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The Role of Women in Peacebuilding in Yemen

by *Iman al-Gawfi, Bilkis Zabara
and Stacey Philbrick Yadav*

Introduction

This Brief focuses on the contributions of Yemeni women to six core areas central to supporting sustainable peace: the economy, society and culture, politics, education, security and justice, and the environment. It is part of 'Research Cooperation on Peacebuilding in Yemen', a wider project that encourages Yemeni-international research cooperation on peace requirements in Yemen. CARPO is implementing the

Executive Summary

Throughout five years of war, Yemeni women have engaged in a broad range of activities that contribute to social cohesion and informal peacebuilding in their communities. While they may not always describe their work in such terms, women are already laying foundations for sustainable peace through everyday practices that have the capacity to help transform the landscape of women's rights in the post-war period. Wider recognition of women's paid and unpaid work in wartime, and the conditions that enable it, could improve the social cohesion, economic stability, and human security necessary for sustainable peace, consistent with the priorities of UN Resolution 1325. Based on interviews and focus groups conducted in the summer and fall of 2019, this Brief reviews variations in women's experience of conflict and participation in everyday peacebuilding in different parts of the country, advocates for an entitlement-based approach that recognizes women's agency, supports women's diverse aims, and works to leverage their existing contributions in support of sustainable peace.

entire project on behalf of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH and by commission of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).¹

The greatest challenge facing Yemeni women today is undoubtedly the war's sustained toll on an already impoverished economy: This was the resounding message voiced across all parts of the country in which research for this paper was conducted. And yet, as our research and similar studies clearly show, economic insecurity is also a core driver of women's changing social, economic, and even political roles.² Humanitarian assistance and relief efforts have tapped some of this potential, but largely by approaching women only as conduits of essential services or providers of essential data for needs assessment. We see the work of Yemeni women as contributing much more.

Examining the diverse roles that women are playing in their communities across a range of wartime conditions and in rural and urban settings, it is clear, in the words of one activist,

that "the war in Yemen is not something that is simply happening to Yemeni women."³ Indeed, the vitality of many communities depends on the work, paid and unpaid, that women are doing, much of which contributes to the conditions that support sustainable peace. But this work is not without risk; across the country, women face constraints driven by insecurity and the prevalence of armed actors. The support of local communities and family members is reciprocally tied to women's work – such support is a necessary precondition for at least some of what women are doing, and women's successful contributions build new sources of social support. This is consistent with the gender mainstreaming priorities of UNSC Resolution 1325, which seeks to both recognize and further support the role of women in a broad array of formal and informal peacebuilding and recovery.⁴ This Brief, which draws on field research conducted in the summer and fall of 2019,⁵ identifies ways in which Yemeni women are already contributing to conditions that build sustainable peace and also charts a path moving forward toward the integration of Yemeni women in peacebuilding and post-war planning.

¹ For a more complete discussion of the six areas and their centrality for sustainable peacebuilding in Yemen, see CARPO Report 06 *Understanding Peace Requirements in Yemen: Needs and Roles for Civil Society, Women, Youth, the Media and the Private Sector*, in which Mareike Transfeld and Marie-Christine Heinze outline the conceptual framework for this paper. The Report, published in March 2019, is available at https://carpo-bonn.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/carpo_policy_report_06_2019.pdf (22.10.2019).

² Fawziah al-Ammar, Hannah Patchett and Shams Shamsan (15.12.2019): *A Gendered Crisis: Understanding the Experiences of Yemen's War*, Sana'a Center for Security Studies, available at: <https://sanaacenter.org/publications/main-publications/8480> (16.12.2019).

³ Afrah Nasser (2019): 'Yemeni women confront their marginalization', in: *Middle East Report* 282, p. 12.

⁴ United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000). Available at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N00/720/18/PDF/N0072018.pdf?OpenElement> (16.01.2020).

⁵ Focus groups and key informant interviews were conducted in August and September 2019 with women and men in Aden and Sana'a, as well as several villages in rural areas of Lahij and Sana'a governorates. The focus groups were composed of men or women paired with a same-gender interviewer. Some of this research was conducted at times of proximate armed conflict; findings are reported in aggregate and anonymized form to protect participants' security.

A Short History of Women's Activism in Yemen

For a full decade before the onset of the current war, Yemen's gender development gap was ranked worst in the world. Women have consistently suffered lower literacy rates and higher malnutrition rates than Yemeni men, as well as high levels of gender-based violence. Women's labor market participation on the eve of the 2011 uprising was nearly two-thirds lower than that of men.⁶ Yemen had managed to more than halve the gender literacy gap among its youth cohort by 2013, but as the war has so thoroughly disrupted the education system, it is likely these gains have been entirely reversed.⁷ Despite provisions in the Yemeni constitution that guarantee women equal protection before the law, women experienced significant forms of discrimination in their encounters with both state and society before the war and the erosion of authority during the conflict has only intensified this further. Overt political engagement remains controversial and, in some cases, dangerous for women.⁸

In this regard and others, however, the experiences of Yemeni women have been, and continue to be, substantially differentiated by regional institutional histories and by

social class. It is difficult to conceive of a unified Yemeni 'women's movement' that cuts across these divisions. Women who were politically active before the war tended to be urban dwellers with at least secondary, and often tertiary, formal education. However, at the onset of the uprising in 2011, only 36 percent of Yemenis lived in cities, and nationally, only 10.3 percent of women over the age of 25 had any secondary education.⁹ In this regard, politically active women in the 2000s constituted an elite class.

