access to women or girls is necessary, such as in the cases of disputes over marriage, or sensitive issues such as rape. Women engaged in civil society organisations tend to perform these roles, and it was noted that the work is done with subtlety and confidentiality.

An example of women's activism and efforts at peacebuilding in Mukallah is the mothers, wives, sisters and daughters who have been protesting for nearly two years over their forcibly disappeared male family members. These dedicated women have been lobbying between government and prosecution offices, security departments, prisons, coalition bases, and various entities handling human rights complaints.<sup>122</sup> They have also been holding public protests seeking information on their family members who have been forcibly disappeared by UAE-backed forces. In April 2018 UAE-backed security forces used excessive violence to disperse a rally of hundreds of Yemeni women demanding the release of their imprisoned family members from prison.<sup>123</sup>

In the context of the current conflict, Hadrami women have sought to support peace efforts through a Women's Peace Festival organised on 29 March 2018 in Mukallah. 700 women from all around

120 The Governorate of Hadramawt is in the Southern part of the country and is the largest in size of the 22 governorates (21 + the municipality of Sana'a), with 36 percent of the landmass of the country, but with only 4 percent of the population. With a long history of migration around the Indian Ocean littoral, Hadramis have left their homeland, but maintained strong cultural and commercial connections shaping gender and conflict dynamics. The area is the ancestral home of Osama bin Laden and over the past few years the presence of AQAP and ISIL-YP has played a role in conflict dynamics. Since 2016, various parts of the Hadramawt have seen intense fighting between force loyal to the internationally recognised government, SLIC forces and AQAP forces, particularly in Mukallah.

121 The 2013 National Health and Demographic Survey noted that 84 percent, versus the national average of 19 percent, of all women aged 15 to 49 had undergone some form of FGM/C. Republic of Yemen (2013). "Yemen National Health and Demographic Survey 2013." Ministry of Public Health & the Central Statistical Organization. <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR296/FR296.pdf>

122 Amnesty International (2018). "Disappearances and torture in southern Yemen detention facilities must be investigated as war crimes." 12 July. <https://www.amnesty.org>.

123 <https://yemen-rw.org/emirati-forces-attack-female-protest-march/>.

the Governorate attended the festival to express their support for peace in Yemen and to deliver a clear message to the new UN Special Envoy, Martin Griffith, that women in Hadhramawt believe peace is desperately needed. Support for the effort was received by many local women's organisations, as well as by the Global View and Peace and Development Foundation, local civil society organisations

based in Mukallah. The festival was launched with tens of doves of peace released into the sky, close to the walls of the Royal Palace where the festival took place. The day's events also included local songs, dances and speeches by community leaders. During the festival, hundreds of white and green balloons were released into the air as a symbol of people's right to freedom and peace.<sup>124</sup>

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124 Co-sponsors of the event include the National Women's Committee, Yemeni Women's Union, Student Union of Hadramawt University, Sama Forum and Kaizen Center. <http://www.globalview.consulting/en/media/news/women-in-yemen-participate-in-peace>.

5.

# CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Both the literature review and field data collection encountered numerous stories of women involved in conflict resolution and peacebuilding, demonstrating that women have played a range of such roles both traditionally and during the current conflict. While it was noted by participants that the nature and level of those roles were often dependent on women's status in the community pre-conflict, it was also clear that with the humanitarian crisis and conflict, women have both faced challenges and created new opportunities for peacebuilding.

Field data shows that in governorates where women have historically been engaged in peacebuilding, they have continued to play this role even after the eruption of the recent conflict. Comparatively, in areas where women had a less public role pre-conflict, they play a less prominent role outside the home during more complex times.

Evidence shows that women have acted as mediators and peacebuilders. However, in many cases, this took place in the context of women adhering to existing gender roles and stereotypes within their communities. For example, where women's mobility was restricted to the orbit of their family and very close relatives, they were mostly active in resolving disputes within such circles rather than their broader communities. In addition, it has long been socially acceptable for them to intervene in cases that involved so-called family-related issues, such as disputes over child custody or divorce.

