



Impact of the Conflict (2015-2020) and the COVID-19

Pandemic on Yemen Women's Political Participation and Engagement in Peace Negotiations and Peacebuilding

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KEY MESSAGES

In Yemen the enabling factors to support women's political participation include

(a) Existence of political will, (b) serious governmental efforts at empowering women of all social classes; (c) decision makers' acknowledgement that securing women's rights within the family is a major determining factor of social acceptance of women's public and political involvement; (d) the prevalence of a national identity that supersedes primary identities and loyalties; (e) the positive role played by political parties and (f) the role model played by elite women in mobilizing and encouraging ordinary women to venture into public life and political engagement; and (g) the existence of a shared vision of the desired future of the country.

Disabling factors that hinder women's political participation may include

(a) The role of religious extremism and tribalism, which rationalized the adoption of discriminatory laws; (b) the deep gap between northern and southern women in capacities, experiences and concerns; (c) the heterogeneity and conflictual political culture of Yemeni society that surfaced upon unification; (d) Successive armed conflicts from 1994 to the present day; and (e) the increasing dominance of a patriarchal culture undermining women's abilities as political leaders and defenders of the group's interests.

Current global data shows

- Yemen is considered the worst humanitarian crisis;
- The conflict has reversed human development in Yemen by 21 years, and is projected to reverse it by 26 and 40 years if it continues into 2022 and 2030 respectively;
- Yemen is ranked worst on the women, peace and security index; and
- Yemen is ranked the last on the global gender gap index, standing at 153rd out of 153.

Just prior to the conflict

Yemeni women constituted 28.6 per cent of the total 565 participants in the two national dialogues. They were elected to chair and participate in committees and held 4 out of 17 seats on the committee to draft the new constitution.

However,

Despite the promising result of the National dialogue, only one woman is represented in the internationally recognized government and one in the Houthi government.

The conflict in Yemen has turned women into war makers and peacemakers. Though the conflict and COVID-19 appear to be leaning more to the negative rather than the positive side, they hold important opportunities to increase women's participation in politics and peacebuilding.

Negative impact of the conflict and the pandemic on gender equality

- a) Threats to personal safety;
- b) Threats to livelihood and survival;
- c) Loss of democratic mechanisms for women's participation in the political sphere;
- d) Weakened influence of women in decision-making positions;
- e) E- Women's rights pushed to the back stage;
- f) Excessive restrictions on the work of women's organizations;
- g) Change in social attitudes towards women's work outside the home.

Positive impact of the conflict and pandemic: potential opportunities

- a) Increased support from Yemeni women living abroad;
- b) Broadening the women's movement's support base and geographical scope;
- c) Unity is the best means for making women's voices heard;
- d) Emergence of alternative ways to contribute to peacebuilding;
- e) Women's mediation: a stepping stone towards a greater role in pandemic response and peacebuilding;
- f) Leveraging women's experiences for post-war reform of the security forces;
- g) Greater appreciation of the role of the United Nations and its agencies.

Policy recommendations

Women's engagement in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic

- Network, assess and prioritize governorates' needs based on women's experience in the field and revise the national response plan;
- Seek support of WHO and Ministry of Health to ensure the government adopts the revised response plan;
- Raise public awareness that COVID-19 is not a weapon of war;
- Build capacities of potential young male and female mediators;
- Harness donor support for women's activities.

Increase women's meaningful participation in peace making and building processes

- Hold networking and consultations among women's organizations across the country to draft a list of priorities for peace negotiations;
- Cooperate with the UN Special Envoy to put the list on the negotiating table;
- Pursue intensive campaigns demanding 30 per cent women's representation in peace negotiations;
- Have donors use all means at their disposal to ensure women's representation in peace negotiations in accordance with UNSCR 1325 and NDC outcomes.

Sustain women's participation in crisis response and engagement in peacebuilding

- Start a legislative reform workshop to prepare drafts of needed amendments to remove discrimination against women;
- Adopt a compulsory free education law;
- Train potential male and female youth on mediation and conflict resolution;
- Introduce human rights courses in training of judges and security forces and in school and university curricula;
- Empower women through legal literacy, adult literacy and computer literacy programmes;
- Raise donor support for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 NAP and the drafting of a national women's strategy and an IDP strategy;
- Train women IDPs on income-generating activities;
- Provide international funding for graduation from poverty programmes;
- Coordinate among international donors to provide aid in support of women's rights;
- Build a tough international stance against violations of human rights and supporting an end to the conflict.