For most of the period since the unification of North and South Yemen in 1990, partisan politics have been sharply dominated by men, and the 'woman issue' has been instrumentalized as a wedge issue among Yemen's opposition parties.¹⁰ Consequently, politically engaged women, especially in the 1990s and 2000s, concentrated their activist efforts in civil society. Restrictions on activists – both legal restraints and informal, and often gendered forms of harassment and intimidation – limited women's efficacy. Female activists nonetheless often worked through shared social networks with (male) partisan activists to retain some space amid the Saleh regime's authoritarian encroachment.¹¹ In the 2000s, the substantive content of much of women's activism in the associational sector shifted more

6 UNDP (2018): *Labor Force Participation Rate*, Human Development Reports, United Nations Development Programme. Available at <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/labour-force-participation-rate-female-male-ratio> (26.06.2019).

7 Mareike Transfeld (2018): 'Yemen's education system at a tipping point: Youth between their future and present survival', in: Marc Lynch and Stacey Philbrick Yadav (eds.): *Politics, Governance, and Reconstruction in Yemen*, POMEPS Studies 29, Project on Middle East Political Science, pp. 39–42. Available at https://pomeps.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/POMEPS_Studies_29_Yemen_Web-REV.pdf (26.06.2019).

8 Saferworld (31.10.2013): *Young Women Start New Campaigns on Safety and Security in Yemen*. Available at <https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/news-and-analysis/post/599young-women-start-new-campaigns-on-safety-and-security-in-yemen> (26.06.2019).

9 UNDP (2019).

10 Stacey Philbrick Yadav and Janine Clark (2010): 'Disappointments and new directions: Women, partisanship, and the regime in Yemen', in: *HAWWA: Journal of Women of the Middle East and the Islamic World* 8, pp. 55–95.

11 Stacey Philbrick Yadav (2011): 'Antecedents of the revolution: Intersectoral networks and post-partisanship in Yemen', in: *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 11/3, pp. 550–63.

overtly in the direction of economic and political issues, in ways that aligned with many opposition parties. Neither civil society organizations nor the major opposition parties, however, were able to deliver on these demands.

Large numbers of women participated in the 11-month popular uprising, and activists and analysts alike cite the transformative nature of this activism on expectations (among men and women) of women's activism.¹² But Yemeni women had few partners in such a transformation. Political parties remained largely off limits to women after the uprising. As the formal opposition joined the transitional government, all members of the Joint Meeting Parties opposition alliance suspended internal elections and normal political processes, leaving Yemen's parties even more exclusive, and less capable of or willing to integrate new voices, than before.¹³ External requirements ensured that the National Dialogue Conference (NDC) offered women the opportunity to deliberate over Yemen's future, but then deteriorating security and economic conditions significantly inhibited women's activism. No political faction, regardless of ideology or capacity, has worked to uphold the NDC's promises of economic, social, or political equality for women.¹⁴

The Role of Women During the Conflict

Women's formal participation in Yemen's war has been limited, but does include an active role by some in policing and detention.¹⁵ Informally, women have supported different factions by "preparing and delivering food and water to the battlefield, by nursing wounded fighters and civilians, by fundraising to support the wounded, and by encouraging their children to join the armed struggle to defend their city."¹⁶ On balance, however, our research suggests that contributions by women to the social requisites of peace far outweigh their role as participants in the war and thus highlights their capacity to contribute to durable solutions to Yemen's most pressing problems.

Interviews and focus groups conducted by our research team suggest that the war has eroded the human security of all Yemenis, with its effects differentiated spatially and socially, as well as by gender. Urban dwellers are constrained both by armed conflict and by the destruction of civilian infrastructure, while rural dwellers are more directly affected by disruptions in access to cities and their resources. Baseline expectations for state

¹² Abdelkarim Ghanem (03.01.2019): 'Addressing social fragmentation in Yemen', Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies. Available at <http://sanaacenter.org/publications/analysis/4843> (26.06.2019); Erica Gaston (2014): *Process Lessons Learned in Yemen's National Dialogue*, Special Report 342, United States Institute for Peace. Available at https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR342_Process-Lessons-Learned-in-Yemens-National-Dialogue.pdf (26.6.2019).

¹³ Ala Qasem (2014): *Five Barriers to Youth Engagement, Decision-Making, and Leadership in Yemen's Political Parties*, Saferworld. Available at <https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/785-five-barriers-to-youth-engagement-decision-making-and-leadership-in-yemens-political-parties> (26.06.2019); Mareike Transfeld (2016): 'Political bargaining and violent conflict: Shifting elite alliances as the decisive factor in Yemen's transformation', in: *Mediterranean Politics* 21/1, pp. 150–69.