Even in cases where women mediate in disputes over resources, such as water or land, their role is often considered to be that of an 'influencer' of male decision-makers, rather than that of a 'mediator.' This distinction is because they usually play their roles subtly and with a low profile. In these cases, women

do not usually meet with parties to the conflict in public and therefore their roles are not publicly recognised. In the few cases where women's roles were recognised, the community typically attributed their successes to personal factors such as their blood relation to prominent local sheikhs or a position in current or former ruling political parties.

In tribal contexts, women leverage traditional roles that are sanctioned by customs and which constitute a social contract amongst tribe members and their sheikhs, as well as between tribes. This accords them protections and the privileges of mobility and access, allowing them to enhance and expand their roles as negotiators or peacemakers.

In many parts of the country, women have taken advantage of the protective side of tribal law, based on the perception that women are vulnerable and defenceless. They play the role of messenger between conflicting parties, accessing conflict zones and providing aid to people affected by conflict. This is particularly prevalent in tribal areas where customary law still prevails. Additionally, in many areas women are able to interfere in cases of revenge by using their ability to access the mothers of victims and other family members and thus avoid further bloodshed.

There are exceptions to the above, mainly in large urban areas like Taiz and Aden, where women and girls are generally more educated and where women have an established presence in the public sphere as professionals, activists and political actors. Particularly in Taiz and Aden Governorates, field data included information on women who have been able to mediate between important actors engaged in conflict. The common profile of these women is that of an educated and empowered activist engaged in pre-conflict civic or political activities now providing humanitarian relief.

### Area Specific Recommendations

As we have seen from the analysis above, women's status and the characteristics of women involved in conflict resolution vary in different parts of the country. Therefore, the role of women in peacebuilding should be addressed within the specific context of each area.

In areas such as Taiz and Aden, where women are significantly engaged in the public sphere and are either leading or engaged in civil society or community groups, the following actions are recommended:

- Strengthen efforts to document and monitor the patterns and success stories of women in Track II peacebuilding.
- Support and train a second generation of peacebuilders with capacity building activities directed at female youth and young social and humanitarian activists, and by establishing networks and coalitions among established (and older) peacebuilders as well as younger activists.
- Humanitarian aid seems to be one of the entry points through which women can play a role in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Humanitarian interventions should be accompanied by a peacebuilding component that engages women at the local level.
- Strengthen the capacities of young women peacebuilders in areas including negotiation skills, leadership and communication, as this can boost women's status and empower their involvement in conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

- Support women engaged in the public sphere to organise themselves in legal entities instead of depending on their families or social status to ensure sustainability.
- Advocacy efforts for women's role in conflict resolution and peacebuilding at the policy level should be linked to ensuring support to women engaged in peacebuilding at the local levels, linking Track I, II and III efforts.
- Foster linkages between women and young people to leverage peacemaking efforts and form alliances to further such efforts.

In tribal areas where women have a role in peacebuilding leveraged by customary law (such as in Sana'a, Mareb, Al-Jawf, Shebawah and Al-Baydha), we recommend the following:

- Document gender relations in tribal customary law, as there is limited research conducted on both the positive empowering aspects and the negative elements of these traditions.
- Document success stories of women who defied gender stereotypes and have had a meaningful role in peacebuilding.
- Empower young women and key leaders through trainings on conflict resolution and peacebuilding education.
- Advocate against the exploitation or violation of women's rights as a means to resolve conflicts. Negative practices that are harmful to women and girls should be examined within the tribal customary law and advocated against (such as the forced marriage of girls to opposing tribes, coercive marriage of girls to their rapists, etc.).
- Increase support to and document the efforts of women-led organisations or similar initiatives at the community level and support their engagement in peacebuilding efforts.
- Organise public events that improve the visibility of women's role in peacebuilding and conflict resolution.



Women in a third group, from Al-Dhale' and Hadhramawt, have a more limited role in peacebuilding compared to the other two groups. This is indicated by a lack of evidence of their role in the public domain overall. Therefore, it is recommended to:

- Conduct further research on the role of women in conflict resolution and peacemaking in such areas. The absence of information does not mean that such activities are not taking place.
- Support women in such areas to seek alliances with other activists, including young people, who may be active in the area.

In addition to the specific investments recommended above, there are also issues to address the empowerment of women and women's status in general and not just their role as peacebuilders including:

- Advocate for women's role in conflict resolution within the family and the community, with a specific focus on young women.
- Promote female literacy and women's education and training, particularly focused on livelihood skills and income-earning opportunities.
- Advocate for expanding opportunities for young women to engage in community-level initiatives and organisations.