CONTENTS

Acknowledgement
Key Messages

I. Purpose and Research Questions, Methodology and Context

- A. Purpose of the report and research questions
- B. Methodology

II. Impact of the conflict and the COVID-19 pandemic on women's political participation

- A. Women's political participation in Yemen: enabling and obstructing factors during the last decades
- B. Impact of the conflict (2015-2020) and the pandemic on women's political participation

III. Summary and policy recommendations

- A. Assumptions
 - B. Policy Recommendations
-

Bibliography
Endnotes

I. PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS, METHODOLOGY AND CONTEXT

A. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The UN Women Iraq Yemen Cluster Office (IYCO), in partnership with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), commissioned two national reports for Iraq and Yemen to support the two countries' Governments in increasing the effectiveness of their efforts at achieving gender equality in all sectors including health and political and economic empowerment through evidence-based recommendations. With the pandemic striking Yemen and Iraq amidst a combination of crises, the two reports explore the impact of these crises and COVID-19 on women's participation and engagement in the pandemic response, and in the ongoing attempts at peace making and peacebuilding in each of the two countries. Both reports raise the same research questions and use the same methodology and data collection methods, with the aim of a) identifying the factors at play in determining the nature and level of this participation and engagement; b) identifying any potential opportunities created by the conflict and pandemic to increase women's effective participation in the pandemic response and the peace making and peacebuilding processes; and c) providing concrete recommendations for policymakers and other stakeholders to build on these opportunities and maintain an effective and inclusive approach.

Key questions raised in this research are:

- Have the conflict and/or the pandemic led to any significant changes in gender roles and relationships? What is the impact of the current conflict and COVID-19 on women's

role in the political field? Are there any differences in this impact on various groups of women?

- What are the major obstacles, challenges and threats that have inhibited the political participation of various groups of women in the context of the current conflict and the COVID-19 pandemic?
- What opportunities are there to increase women's participation in decision-making processes and policies pertaining to COVID-19?
- What can be done by various stakeholders to a) decrease the impact of the inhibiting factors; b) build on the available or potential opportunities to increase women's political participation; and c) sustain this participation at all levels in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and other humanitarian crises and in the making and building of a sustainable peace in Yemen?

B. METHODOLOGY

1. Conceptual framework

Guided by an intersectional approach and using the lens of gender, an analysis was conducted of the impact of the current conflict and COVID-19 on women's and girls' political participation and engagement. Use of these two analytical approaches enables consideration of Yemen's historical and current divisions along regional, tribal, sectarian and socioeconomic lines, and the resulting subcultures and multiple interlocking identi-

ties, defined in terms of socio-cultural power and privileges,¹ that play a significant role in: (a) shaping people's individual and collective positions on women's and girls' rights and their role in the private and public spheres, and (b) dictating the choices and means available to various women's groups, organizations and individual activists to tackle various issues of gender equality. Moreover, the intersectional approach helps ensure avoiding one of the reasons identified for the limited success of some developmental efforts aimed at empowering women and girls and achieving gender equality, i.e.

the prototypical categorization of women and girls based on an assumed but erroneous homogeneity² (e.g. Yemeni women, Yemeni women non-governmental organizations (NGOs), etc...). This prototypical categorization has led to the adoption of a top-down approach in planning interventions, rather than a bottom-up approach capable of creating a sense of ownership, a critical element in ensuring responsiveness of the target audience and the effectiveness of the intervention.

Based on the assessment of the current status of women's and girls' political participation and engagement in conflict resolution and peacebuilding, and identification of the factors increasing or obstructing their engagement and political participation, the theory of change (TOC) was used to draw and provide feasible and applicable recommendations for the different stakeholders to ensure the achievement of the goals of this report. In applying the TOC, we started with identifying the long- and medium-term goals to be achieved, drew a backward map (through in depth investigation of the factors that have enabled or obstructed women's political participation at various stages of Yemeni history from 1967 to the present), identified the necessary and sufficient conditions for increasing women's participation, drafted our assumptions about the context and recom-

mended the interventions needed to achieve our goals.

Finally, some clarifications are in order regarding important terminology used in this study. First, the term "gender" is used to refer to the social constructs regarding the status, position and role of males and females in society. Second, the broad definition of "peacebuilding" is adopted in this study. For the purposes of this study, "peacebuilding" is defined as a comprehensive political process, carried out by various governmental and non-governmental individual or group actors, aimed at: (a) addressing the various causes and effects of conflict; (b) building and enhancing local capacities to resolve conflicts peacefully through negotiation, mediation, reconciliation, etc..; (c) provision of various types of services (e.g. social, economic, educational, medical and psychological) that can eliminate, or at least decrease, the impact of potential drivers of conflict; (d) building and enhancing resilience, tolerance and social cohesion; (e) providing and maintaining security; and (f) treating the various root causes of conflict at all levels and in all fields. As such, women's and girls' involvement in such activities is considered engagement in peacebuilding and is respectively considered a form of political participation regardless of the level it is exercised at.