¹⁴ Ghanem (2019).

¹⁵ Nasser (2019).

¹⁶ Marie-Christine Heinze and Marwa Baabbad (2017): *Women Nowadays Do Anything: Women's Role in Conflict, Peace, and Security in Yemen*, Saferworld, Yemen Polling Center and CARPO, p. 14. Available at <https://carpo-bonn.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Heinze-Baabbad-Women-nowadays-do-anythingupdate.pdf> (26.06.2019).

services vary based not only on location but on pre-war experiences, where respondents in the city of Sana'a have seen the greatest change in circumstances. Respondents in rural areas comparatively less accustomed to the state provision of basic services and infrastructure seek to meet their needs through a broader array of channels.

Women and girls are uniquely exposed to violence by the pervasiveness of checkpoints that restrict their mobility and expose them to gendered forms of harassment and assault. Economic precarity at the household level – most notably following the collapse of civil service salaries since 2016, which disproportionately affected women – have led more women to seek work outside of the home, which both increases their economic contributions and exposes them to additional protection risks.¹⁷ Furthermore, women who seek to advance claims of gender equality or to engage in overtly political work must contend with an increasingly hostile environment in many parts of the country. Rival militias that control different areas (both under and outside of government control) espouse more conservative views, often grounded in religious claims, than many Yemenis did before the war.¹⁸ While the work of the women we spoke to has clear political implications, very few of them framed their work as political and several explicitly framed their work as non-political.

Despite these prodigious challenges, and regardless of whether they describe their work in this way, women are directly engaged in peacebuilding throughout the country. They do so by helping organizations inside and outside Yemen to address (in)security through a broader human security perspective that emphasizes the risks posed by Yemen's economic and humanitarian deterioration.¹⁹ Previous approaches to security sector reform have usually privileged the perspectives of those with a "pre-existing level of expertise", and thus have tended to exclude women from policy-making in the security realm.²⁰ However, wartime contributions by Yemeni women suggest that they have both developed expertise *and* broadened the framework for what might be considered security-relevant knowledge.

Most women with whom we spoke were far more focused on their present condition than their roles in a post-conflict Yemen. Yet their work often directly addresses the conditions they see as barriers to peace, especially with regard to declining living conditions. Women in both Lahij and Aden indicate that they have no desire to abandon these new forms of work when the war ends. Some attribute this to the higher standard of living they are able to secure for their families – higher, in some cases, than before 2011 – while others explain this through the lens of their increased self-esteem and sense of pride. In the

¹⁷ Fawziah al-Ammar and Hannah Patchett (2019): *The Repercussions of War of Women in the Yemeni Workforce*, Rethinking Yemen's Economy, CARPO. Available at https://carpo-bonn.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/RYE_Brief_13.pdf (09.01.2020). Marie-Christine Heinze and Sophie Stevens (2018): *Women as Peacebuilders in Yemen*, Social Development Direct and Yemen Polling Center. Available at http://www.sddirect.org.uk/media/1571/sdd_yemenreport_full_v5.pdf (26.06.2019).

¹⁸ Ibid; Bushra al-Maqtari (17.09.2017): 'The evolution of militant Salafism in Taiz', Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies. Available at <http://sanaacenter.org/publications/analysis/4843> (26.06.2019).

¹⁹ Leonie Northedge (20.12.2017): 'Security provision in Yemen: Applying a human security focus', in: Marie-Christine Heinze (ed.): *Addressing Security Sector Reform in Yemen: Challenges and Opportunities for Intervention During and Post-Conflict*, CARPO Report 04, pp. 49–55. Available at https://carpo-bonn.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/carpo_policy_report_04_2017.pdf (26.06.2019).

²⁰ Ibid, p. 52.

North, most women with whom we spoke, in both urban and rural settings, also experience this increased sense of pride but did not anticipate continuing their work when hostilities cease. This reluctance appears to stem, at least in part, from steeper barriers to economic participation and less consistent family support. Women in the North report participating in primarily home-based economic production (crafts, incense production, etc.) as well as in subsistence farming in rural areas. Such resort to home production was also observed among young women in Taiz.²¹ Such work is primarily intended to supplement extremely precarious household budgets, but often decreases financial security; spending of a woman's personal savings to start such enterprises may leave them less financially independent in the medium term, despite their increased earnings.

Consistent with earlier studies, women continue to identify some features of peacebuilding as beyond their reach, even as they acknowledge that addressing the core drivers of conflict requires the full participation of Yemeni society.²² The negative conditions that women cite as barriers to their own greater participation – notably, the role of the media and pervasive personal insecurity – are conditions that many see as outside of their control, and requiring a political solution in which they do not envision themselves playing a direct role. Here, however, regional variation does seem to matter. In the section that follows, we seek to map both differences and continuities along axes of political control, region, and rural/urban difference.