- Since there is evidence that the leadership of women in civil society and as humanitarian actors enhances their role as peacebuilders, support women-led organisations and women's empowerment within community groups as a strategy to leverage their role in conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

## General Recommendations

- Invest in documentation and research on the linkage between gender and conflict with more focus on how evolving gender roles due to the conflict can contribute to a better and more effective capacities for women in peacebuilding.
- Include case studies on women peacemakers whenever possible in public and media materials to raise awareness on the impact and value of women as peacebuilders.
- Conduct in-depth analysis on the indigenous mechanisms in different regions of Yemen for peacebuilding and conflict resolution and identify (and develop whenever possible) entry points for women activists to intervene in local conflict resolution efforts.

# APPENDIX A.

## CAPACITIES FOR

### PEACEBUILDING<sup>123</sup>

Many social and cultural traditions have evolved in Yemen as a result of isolated rural communities that have lived outside of central control for centuries and where tribal affiliations have deep personal and political significance. Such factors have contributed to traditional means of consensus-building and consultation within tribes and have evolved into deep understandings of the consequences of violence. Indeed, many contemporary observers of Yemen agree that it is this proximity to local decision-making traditions that is a defining characteristic of indigenous traditions in conflict mitigation and peacebuilding. Yemen has long had a vibrant tradition of community-based dispute resolution, particularly tribal dispute resolution, which has become even more dominant in the transition period that followed the 2011 Arab Spring protests.<sup>126</sup>

A number of so-called ‘capacities for peace’ have been identified in Yemen including: a culture of dialogue, a willingness to engage in mediation and arbitration, an openness to acknowledge other groups’ grievances, a culture of empathy and support for the vulnerable, and recognition of common concerns and aspirations.<sup>127</sup>

Despite gender inequalities, women in Yemen have traditionally played an important role in peacebuilding, particularly within homes and at the community level. One salient example of this role is that of female

*Qat*<sup>128</sup> farmers and sellers of Jebal Sabr (the mountain which looms over the city of Taiz), in contrast to other areas of Yemen where *Qat* cultivation, sale and purchase is generally an exclusively male activity. This makes the unveiled faces, coquettish behaviour and assertive bargaining of these female *Qat* dealers a memorable site. The origins of this practice are unclear but one widespread explanation is that this tradition dates back to when the newly established YAR government instigated a *Qat* tax and a conflict ensued between the tax collectors and the men of Jebal Sabr. Due to this conflict, the women of this mountain were sent to sell this lucrative cash crop. They were so successful at making a profit that it has remained thus ever since.<sup>129</sup>

While not overemphasising the positive role of Yemeni women in peacebuilding, it is becoming increasingly common for women, particularly younger women, to carry weapons for purposes of self-defence. The following example of this phenomenon is from an article in a local Yemeni newspaper:

“Carrying arms for a Yemeni woman has become a source of pride, a prestige and, sometimes, a means of protection. My father,” Suad, a young woman, said, “maintains a high social status. He is worried about me and my siblings’ safety, so he bought us guns; mine is small and light. My father taught me how to shoot in case someone should attack me. It is a means of

125 Colburn, Marta (2017). “Role of women and youth in peace-building.” UNDP Rule of Law Conference. Dead Sea. September 2017.

126 Gaston, Erica; Al-Dawsari, Nadwa (2014). “Dispute Resolution & Justice Provision in Yemen’s Transition.” USIP.

127 UNICEF (2014). “Situation Analysis of Children in Yemen 2014.” ROY, MOPIC and UNICEF. p 272.

128 A mildly narcotic leaf, chewed daily in Yemen by the vast majority of men and an increasing percentage of women. This hardy drought-tolerant evergreen plant, cultivated either as a shrub or tree, can reach up to 10 metres in height. *Qat* is also grown and used widely in countries on the Horn of Africa – Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and Kenya.