2. Data collection methods

Two sources of information were used in this report:

A comprehensive desk review which covered published work on Yemeni women's political participation at the decision-making level and the impact of armed conflicts, humanitarian crises and epidemics on women's political participation and engagement in conflict resolution and peacebuilding in general, and in Yemen in particular, especially during the period 2011-2020. The desk review also covered reports published by the United

Nations, other international governmental and nongovernmental organizations and local agencies, government documents and available statistics. Special emphasis was placed on identifying best practices for increasing women's political participation and engagement in conflict resolution and peacebuilding in other war-torn countries and/or those hit by epidemics (e.g., the Ebola and SARS epidemics).

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 40 key informants (33 women and 7 men) chosen from political activists both inside and outside Yemen, activists working on peacebuilding, civil society leaders, political party members, participants in the national dialogue committee (NDC), members of the Constitutional Drafting Commission, members of local authorities, gender affairs officers in international organizations, health professionals and women working in mediation and conflict resolution.

One focus group discussion was held in each of ten governorates, five in the north (Sana'a, Taiz, Ibb, Al Hudaydah and Marib), and five in the south (Aden, Hadramaut, Al-Mahrah, Shabwa and Ad Dali). The original plan was to have four participants in each group discussion. However, due to internet problems, two of the ten group discussions had three and two participants respectively, dropping the total number of participants from the original 40 to 37. The ten governorates were chosen to ensure that they covered areas under the control of the three major parties to the conflict: the internationally recognized Government (IRG), the Houthis and the Southern Transitional Council (STC).

Positional and reputational approaches, aided by the snowball technique were used to identify key informants and participants in focus group discussions. The drafting of the basic questions used in the semi-structured interviews was guided by the aims of this

research and the results of the desk review.

3. Challenges encountered and the limitations of the report

Field researchers did not encounter any lack of responsiveness from any of the subjects contacted for interviews. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews and group discussions were conducted via the internet (Zoom), which caused some logistical problems (total lack of internet services or bad internet connections, electricity problems, etc.) that interrupted some interviews and/or impacted the number of participants in group discussions and the ability to conduct interviews on the agreed date and time. As only one group discussion was held in each governorate, the key findings, though highly informative and insightful, should be approached with care if used for drawing generalizations.

4. Context

While the history of independent Yemen testifies to the recurrence of overlapping local, regional, and international conflicts on its territory, the current conflict, ongoing since January 2015, is by far the fiercest. Besides devastating most of the country's infrastructure, it has had catastrophic repercussions on the whole Yemeni population, with women and girls being among the most, if not the most, severely affected.³ Coupled with the repercussions of the various natural disasters, epidemics and the COVID-19 pandemic that have hit the country amidst corrupt and weak governance and a collapsing health care system,⁴ the current conflict has exacerbated the already dire economic, social, political and humanitarian conditions prevalent before its outbreak. It has claimed the lives of over 100,000 Yemenis between March 2015 and October 2019,⁵ among them at least 17,700 civilians,⁶ left over 80 per cent of the Yemeni population in dire need of assis-

tance and protection, with over 20 million lacking food security and half of them suffering from extreme levels of hunger and on the brink of famine, left millions without access to safe water, sanitation and basic health and social services, left an estimated 1.25 million civil servants suffering from irregular payment of their salaries since August 2016 and led to a total of 3,635,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) as of 31 December 2019, most of them women and children.¹⁰ After an earlier United Nations declaration of Yemen as the “worst humanitarian crisis”¹¹ and the declaration by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in April 2019 that the conflict has reversed human development in Yemen by 21 years, and is projected to reverse it by 26 and 40 years if it continues into 2022 and 2030 respectively,¹² Yemen ranked as the worst food crisis worldwide in the Global Report on Food Crises in 2020¹³ and continues to rank last on the Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) (153rd out of 153), 151st on political empowerment and on economic participation and opportunity and last in the regional ranking on the GGGI (19th out of 19).¹⁴ It also ranked last on the 2019 Sustainable Development Goals Index rankings with a score of 10.4 per cent.¹⁵ The country also ranked as the last performer on the Women, Peace and Security Index.