Women's Contributions to Peace Requirements in Yemen

Across the country, the primary driver of women's changing work role in wartime is economic privation, which affects all research participants and their communities. A second common condition is the pervasive insecurity, shaping what women feel they can do, alongside the nature and extent of the restrictions they face. The role of family is enormously significant for all of our respondents, though its effects are ambiguous: Women cite family pressure – especially from fathers and brothers – as a restriction on their work outside of the home, even as many others cite the support of husbands and fathers as essential to the work that they are able to do. Sectoral, regional and urban-rural distinctions also greatly affect the degree and nature of women's activities during the war, as each area is under the control of different political actors. Finally, the differing ways in which research participants framed their work also reveal the effect of the legacies of institutional and cultural differences between North and South as they pertain to women's roles and rights.

Economy

Women's participation in the formal labor market has traditionally been low, comprising only 6.8 percent of Yemen's non-agricultural workforce.²³ During the war, necessity has led to changes in the form and extent of women's work in many parts of the country. Women's humanitarian work – both paid and unpaid – has led them to develop skills and

²¹ Maged al-Kholidy, Kate Nevens and Yazeed al-Jeddawy (forthcoming): *The Role of Youth in Peacebuilding in Yemen*, CARPO and YWBOD.

²² Heinze and Stevens (2018), p. 44.

²³ UNDP (2019).

capacities that may be transferable to other kinds of work in the post-war environment.²⁴ Focus group research, conducted in several governorates during the war, suggests some change in social norms that previously argued against women's work outside of the home, particularly in current households with male unemployment. Earlier research in Yemen and similar research elsewhere suggests that women's work may also generate some resistance in the home and in the wider community and thus increase women's protection risk.²⁵ As our interviews show, the extent to which Yemeni women are able to support the economic requirements of peace, as outlined in the background paper for this research,²⁶ depends in large part on whether and how their work has altered the perceptions of men in their families and communities.

In the North, urban and rural women report a doubling of their work burden as they struggle to care for their families and generate essential income, largely through small-scale and home-based economic production (such as sewing, crafts, and incense production). They do not report any major change in the contribution of men to household labor. Some husbands describe their support for their wives' work as contingent on the support wives continue to show to them. Broadly speaking, men in the North with whom we spoke recognize that household tasks take longer and are more physically demanding because of interruptions in basic services

caused by the war. They did not report increasing their own share of household labor to compensate for these changes or to facilitate women's engagement in income-generating work.

In Lahij and Aden, women reported more equitable sharing of domestic labor with their husbands, particularly in the collection of water and household necessities such as cooking gas. Securing such items involves interacting with local governing authorities and cooperatives who follow a set system of distribution. When necessities must be sourced outside of these local channels, women report that men and women jointly participate in sourcing to increase the chances of successfully securing what the family needs.

Research participants in Aden described qualitative and quantitative changes in women's participation in the private sector since the beginning of the war. Women reported participating in home-based economic activities and humanitarian service provision similar to women in the North, but many also described working in businesses that are conducted largely in the streets or other high-visibility settings (including hotels, cafés, and mobile food carts). In Lahij, though the rural economy differs from Aden, women also reported working in service industries that brought them into regular contact with men, including automobile and cellphone repair, and building and construction. These activities were identified by Lahij participants as new

²⁴ Al-Ammar and Patchett (2019), pp. 4–6.

²⁵ Al-Ammar and Patchett (2019); Beatrix Beucher and James Rwampigi Aniyamuzaala (2016): *Women, Work, and War: Syrian Women and the Struggle to Survive Five Years of Conflict*, CARE Research Report. Available at https://www.care.org/sites/default/files/documents/Syria_women_and_work_report_logos_07032016_web.pdf (26.06.2019); Heinze and Stevens (2018), p. 27.

²⁶ Transfeld and Heinze (2019).

fields for women; while men and women welcomed the income and the sense of contribution, they also identified these emerging roles as creating new sources of social resistance and physical insecurity. Women in the South reported considerable support from their male relatives and husbands, and attributed resistance to their work to sources outside of their immediate networks and to the 'dominance of tribal norms' – an argument that has a lengthy history among Adenis, keen to demarcate themselves from Northerners or distance themselves from more traditional views they have rejected.

Politics

As the background paper for this study lays out, there are three core political requirements for peace: a formal peace process, the restoration of functioning state institutions, and greater integration of the local level in policy-making.²⁷ Women are positioned to contribute in each of these areas, though the extent to which their contributions will be welcomed varies.

At the formal diplomatic level, women have been lobbying for greater inclusion in peace negotiations from the outset of the war,²⁸ and have enjoyed some limited successes, such as inclusion in working groups that contributed to the December 2018 Stockholm Agreement.²⁹ Women's inclusion in the diplomatic process is essential: The final peace agreement, whatever shape it may take,

will lay the groundwork for the restoration and strengthening of state institutions, and peace processes that include women have a better chance of medium-term success.³⁰ Attending to issues of women's inclusion and empowerment at the planning stages is vital to the ability of women to successfully realize whatever opportunities the new system might afford.