129 Colburn, M. (2002). *Gender and Development in Yemen*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Amman Jordan. p 39.

protection and self-defence. At the beginning, I was uncomfortable with the matter, but then, when I talked to my friends, I discovered that most of them carry various guns in their bags and now I find it normal.”<sup>130</sup>

Young people in Yemen’s Arab Spring used a variety of tactics of non-violence in their efforts to promote positive political change in their country. Taking inspiration from other areas in the Arab World as well as indigenous creative expressions, below are examples of some of the non-violent tactics young people employed:<sup>131</sup>

- 15,000 students and activists formed a human wall at Sana’a University and many wore pink ties on their heads to represent the Jasmine Revolution and to demonstrate that they did not want violence. “We didn’t give [the security] a chance to find fault in our demonstration or attack us like they did last time.”<sup>132</sup>
- Various artistic media including music, poetry, film, graffiti, photography, visual and performance art was employed in non-violent protest. As an example, on 1 April 2011, tens of thousands of pro-democracy protesters converged on Change Square in Sana’a and hung up posters of young men recently killed in demonstrations.
- On 6 May 2011, known as the ‘Friday of Gratitude to the South,’ hundreds of thousands of protesters in the western part of Sana’a released balloons in pan-Arab colours, painted with slogans calling for President Saleh to step down.
- Human and material obstruction techniques were used extensively including on 19 February 2011 in Southern Yemen, when dozens of men in the town of Karish used their cars to block the main road between Taiz and Aden; on 6 April 2011 in Khormaskar, Aden, when hundreds of students set up roadblocks demanding the release of people detained earlier

130 Al-Shaibani, Najla’a (2011). “Armed Yemeni Women: Fashionable Defence.” *National Yemen*. May 17.

131 The following list is compiled from various sources but relies heavily on Sismil, Nicholas (2011). “Yemen’s Youth Revolution: A Hope for Nonviolence.” Metta Center for Nonviolence.

132 *The Guardian* (2011). “Yemenis take to the streets calling for President Saleh to step down.” 27 January. <https://www.theguardian.com>.

in the day; and on 13 May 2011 when thousands of protesters moved from the sit-in epicentre in Crater District to the town centre, putting heavy chains around government offices and replacing the locks on the main gates.

- Peaceful sit-ins were common throughout 2011, often evolving into a long-term presence in tent camps that were largely well organised with few reports of trouble or injuries. Such sit-ins regularly attracted non-violent solidarity from people who were traditionally heavily armed. One example comes from 20 February 2011 when armed tribesmen in Al-Baydha left their weapons behind to join pro-democracy protests. Ahmed Araman, a lawyer and activist at the National Organisation for Defending Rights and Freedom stated, “I saw tribesmen handing in their guns and Kalashnikovs to security committees around the square and entering the protests without weapons.” According to Dr Mohamed al-Qadi, a political analyst, “This is a huge shift for a Yemeni tribesman to leave his arms and demands his rights peacefully, even if hurt.” Al-Qadi said that this has occurred not only in Al-Baydha, but among a majority of tribesman nationwide.<sup>133</sup>
- The non-violent commitment of many young people, even in the face of violence, led to many instances of conversions of soldiers such as on 8 March 2011, when army troops joined protestors on a day where one million people staged a protest in southern Yemen and across other cities in Yemen. There are also examples of armed tribesmen and the military feeding and protecting young Yemenis waging a non-violent war against corruption, violence and injustice.
- The rise of Tawakkol Karman as a prominent leader for the revolutionary student youth and the use of non-violent tactics provided an internationally recognised example of peacebuilding during the events of 2011, which led to her being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011.

The power of nonviolence among women and Yemeni youth, including young women, did not end with the political transition. The phenomenon has continued

133 Ibid.

with groups such as Youth Creativity, a local NGO led by young people from different regions and political affiliations who came together to protect their society from terrorism and build a more secure country together. One of the organisation's projects trains youth to launch awareness campaigns to enhance the values of peace and coexistence among schoolchildren.<sup>134</sup>

Street art is the preferred medium of expression for Yemeni artist Murad Subay, who deploys graffiti to communicate often critical social and political messages. One 2013 piece was a seven-foot painting of an unmanned drone spray-painted near the top of a whitewashed city wall with "*Why did you kill my family?*" stencilled below in blood-red text in English and Arabic.

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<sup>134</sup> <http://www.commongroundnews.org/article.php?id=32758&lan=en>

# APPENDIX B.

## METHODOLOGY

NAHJ approached the data collection with an integrated methodology to inform the selection of the Yemeni women's success stories as well as the report-writing process. The emphasis was on qualitative data collected through KIIs and FGDs with a variety of stakeholders (community leaders, individuals and activists, civil society organisations).