The war started with the Houthi rebels’ move into Sana’a late in 2014, and their advances towards Aden, the interim seat of President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, who was forced to flee to Saudi Arabia and appeal for international support. The response was soon to come in the formation of a Saudi-led Alliance in March 2015.¹⁶ The military confrontations that followed added to the already existent complexities of the Yemeni war by turning Yemen into an open stage for settling local, regional and international rivalries. Western, mainly American and British, support for the Alliance and the Hadi Government (with recent talk about potential Turkish support

for the Islah Party)¹⁷ on one side, and alleged Iranian support for the Houthi rebels on the other, brought Yemen into the heart of: (a) American-Iranian conflicts (b) heightened regional and local Sunni-Shiite rivalries, (c) Iranian- Saudi rivalry, and d) the “New Middle East Cold War”.¹⁸ The current conflict also gave rise and momentum to old and new local and regional actors. Among these are the tribal fighters claiming to defend their territories, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), who are competing to represent and defend Sunni interests in Yemen. There is also alleged involvement by Lebanese Hezbollah and some extremist Iraqi Shiite groups on the side of the Houthis, thus adding them to the Iranian-formed “Axis of Resistance”.

The multitude of actors with conflicting interests made reaching a resolution of the conflict much more complex and difficult. All parties without exception continue to commit violations of international humanitarian law, international criminal law and the law of war. The United Nations and humanitarian agencies have made many recommendations regarding these violations. Among them are to: (a) ensure the representation of women in public and political life during the transition process; (b) adopt measures to combat discriminatory attitudes against women and protect them from forced and early marriages; (c) cooperate with the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts appointed by the Human Rights Council to monitor and report on the human rights situation in Yemen; (d) secure the rights of IDPs and IDP returnees; (e) end the indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks against civilians and ensure that all parties to the conflict protect the civilian population, especially women and children, civilian objects and medical installations and personnel against attacks; (f) end blockades to ease delivery of humanitarian aid; and (g) prohibit torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.¹⁹

As the Yemeni situation is projected to get worse with the uncontrolled spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, more and more voices are being raised to demand an end to the conflict and build a sustainable peace, with some of the loudest being raised by Yemeni women's organizations and activists working inside and outside Yemen.

Although women and girls are among the most vulnerable to the impact of conflict and the pandemic,²⁰ women continue to be excluded from decision-making processes related to

pandemic response and peace making and building in the country.²¹ As such, women's organizations and activists are demanding their inclusion and participation in these processes.

Their demands are based on the principle of equality consecrated in the Constitution, the NDC outcomes, the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda and UNSCR 1325 as well as the widely acknowledged importance of women's and girls' participation in those processes.²²

II. IMPACT OF THE CONFLICT AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

A. WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN YEMEN: ENABLING AND OBSTRUCTING FACTORS DURING THE LAST DECADES

Identification of the various factors that have played a role in determining the nature and level of Yemeni women's engagement in politics before the outbreak of the 2015 conflict and the COVID-19 pandemic was a necessary first step to track any changes in this engagement brought about by the war and/or the pandemic and the direction of these changes. As such, an in-depth review of the history of Yemeni women's engagement in politics was conducted. This review revealed several factors that have enabled and/or obstructed women's engagement in politics at different stages of Yemeni history.

The experience of Yemeni women under the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) and the preceding decades of the anti-British struggle highlight the significance of the following factors in enabling women's political activism and participation: (a) a serious political will emanating from a real belief that pervasive discrimination against women is a major factor behind the country's

backwardness²³ and an obstacle to development;²⁴ (b) serious governmental efforts to empower women of all social classes; (c) acknowledgment by decision makers that securing women's rights within the family is a major determining factor of social acceptance of women's public and political involvement; (d) a national identity that supersedes atomistic identities and loyalties; (e) recognition and prioritization by political parties of the political empowerment of women; (f) inspiring role models of elite women to mobilize and encourage ordinary women to venture into public life and political engagement; and (g) a shared vision of the desired future for the country and the contribution of all components of society without discrimination towards achieving it.

Women's experience in North Yemen before and after unification in 1990 and up until the 2011 protests provides support for the above enabling factors and reveals the major factors that have obstructed actual and effective

political participation by women. First among these obstructing factors is the role of religious extremism and tribalism which were adopted by the General People's Congress (GPC) in the Yemeni Government and parliament in 1993.²⁵ These forces paved the way for the later adoption of discriminatory laws that continue to reflect a highly patriarchal culture and provide the legal infrastructure for discrimination against women;²⁶ second is the revealed deep gap between northern and southern women in capacities, experiences and concerns dictated by different backgrounds.²⁷ This impacted the representativeness of women's movements, their potential for unity and their ability to form a critical mass capable of ending gender-based discrimination in laws and achieving gender equality.²⁸ The third and most important obstructing factor is the heterogeneity and conflictual political culture in Yemen that were surfaced upon unification. The latter was best manifested in the southern separatist ambitions apparent in the southern secessionist movement of 1994, its revitalization in 2007, successive Houthi insurgencies, military confrontations with the regime of the former President Ali Abdullah Saleh and the current conflict, sparked by Houthis' rejection of religious, social, economic and political marginalization and discrimination against them.²⁹