The contributions that Yemeni women have undeniably made towards day-to-day survival in their communities can be leveraged now in their call for political voice and a share of decision-making power at the local level. Any political structure that seeks to better integrate local level capacities and needs into policy-making will have to recognize that women have been at the forefront of developing these capacities and securing these needs over the course of the last five years. Rather than simply waiting for international institutions to recognize or elevate women's roles in formal negotiations, decision-making institutions at the local level can and should better integrate women. The possibilities for women's participation in peacebuilding do not need to originate 'at the top', but can be first integrated at the local level and then scaled up.

As the women we spoke with demonstrate, the core challenges facing rural communities differ qualitatively from those in the cities, as do expectations of what political authorities will provide. In Sana'a and Aden, while there

²⁷ Transfeld and Heinze (2019), p. 11.

²⁸ UN Women (27.10.2015): *Yemeni Women Call for Their Inclusion in Peace Efforts*. Available at <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2015/10/yemeni-women-call-for-their-inclusion-in-peace-efforts> (26.06.2019).

²⁹ Nasser (2019).

³⁰ Council on Foreign Relations (30.01.2019): *Women's Participation in Peace Processes*. Available at <https://www.cfr.org/interactive/womens-participation-in-peace-processes?fbclid=IwAR0YLjVFA5PATbexzFagudnOnsv5ijP6AqCdynNdqLMDllgfHRuQMec> (26.6.2019).

has been considerable damage to essential infrastructure, the *'aqil al-hara* [neighborhood representative] is still able to distribute some essentials at centralized locations in neighborhoods. This means that needs are being met, at least in part, through interactions with governing authorities; though in both cities, our respondents noted that these services are insufficient and sometimes distributed according to a politicized logic. In Lahij and rural villages of Sana'a governorate, by contrast, these essential services are not provided in the same way. In Lahij, women report securing services through a local parastatal cooperative; whereas in Northern villages, women described relying on humanitarian assistance, which appears arbitrary and is frequently interrupted.

Local encounters with political authority shape future expectations, but also affect existing opportunities for women's engagement in local governance. The issue of early marriage illustrates this well. Early marriage has expanded across all of Yemen since the onset of the war, although Southern respondents differentiated themselves from Northern respondents in the extent to which they seek resolution to this issue through political authorities. Women in Aden cite the role of a local *'aqilat al-hara* [neighborhood representative, f.] who has refused to falsify the age of underage brides, applauding her leadership on this issue. In Aden and Lahij, women express a desire to see programming and legislation to prevent early marriage in a post-conflict context. There is no equivalent call for government involvement in the issue – or, indeed, identification of the issue as a

public concern – among our research participants in the North. Thus, we see variation in the identification of the level at which policy issues should be resolved, as well as the degree to which women expect to be, or are already, involved in addressing them.

Culture and Society

Sustainable peace in Yemen will require the “construction of a consensual Yemeni identity”.³¹ However, this is also the area that will be most challenging for women to play a substantial and positive role. This is not because Yemeni women are unskilled in this area; as the background paper suggests, women “contribute to community cohesion like no other force in Yemeni society, and thus ought to be at the center of measures aimed at peacebuilding and conflict prevention.”³² Rather, the ‘woman issue’ has been historically so polarizing that it is difficult to see how women can build consensus when men and women alike remain deeply divided on the normative role women should play in Yemeni public life.

As our data show, women and men alike appreciate the contributions that women are making to improvements in human security; but it is widely recognized that women, due to the work they engage in, face pushback from those outside their immediate networks, as well as experience physical and other forms of harassment. Moreover, women who engage in political activity continue to face specifically gendered forms of harassment, such as allegations of their involvement in prostitution or other illicit sexual

³¹ Transfeld and Heinze (2019), p. 13.

³² Ibid, p. 17.

practices. Such harassment campaigns contribute to social and familial pressure on women to stay home or otherwise disengage from activist work.

The impact of gender-differentiated spaces also matter for social change. Even as women are becoming more economically active in the North, our respondents identify their work occurring overwhelmingly among other women. In Sana'a city, women report developing home-based products to sell as a supplement to their income, but vend these products in female spaces and do not report selling directly to men. In one village outside of Sana'a city, a woman initiated a project to build a hall to be used for the exclusive use of women. The *shaykh* of the village initially refused to permit the project until the women clarified that they would raise the funds and construct the building themselves. In Hadhramawt, a 'women's bazaar' of handcrafts has been developed with the support of local authorities.³³ Gender-segmented entrepreneurship of this sort appears to be accepted by men and women alike under the current conditions. Home-based economic production, however, does not appear to shape women's post-war expectations for integration in Yemen's economy or the broader political sphere in the same way as other forms of gender-integrated economic activity.

Women's voluntary work also takes different forms in the North and South, with potential implications for social change. In Sana'a city, our participants described women's voluntary work as primarily conducted at the neighborhood level, largely among their

own networks and neighbors. In Aden, women more frequently cited involvement in community-based organizations, often in coordination with international donor agencies and governments. Given that before the war many international organizations working in development and humanitarian relief were based in Sana'a, this represents a geographic shift with social and political implications.