The written output of the research was built from in-depth interviews with women who have played a role in conflict resolution in their communities. The study highlights peacebuilding success stories and documents Yemeni women's roles at various levels of conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

The report-writing approach is based on the Gender Relations and Conflict Transformation theoretical framework. This theoretical framework facilitates the analysis develop an in-depth understanding of:

- Social map within society.
- Gender relations in conflict.
- Cultural construction of gender.
- Changes in gender roles.

The report-writing process relied on the following tools reflecting its objectives stated above. The questions and tools used in the field work were approved by UN Women.

### Desk Review (Secondary Data Collection)

The first step of research for the report was conducting the desk review. The team of consultants reviewed all available and relevant reports, statistics, field studies and media reports to provide historical background to the conflict in Yemen, the types of dynamics of conflict within each governorate, and the roles played by women in conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

This grounded the field work stage within a body of knowledge and also supported the development of criteria for selecting women's success stories to be included and shaped the development of the interview tools.

### KIIs and FGDs

A team of field workers conducted KIIs and FGDs within each of the nine targeted governorates – Aden, Al-Baydha, Al-Dhale', Al-Jawf, Hadhramawt, Mareb, Shebawah, Sana'a Governorate and Taiz. The interview and FGD tools developed by the consultant team aimed to explore and elucidate the general opinion of society (as individuals, leaders and activists, local CSOs and local authorities) on the role of women in conflict resolution and peacebuilding in the community and the impact of conflict on women. The tools also were used to identify women's success stories within each governorate.

In each governorate, three to five KIIs were conducted, and four FGDs (two with women, two with men) with around 10 participants in each group.

The field team consisted of 19 members (50 percent female) who were trained on the project tools and selected based on previous experience on data collection in relevant topics (gender, conflict resolution, peacebuilding, etc.).

### Selection of Women's Stories and In-Depth Interviews

Once the first stage of field work was finalised, the consultant team analysed the data collected with the aim to select the women who will be part of the KIIs. An average of two success stories per governorate were selected, although in some governorate it was more difficult to identify such women. The in-depth

interviews allowed the consultants to develop clear ideas on the nature of women's experiences, challenges and success, and to explore their perspectives related to the role of women in conflict resolution.

The women were selected based on the following criteria:

- Proven experience in conflict resolution and peacebuilding in their communities:
  - Their roles have directly contributed to a real change in the management of the conflict and peace within society.
  - They have contributed to resolving an existing conflict and building peace amongst the parties to a conflict.
  - They have contributed to changes in society's perception of the role of women and facilitated the acceptance of women's participation in conflict resolution.
  - Their continuing participation at different stages in conflict resolution.
- Ability to take the lead in stimulating women's role in conflict resolution and peacebuilding.
- Diversity: selection will seek to ensure diversity of age, profession, education, social, cultural, and geographical area.

## Analysis and Report Writing Phase

Once the field work was completed, academic consultants analysed the data and compiled findings into the final report. The research process was parallel by a video documentary produced by Comra Films as part of this study "Yemeni Women Building Peace in Times of War."<sup>135</sup>

The report-writing process is based on the gender relations and conflict transformation theoretical framework. This theoretical framework facilitated the analysis to develop a deep understanding of:

- The social map within society and gender relations in conflict: analysis of differences in the distribution of resources, responsibilities and authority; and the description of structured relationships that create and produce differences in social relations (inequality) and give each person a position in the structure and hierarchy of society.
- Gender-based cultural construction by identifying and documenting changes in gender roles and inter-relationships of women's participation as a result of conflict and in conflict resolution and peace-making at the community level.