Drawing on the experience of other Arab countries with heterogeneous societies and conflictual political cultures, such as Lebanon, this heterogeneity and conflictual political culture constitute major obstacles to women's political participation at the level of leadership and decision-making.³⁰ Deepening group divisions, mostly due to a perceived or real threat of an exclusionary political, religious or ethnic ideology, lead to (a) an increase in groups' fear for survival and loss of identity; and (b) an increase in the potential of resorting to armed conflict to secure the groups' interests and survival. Under such conditions, two major phenomena have

appeared in Yemen. First is the increased dominance of the patriarchal culture which undermines women's abilities as political leaders and defenders of group interests,³¹ leading to their exclusion from decision-making processes on war and peace and all related issues. The best example of this is the propagation of COVID-19 as a weapon of war rather than a health threat, as reported by many KIs. Second is the priority assigned during times of conflict, by both women and men, to their primary loyalty even at the expense of women's and human rights.³² This is best reflected in the declaration by one KI that "we are in the middle of war... it is not the time to talk about women's rights. When the war is over, we will discuss it".³³

Successive armed conflicts from 1994 to 2011 have obstructed women's access to leadership and decision-making positions. Despite the high level of women's participation in parliamentary and local elections, ranging from 40 to 44 per cent of the total electorate,³⁴ and their constituting 25-40 per cent of the membership of political parties,³⁵ women held only 0.33 per cent and 1.8 per cent of seats in the House of Representatives and Shura Council respectively in 2003, 1.7 per cent in local councils in 2006, 5 per cent of the total numbers of ministers in 2017,³⁶ and a reportedly small number of governmental and diplomatic positions.³⁷ Throughout this period, Yemen has remained at the bottom of the Global Gender Gap Index (153rd out of 153) and the bottom of the Regional Gender Gap Index (19th out of 19) as of 2020.³⁸

Yemeni women rarely participate in political protests due to societal norms and a culture that reserves this space for men. This is a factor obstructing women's meaningful political participation. However, the demonstrations of 2011 marked a real turning point, as women made their voices heard and demanded to contribute to rebuilding their country on a solid basis. With the help of the United

Nations, women ensured their representation in the two-year National Dialogue Conference (NDC). They constituted 28.6 per cent of the total 565 participants in the NDC, were elected to head and participate in committees and held 4 out of 17 seats on the constitutional drafting commission. Through this representation, women were able to ensure constitutional consecration of many women's rights (e.g. banning discrimination on the basis of sex in Art. 75 and setting the marriage age at 18 years in Art. 122) and secure a 30 per cent quota in all elected and appointed governmental positions (Art. 76).³⁹

The opposition to women's demands at the NDC, voiced by both male and female religious and conservative groups, reflected division in the Yemeni society over women's rights. Women of religious and conservative groups organized marches in Sana'a under the slogan "Women against quota", with some characterizing it as racial discrimination against men.⁴⁰ This position by women belonging to Islamist groups raises questions about the potential for Yemeni women's unity through acknowledging women's issues as national issues that transcend group borders and loyalties.⁴¹ It also highlights group leaderships' ability at projecting women's demands for equality as a cultural invasion, carried out by local agents, and targeting the group's values, norms, and social structure. More-

over, male opposition came also from within the NDC. It was reflected in the opposition to Nabila Al Zubair's election to head the committee on the Sa'ada governorate at NDC, "not because she is a woman but because of her personal liberal ideas". This reveals male leaders' fears, especially in conservative heterogeneous societies, of having a critical mass of women in decision-making positions, capable of influencing change and depriving them of their traditional sources of power.⁴²

The fact that women are currently represented by only one woman in each of the IRG and the Houthi government respectively,⁴³ and that women's participation in peace talks have been minimal and token-like, indicate both parties' lack of readiness to comply with, and implement the NDC outcomes regarding the 30 per cent quota for women's representation.

The following sections provide an analysis of the results of the conducted field work. It aims at assessing the impact of the conflict, and that of the COVID-19 pandemic respectively, in adding to, or removing any of the above mentioned enabling and obstructing factors that have determined the level and nature of women's political participation as reflected in their engagement in responding to the pandemic and in peace making and peacebuilding processes.