Security and Justice

Working outside of the home exposes women to risk of violence and other forms of harassment. Many women we spoke with cite examples of harassment and violence that appear to stem from the proliferation of weapons on the streets, deterioration of state security institutions, and media radicalization. In Aden, women report armed attacks on their enterprises – especially high-visibility enterprises such as food carts – and see minimal government ability or willingness to prevent or respond to such attacks. Women in Lahij also note that they face physical insecurity when undertaking work outside of the home. Many have armed themselves – particularly where there is no male head of household – and highlight that women participate directly in the provision of security by helping to administer checkpoints and carry out other security functions in their communities.

In no part of the country did women name formal security services as meaningful purveyors of security. Indeed, many respondents cite the security services as engaged in extortionate practices that undermined their personal security. This seems to confirm earlier analyses that identified women's

³³ Al-Kholidy, Nevens and al-Jeddawy (forthcoming).

contributions to security as threatened by features of the changing political and religious context.³⁴ Moreover, the politicization of security is consistent with the fragmentation of Yemen, a fact that has been increasingly well-documented over the course of the war.³⁵ In order for women to contribute meaningfully to security and justice in the context of peacebuilding, women's role in security provision will need to be depoliticized, building on some of the earlier practices adopted with success during the transitional period.³⁶

Education

To support peace, Yemen's education system will need to prepare workers for a post-war economy and develop norms of shared citizenship. The war has been tremendously destructive to Yemen's educational infrastructure and has likely set the country back by at least a generation.

As families choose how to allocate limited resources, and as mobility security for women and girls deteriorates, girls account for the majority of the roughly two million children who are out of school.³⁷ Participants in all areas reported interruptions in schooling, but the reasons vary. Urban respondents stress a decline in the *quality* of education and an increase in absenteeism, which is attributed to economic pressure on young people as well as demoralization among those who see little purpose in remaining in school under the current conditions.

In rural areas, some parents are changing their approach to schooling. For example, in one of the rural Northern villages where we conducted interviews, families are now sending boys and girls to school together (at the primary level), hoping to make the most of the few opportunities that exist. Secondary school girls, according to our respondents, are sometimes volunteering as teachers in village schools; however, some see this as contributing to declining quality, since they are not trained teachers. Given current limited access, untrained volunteer teachers nonetheless afford girls more opportunities than they would otherwise have. An additional constraint on rural access to education and training for women and girls is pervasive insecurity. Respondents expressed anxiety about women and girls' safety due to ongoing conflict, but also from the 'deteriorating morals' of men and boys on the streets who are increasingly armed. While anxiety about women's and girls' safety existed before the war and contributed to the rural/urban gap in literacy, its consequences are now more pronounced as the number of schools and qualified teachers contract and Yemeni youth must travel farther to meet their educational needs. Our focus group with men in Sana'a also suggests that women are playing a critical role as informal educators. These men identified women as doubly important to the education of their children at home, under conditions of war. For example, they argued that pressure on boys to take up arms and/or become ideologically radicalized can be most effectively countered by their mothers, who bear

³⁴ Heinze and Stevens (2018), p. 8.

³⁵ Mareike Transfeld (22.11.2019): 'Peace and state fragmentation in Yemen', *Sada*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/80399> (25.11.2019).

³⁶ Cook (2014).

³⁷ UNICEF (2018): *Literacy Among Youth is Rising but Young Women Lag Behind*. Available at <https://data.unicef.org/topic/education/literacy/> (26.06.2019).

responsibility for their moral development. The role of women as educators – at home and in school, paid and unpaid, trained and untrained – and the role they can play in education for peace cannot be overstated.

Environment

Before the war, discussion of environmental conditions in Yemen tended to center on water management, the most acute environmental challenge faced by the country. Today, the process of securing water remains a daily preoccupation for most Yemeni households. As destroyed or damaged infrastructure forces women and children to travel increasing distances in search of water, they are exposed to greater risks of violence and harassment.³⁸ Out of necessity, women are currently involved in a broad range of water management practices at the local level. Although their role is under-recognized by political authorities to date, research suggests that it could be capitalized on through greater gender mainstreaming in the peace process.³⁹

Throughout our interviews and focus group discussions, water collection was cited as a pervasive part of women's everyday labor, but the extent the task was shared with men and the degree to which political authorities played a role in water provision varied considerably across different parts of the country. There is also some evidence from other research teams involved in this study that

diagnoses by men and women of environmental risks are shaped by gendered divisions of labor. For example, men and women in Say'un assess environmental risks differently: Men were generally unconcerned, but women identified weaknesses in sewage and neighborhood garbage disposal, as well as contamination from nearby oil facilities, as contributing to public health risk.⁴⁰

Cooperation and Conflict between Women and Other Actors

One risk in sectioning off 'women' as a category of analysis is that all other spheres are then implicitly treated as 'male'. Women are or wish to be active in many spheres: they work in civil society, count among Yemen's youth, etc. That said, there are gender-based risks and experiences, particular to the war, that Yemeni women face that deserve distinct attention.