For each of the nine targeted governorates (Sana'a Governorate, Mareb, Al-Jawf, Al-Baydha, Al-Dhale', Taiz, Shebwah, Aden, Hadhramawt) the section of the report will include an overview including:

- Basic demographic information on the area;
- Status of women in the Governorate and dimensions of gender relations;
- Types of conflicts in the area and actors and key influencing actors;
- Practices in resolving conflict, conflict and peacebuilding;
- Relationship of women to existing conflicts and the impact of conflicts on women and the roles of women in conflict resolution and peacebuilding;
- Models for women who contributed to conflict resolution and peacebuilding;
- Best practices illustrated in success stories;
- Potential mechanisms to enhance the role of women in conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

135 <http://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2018/9/women-set-examples-for-peacebuilding-in-yemen>

# APPENDIX C.

## DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

### Focus Group Discussions

**Tool:** FDGs (Four FDGs were convened in each governorate; two for women and two for men)

**Attendees:** Local community (women, men and young people from local communities).

**Goal:** Exploring and elucidating the general opinion of local communities on the role of women in conflict resolution and peacebuilding in the community, and the impact of conflict on women. The tool was also used to help identifying women's success stories within each governorate.

The language of the questions was simplified to suit the target group.

### Questions

- What are the factors and causes of conflict in the community/governorate?
- What are the structures of power in society? What are the risks and threats that women face in the current environment? How can these risks and threats be eliminated or reduced in the short, medium and long term?
- How does conflict differently affect women and men? How does conflict affect the roles of men and women in society?
- What roles do women and men play in conflict?
- Who promotes opportunities for peace at various levels, including locally, in the midst of conflict? What networks and structures are used to do this?
- What roles do women and men play in conflict resolution and peacebuilding?
- What are the obstacles or difficulties facing women to play their role in resolving the conflict and peacebuilding?
- How can the role of women in conflict resolution and peacebuilding be enhanced?
- Are there any peacebuilding organisations or initiatives in your governorate? What kind of activities are they doing?
- Do you know of any successful experiences in which women have been able to influence conflict resolution and community-based peacekeeping at governorate and/or district levels?

## Key Informant Interviews

**Tool:** KII (three to five in each governorate)

**Interviewees:** Community leaders, local authorities, civil society organisations.

**Goal:** Exploring and elucidating the general opinion of local communities on the role of women in conflict resolution and peacebuilding in the community, and the impact of conflict on women. The tool will also be used to help identifying women's success stories within each governorate.

## Questions

- What are the nature and types of conflicts at the governorate level? What are the factors leading to these conflicts?
- Who do you think are the main actors in the conflict at the governorate level? (It is important to identify each actor in his or her capacity and relationship and its impact on the conflict)
- What is the level of impact of the conflict on society? (It is important to describe the general and specific context of the conflict)
- What roles do women and men play in conflict?
- In your opinion, who is affected by this conflict? (It is important to identify those affected, their relationships and the extent of effect)
- What methods are used to resolve conflict at the governorate level? (Emphasis should be placed on describing whether it is institutional or community specific).
- Who do you think are the main players in resolving the conflict at the governorate level?
- Is there any role for women in conflict resolution at governorate and/or district levels? What is this role? And is this role accepted by society?
- Are there any obstacles and difficulties preventing women from contributing to conflict resolution at the governorate/district level?
- What roles do men and women play in coming up with peaceful solutions to the conflict?
- In your opinion, how can women's role in conflict resolution and community-based peace-keeping be enhanced?
- Are there any peacebuilding organisations or initiatives in your governorate? What kind of activities are they doing?
- Do you know of any successful experiences in which women have been able to influence conflict resolution and community-based peacekeeping at governorate and/or district levels?



## In-Depth Interviews

**Tool:** In-depth Interviews with one to three women (on average, two) from each governorate

**Interviewees:** Women with success stories based on their role in conflict resolution in their respective governorates. Women will be selected from a pool built during the field work and based on the set criteria in methodology.

### Questions

- What is the nature and type of conflict(s) that your efforts have helped solve?
- What prompted you to take the initiative to work on resolving the conflict towards a peaceful solution?
- When did you take the decision to take the initiative: at the beginning of the conflict or in the middle of it, or after it?
- What methods did you use to resolve the conflict peacefully?
- Have you encountered any feedback against your initiative? What was it? And from whom did it come?
- What are the obstacles or difficulties encountered during the initiative to resolve the conflict peacefully? Were there different positions from your initiative? How did you overcome these difficulties?
- Did you get support that helped you make your initiative a success? From whom did it come? What kind of support?
- What are the reactions of women in the family and society to your initiative?
- Did your initiative change the society's perception of the status and role of women? How so?
- Are there peace organisations or initiatives in your province? What kind of activities are they doing?
- How can you make your experience a model for stimulating the role of women in peacebuilding?

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