B. IMPACT OF THE CONFLICT (2015-2020) AND THE PANDEMIC ON WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The responses by KIs and PIGDs reveal a broad-based agreement over some issues. First is the difficulty of drawing the line between the impact of the conflict and that of the pandemic on women in general, and on women's political activism in particular. The pandemic is seen as aggravating the impact of the conflict, thus having a cumulative effect rather than a separate impact. Second is the existence of regional differenc-

es in the impact of both the conflict and the pandemic on the nature and level of women's engagement in the pandemic response and peacebuilding activities. KIs and PIGDs largely attributed these differences to (a) the type of group in power in a given region; (b) the means at this group's disposal; (c) its position on women's involvement in the public sphere in general and in politics in particular; and (d) the perceptions held by the group in power of

the seriousness of the health crisis and its repercussions.

A third area of agreement is that, as a result of the outbreak of the pandemic, women's activism has shifted from prioritizing women's demands for meaningful representation in peace making processes as a main pillar in building sustainable peace to placing more weight on other components of peacebuilding such as the provision of humanitarian aid and relief, building social cohesion and the elimination, or at least reduction, of the impact of potential drivers of conflict,⁴⁴ especially conflict over limited resources (e.g. land and water) which have been exacerbated by the pandemic.⁴⁵ Another area of agreement is that this shift has led to greater involvement by ordinary women and youth in these interventions at all levels, including the launching of highly effective initiatives in some governorates. Finally, and most important, there was agreement on the unity of the women's movement around unified goals and demands as a prerequisite for securing women's rights.

It was clear from the interviews and group discussions that both the conflict and the pandemic have had negative as well as positive impacts on women's political participation. For instance, the conflict has turned Yemeni women into "war makers and peace-makers alike".⁴⁶ Though the balance appears to lean more to the negative rather than the positive side, there are latent and manifest opportunities, which, if well exploited and built on, can increase women's political participation, especially through both official and non-official engagement in responding to the pandemic and building a sustainable peace.

1. Negative impact of the conflict and pandemic: threats and obstacles

a) Threats to personal safety

The deteriorating security situation has result-

ed in a brain drain of women activists leaving the country in search of protection abroad. It has also made it difficult for women's organizations to hold conferences, meetings and training workshops, especially in areas with restrictions on meetings or workshops aimed at providing women with training and empowerment (e.g. Sana'a). Many women activists who stayed behind have been exposed to various types of threats, physical assaults, smear campaigns and harassment from all warring factions, intended to clip their wings, curtail their activities at all levels and silence the outspoken among them. Among the most targeted have been women activists exposing the various violations of international law and human rights committed by all warring factions without exception.

The factors identified by KIs and PIGDs, especially those who have been exposed to such violence, as providing a fertile soil for such acts are: (a) the absence of government or legal structures that women activists can turn to for protection and to file complaints against such assaults; (b) lack of cooperation by security forces and/or legal authorities to provide justice for women when a complaint or law suit is filed; (c) lack of legislation protecting women from violence; and d) the rising influence of extremism and the restrictions it imposes on women's freedom of movement.

COVID-19 has added a new threat: the fear of contracting the virus and transmitting it to family members. Moreover, while the fear for personal safety may have been limited to war-torn areas, the fear of contracting the virus has spread nationwide and restricted women's ability to move, hold conferences, meetings, training workshops, etc. in all parts of the country. As expressed by many KIs and PIGDs, any hoped for decrease in various types of assaults on women activists working on combating the disease, spreading awareness about it and/or distributing humanitari-

an aid has not come about.

b) Threats to livelihood and survival

Yemen's dire economic conditions have been further aggravated by the outbreak and the cost of war. This has impacted the livelihoods of most Yemenis, and women activists are no exception. Many of them have lost their income or been laid off. They have had to devote more time to secure a livelihood for their families, which is not always paralleled by a decrease in their responsibilities at home. According to many KIs from NGOs, women have ventured into new types of work previously unknown to them. Many have become businesswomen selling products on the internet and in markets, limiting the time that women can devote to political activism.

The lockdown and closure measures imposed to contain the spread of COVID-19 have led to further deterioration of the economy, with a greater burden falling on women than on men. As revealed by the interviews, this gendered impact of the pandemic is clear in: a) more women than men being laid off; b) many women going bankrupt and losing the small business they started during the conflict, and c) discriminatory closure policies, more so in some areas than others. Examples of the latter were the closure of women's hairdressing shops but not barber shops, as well as closure of the women's sections in banks (known as the butterfly sections) in Sana'a and requiring women to take leave from work, thus making them lose whatever small income they make from working extra hours to help them face the hardships of life.⁴⁷

Women face a mounting need to maintain their livelihoods, coupled with intense family pressures to stay home to teach their children amidst school closures and monitor their compliance with safety measures. All the while, they live with a fear of contracting the

virus and losing their ability to carry out their increasing domestic responsibilities even as, due to the conflict, they lose time they could devote to activism and engagement in the public sphere.