Women entrepreneurs have tended to view the *private sector* favorably; they stress good relationships with Yemeni businessmen and express a desire for increased investment in their projects. Given the dramatic underrepresentation of women in the private sector prior to the war *and* the educational losses that the war has produced, we expected the private sector to be the space in which women and men would cooperate the least, but our interviews suggested otherwise. Instead, the research revealed women engaged in entrepreneurship at different scales, and

³⁸ Hassan al-Yabari and Elizabeth Bourne (13.07.2015): 'Humanitarian need fuels community-led activism in Yemen', Saferworld. Available at <https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/news-and-analysis/post/165-humanitarian-need-fuels-community-led-activism-in-yemen> (26.06.2019).

³⁹ Bilkis Zabara (20.03.2018): *Enhancing Women's Role in Water Management in Yemen*, CARPO Brief 09. Available at https://carpo-bonn.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/09_carpo_brief_20-03-18.pdf (26.06.2019).

⁴⁰ Al-Kholidy, Nevens & al-Jeddawy (forthcoming).

suggested that women, at least in the South, are finding a wider market for their goods and services that directly engages men. Across the country, women use social media platforms such as Facebook to market goods from the privacy of their homes. The private sector can do more to deepen this already existing role by expanding training, support, and access to resources for women entrepreneurs and private-sector workers, both on and offline.

Women's deep engagement with *civil society* organizations over a period of decades should be the basis to support deeply collaborative relationships between men and women, but the relocation of many organizations to areas under Coalition control means that women, in the North in particular, may be losing these connections. In our interviews and focus group discussions, moreover, women related that some civil society organizations have been useful vehicles for women's increasing activity, while other organizations have been somewhat indifferent to the gendered impact of the war or even resistant to greater gender mainstreaming in their work. Young women have played and continue to play a vital role in *youth* activism. However, among our respondents, younger women expressed more restrictions on their movement owing to the deteriorating security environment and greater fear (by women and/or their families) of potential harassment.

The *media* is where we expected that women would experience the sharpest social

antagonism, and this was indeed reflected in our respondents' descriptions of their challenges. Across the board, women (and men) with whom we spoke called on the Yemeni media to report more fairly on women's participation in the economy and society, and to halt incendiary rhetoric that contributes to harassment and violence. The media is the primary avenue through which personal smear campaigns against women activists have been carried out: Media organizations have propagated political messages explicitly hostile to women's activism generally, and women activists personally. There have been some initiatives, both inside and outside of Yemen, to expand training for women journalists.⁴¹ Such training can be considered a part of the process of professionalizing the Yemeni press, but on its own is insufficient to fully address women's concerns. Initiatives such as *al-Madaniya Magazine*, which successfully integrates the writing of male and female journalists and promotes peace through deliberation, demonstrates that the media can contribute to consensus building at the national level.⁴²

Meeting the Needs of Women Peacebuilders

For women to more fully contribute to peacebuilding, they will need more opportunities to participate in decision-making, a greater recognition of the diversity of their needs and interests, and better protection of their freedoms. None of these will be easy to secure, but each should be mutually reinforcing.

⁴¹ UNESCO (23.08.2017): 'Empowering Yemeni women journalists in Mukalla'. Available at: http://www.unesco.org/new/en/media-services/single-view/news/empowering_yemeni_women_journalists_in_mukalla/ (25.11.2019); Tawakkol Karman Foundation (2018): 'Female journalists for fair peace in Yemen'. Available at: <http://www.tkif.org/events/105-events/peace-building/125-female-journalists-for-fair-peace-in-yemen> (25.11.2019).

⁴² The magazine can be accessed at <https://almadaniyamag.com/>.

The opportunity for women to participate in post-war peacebuilding and public life should be framed as an entitlement to be recognized, not as a gift to be granted. This requires that Yemeni women argue for such an entitlement, both to external actors who are overseeing the peace process and to the Yemeni participants in that process. Data from our interviews and focus groups suggest that some, but certainly not all, women are already couching their expectations in this way.

It is important that women articulate their political demands in a way that reflects their diverse identities and interests, not simply 'as women'. As developments during the transitional period have shown, little progress is made when women are treated as a uniform category. Ensuring that women have the opportunity to participate in decision-making within the context of their regional identities and on the basis of diverse ideologies will more authentically reflect women's intersectional aims while also giving men additional reasons to value women's voices as allies in shared political projects.

All of this will require safeguards against the harassment and intimidation of women due to their political engagement. In this regard, the professionalization of the media is an acute need for women, as well as the broader context of post-conflict reconciliation. The Yemeni Journalists' Syndicate exists as a framework through which professional journalists can be encouraged to maintain standards of journalistic integrity. However, an increasing number of journalists and media professionals operate in emerging media spaces that evade such regulation. Strengthening judicial enforcement of protections

against libel and slander, or threats of violence, is essential to support women's ability to contribute politically.