c) Loss of democratic mechanisms for women's participation in the political sphere

The majority of interviewees indicated that political parties lost their real role in the early days of the conflict. They suffered internal divisions that accompanied and reflected divisions in the political authorities between those inside Yemen and those outside it. Moreover, political parties lacked clear party programmes and/or visions of how to end the war or improve the country's future. Before the conflict, women's share of party membership ranged from 25 to 40 per cent.⁴⁸

Women's pre-war frustration with political parties' failure to provide more than lip service to women's issues was heightened by the political parties' excessive exclusion of women from electoral lists and party representation in peace negotiations. Additionally, out of a fear that taking sides could expose them to reprisals and an awareness of their party benefiting from the spoils of war, many female partisans detached themselves from party politics. According to many interviewees from most governorates, political parties' current role is limited to mobilizing men and women for war, (e.g. the continued presence of the woman-headed Arab Spring Party in Sana'a).

The conflict resulted in the ceasing of the work of the National Women's Committee (NWC) in 2015.⁴⁹ This was considered by most interviewees as a loss of another democratic mechanism for securing their rights and making their voices heard. The fact, revealed by an ESCWA study, that the NWC showed "flexibility to change structure and to adapt to different circumstances... (and) ... the Women and Children Department in the

Ministry of Social Affairs took the lead and continued to effectively fulfil the mandate in partnership with all women's departments in the various ministries"⁵⁰ was not raised by any of the KIs and PIGDs. According to most interviewees, the NWC was already weak and ineffective in the north, except in Al Hudaydah and some parts of the south in which the NWC was very active before 2015. After the war started, with the exception of Hadramaut, the work of the NWC in other governorates was either halted or highly manipulated by the faction in power. Factors identified by KIs and PIGDs as adding to NWC's ineffectiveness are mainly: (a) lack of effective leadership due to the authorities' failure to fill vacant leadership positions (Aden), (b) appointing women leaders from outside the governorate (Shabwah), (c) the security situation and lack of resources, if and wherever political will to increase the Committee's role existed, and (d) appointing women known for their opposition to women's involvement in politics to head the Committee. The best example of the latter phenomenon is Sana'a, where the NWC came to be known as the "National Anti-Women Committee".⁵¹

As revealed by many of the interviews and group discussions, political parties did not show any serious interest in drafting plans to respond to the pandemic, or to mobilize their members to cooperate in implementing existing response plans. The NWC's work in this area and in ensuring the representation and contribution of women to the drafting and implementation of response plans was almost non-existent.

(d) Weakened influence of women in decision-making positions

Although women's presence in political and top administrative positions has not decreased during the conflict, the degree of their influence has decreased, with their leverage and freedom of action determined by the

political authority and the traditions and customs prevalent in their area. According to most interviewees, while both Houthis and the internationally recognized Government (IRG) disagree on almost everything, they agree on the exclusion of women from decision-making positions. However, as they are driven by the need to satisfy donors and secure continued international financial support rather than by a belief in the importance of women's role at this stage of Yemen's history, they appoint indoctrinated loyal women in such positions.⁵²

Despite the expected, or desired, decrease in measures curtailing the leverage and ability of women in top administrative and political positions to act to respond to the humanitarian and health crisis, this has not been witnessed in almost any governorates or at any level. For example, the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Health in the IRG in Aden cooperated with women and youth groups to draft a new response plan that, contrary to the one prepared by the Ministry of Health and WHO, was based on a needs assessment. Despite arranging for the implementation of the plan with the Alliance, this did not help stop the exposure of female participants in its implementation to harassment and assaults from the various factions on the ground. In other governorates, women in public positions were rarely allowed to contribute to the drafting of response plans. However, they were called upon during the implementation stage due to the traditional restrictions on males' entry into other people's houses. Noteworthy is the fact, reported by many interviewees, especially from areas under Houthi control, that women helping in recording cases, doing house checks, etc. were under strict instructions not to reveal the real numbers of cases to anybody. With some estimates of the number of Coronavirus cases in Yemen hitting one million,⁵³ the hiding of any information on the number of cases may have serious implications for the ability to contain the

spread of the virus and save Yemeni lives. As such, it is imperative to increase women's awareness of such dangers.