Recommendations

On the basis of women's existing contributions to the requirements for sustainable peace in Yemen, as well as our assessment of the challenges they face, we offer the following recommendations at different scales:

Leverage women's work to support political entitlement

Rather than ask for a seat at the table, women should expect one. Women are well positioned to demonstrate what they have done in support of their communities and wider society, and explain why it is important that they continue doing so. Many women are already making such a case at the household level; we see that many men have responded positively to this and express a greater recognition of women as partners in household and community survival. Women should expand on this recognition and challenge their exclusion from postwar decision-making on the basis of their direct and indirect contributions to Yemeni security and stability. This approach to political entitlement should be adopted with both domestic audiences and external organizations alike, among women and men.

Encourage media professionalization

The media landscape in Yemen is currently hostile to women's participation in peacebuilding and in economic engagement. Our respondents frequently cited the role of

media – including traditional media that are subject to partisan capture, and new media platforms that are expanding in popularity and reach – as contributing to smear campaigns against women entrepreneurs, volunteers, and activists alike. Given the ubiquity of this concern across the country, we call on local authorities to provide better enforcement of existing regulations against slander, libel, and incitement, and to expand these to consider specifically gendered forms of harassment and intimidation. At the national level, we call for financial and regulatory support for independent and professional journalism in all parts of Yemen. Political parties participating in any post-war power-sharing agreement should be expected to require professional practices in their official media.

Expand media as a gender-integrated platform for deliberation

Beyond a regulatory approach to the media, we also advocate policies and practices that expand women's direct access to media platforms. Given the strength of cultural norms against (at least some) women's participation in politics and the increased security risks that the war has created for women, it is important to consider ways that women can participate in public deliberation without putting themselves at undue risk. Media can provide such a platform by offering women opportunities to deliberate in a gender-integrated 'space' online and in other forums. The ability to make disagreements clear in a civil way, and to identify points of divergence, especially in independent media, were powerful factors in the formation of the cross-ideological opposition alliance of the 2000s in Yemen. The media could play a positive role in allowing women and men

to engage in similar kinds of deliberation together, without jeopardizing their safety. The training of women journalists and the inclusion of those journalists in gender-integrated media platforms can contribute fair representation of women and the expansion of social cohesion.

Demonstrate diversity while building alliances

Women should be recognized as actors with diverse interests and identities – and as potential allies. Women activists in organizations that are not focused on gender can demonstrate the value of their contributions (to their organizations and their communities) in part by advocating for their organization's needs in fora explicitly related to gender. Simultaneously, women who work in gender-focused organizations can work to build alliances with organizations via other overlapping interests, whether regional, issue-focused, or otherwise. This should help to build greater recognition of the diversity of women's identities and underscore the value of women's work to those who do not share (all of) their priorities. It should also contribute to the density of social networks among activists and contribute to the kind of shared civic culture necessary for sustainable peace.

About the Authors

Dr. Iman al-Gawfi is a sociologist and lecturer affiliated with the Population Studies and Training Center at Sana'a University.

Contact: imang21@yahoo.com

Dr. Bilkis Zabara is former director of the Gender Development Research and Studies Center at Sana'a University; her research focuses on the role of gender in water, conflict management, and peacebuilding.

Contact: bzabara@gdrsc.net

Dr. Stacey Philbrick Yadav is chair of the Political Science Department at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, and a fellow at Brandeis University's Crown Center for Middle East Studies. She writes on gender, partisanship, and post-partisan activism in Yemen.

Contact: philbrickiyadav@hws.edu

About the Project

This project, which is implemented on behalf of GIZ and by commission of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), seeks to develop the capacities of Yemeni and international researchers and organizations in researching and advising on peacebuilding in Yemen. Within its framework, a *CARPO Report* on peace requirements in Yemen, as well as five policy briefs, each resulting from a Yemeni-international research partnership, on the role of the following actors in peacebuilding in Yemen, are being developed and published. The five Briefs address civil society, women, youth, media and the private sector. For more information, please visit our *website*.

About CARPO

CARPO was founded in 2014 by Germany-based academics trained in the fields of Near and Middle Eastern Studies, Political Science and Social Anthropology. Its work is situated at the nexus of research, consultancy and exchange with a focus on implementing projects in close cooperation and partnership with stakeholders in the Orient. The researchers in CARPO's network believe that a prosperous and peaceful future for the region can best be achieved through inclusive policy making and economic investment that engages the creative and resourceful potential of all relevant actors. Therefore, CARPO opens enduring channels for interactive knowledge transfer between academics, citizens, entrepreneurs, and policy-makers.

Website: carpo-bonn.org

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About GDRSC

The Gender Development Research & Studies Center (GDRSC) at Sana'a University was founded in 2003. It offers an English-language master in International Development and Gender, providing students with concepts, theories and methodologies of development studies with a particular view to gender issues. Given the situation in the country over the past years, issues relating to (post-)conflict and peacebuilding have necessarily become a focus of the research, training and consultancy provided by GDRSC. Two thirds of the Center's students are female and many work in international (humanitarian and development) organizations. GDRSC thus aims to link research with policy.

Website: gdrsc.net

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CARPO – Center for Applied Research in Partnership with the Orient e.V.
Kaiser-Friedrich-Str. 13
53113 Bonn
Email: info@carpo-bonn.org
www.carpo-bonn.org