(e) Women's rights pushed aside

As indicated by one KI, while women are excluded from decision-making positions and deprived of much of the space to act and influence over actions, they are recruited by all factions to serve in their military and security forces. The Houthi Ansar Allah formed the Zainabiyat group, and in Taiz different armed women's groups were formed by the various warring factions.⁵⁴ One KI declared that women were also recruited in the military and security forces of the Southern Transitional Council (STC). They carried out house searches, detention and searches of women as well as the orders and demands not only of the political powers but also those of military factions such as the security belt funded by the United Arab Emirates.⁵⁵ According to interviewees from the north, Houthis believe that men's and women's priority at this delicate stage of Yemen's history is to fight and defeat the aggression carried out by the Saudi-led alliance and their local allies, and there is no room to talk about women's right to political participation before the war is over. This view was supported by multiple KIs, who declared that political parties have rationalized their previous exclusion of women from their electoral lists, and not currently pushing for their representation in peace negotiations, on the grounds that "it is war time... The situation is dangerous and insecure for women's participation".

The propaganda spread by various warring factions characterizing the spread of the virus as a weapon of war or stratagem used by the enemy has made it so that pandemic response is more similar to an act of war. As such, women were excluded from the drafting of response plans, especially with the high reliance on statistics published by WHO show-

ing that more men than women are infected⁵⁶ by the virus. Accompanied by the slogan used in areas under Houthi control that it is "better to die as a martyr than by infection",⁵⁶ this reflects a significant undermining of the pandemic in the context of war, and the belief that women are not as implicated by the conflict and the pandemic as men. Thus, new rationalization have been found to push women's rights aside and continue to exclude them from participation in decision-making processes, including pandemic response.

(f) Excessive restrictions on the work of women's organizations

The strict restrictions on the work of women's organizations and activists in Sana'a have driven many of them into Aden, with whatever United Nations and foreign-funded projects they were implementing.⁵⁷ This provided them with the space to work, "despite the presence of Salafis and their position on women's political participation".⁵⁸ However, this may have the potential of alienating these organizations and activists from their original communities and intensifying rejection of their work, especially amidst campaigns against those cooperating with international organizations. Within the context of foreign support for civil society or NWC, some interviewees highlighted a major limitation on women's ability to work, i.e., a lack of funding and the experience that "whenever money comes in, men take over".

Lockdown measures, coupled with the fear of contracting disease, have impacted the work of women's organizations in all governorates. Besides the inability to hold meetings, conferences, workshops, etc., many have had to downsize and cut some of their regular activities and/or services due to funds drying up, especially from international donors. As expressed by many KIs and PIGDs, especially those working with women's organizations, women's political participation is no longer a

priority for international donors, whose work has shifted to the provision of humanitarian aid and relief.

Lockdown measures have increased women's organizations' and activists' reliance on the internet to carry out their activities. However, electricity and internet problems have limited the utility of the internet. One particularly impacted group is women IDPs, but with many of the organizations catering to them having already closed or downsized, the internet is not a viable or readily available substitute. Also, the alleged lack of gender mainstreaming in projects carried out by the Social Fund for Development, as raised by some KIs,⁵⁹ as well as the recent reported cuts in the funding from UNFPA,⁶⁰ have resulted in women IDPs becoming among the most vulnerable to the repercussions of both the conflict and the pandemic. Moreover, and despite being mentioned by one KI only, the joint repercussions of the conflict and pandemic have created an urgent need for the provision of mental health services both for women and at the community level, a service still beyond the ability of many women's organizations to provide.

The reported increase in domestic violence cases under the lockdown, the closure of courts and the security forces' reluctance to provide protection to citizens, especially women victims of domestic violence, have added further limitations on women's organizations' ability to provide needed services for this vulnerable group.

The demand for services far exceeds the supply, which was already very limited due to a lack of resources. The internet and social media, though helpful in some cases, are not helpful in many others, especially given the absence of any mechanism to facilitate the reporting of domestic violence cases during lockdown without drawing the perpetrator's attention.

g) Change in social attitudes towards women's work outside the home

During the conflict and driven by the need to sustain their families' livelihood, women from almost all governorates and social strata have had to secure new sources of income to cope with the increasing hardships of life. Depending on their level of education and qualifications, women have even sought paid employment among the ranks of warring groups. They have worked in hairdressing, home food production, handcrafts and perfume production, ventured into public markets to sell their products alongside men, established their own small enterprises with whatever savings they had and, especially for women IDPs, engaged in humanitarian assistance models called cash for work.⁶¹

With the spread of the pandemic, women activists' work in relief and humanitarian aid has increased despite the various sacrifices it involves, in particular the threat of contracting the virus. Closure measures have significantly impacted work opportunities and small businesses. As such, more women have sought employment at agencies providing humanitarian aid and relief services, and more women and girls have volunteered at these organizations (although, as declared by many KIs and PIGDs, not many of those organizations survived their lack of resources). The majority of interviewees declared having witnessed an increase in the level of social acceptance of women's work, even in conservative areas and especially in those under Houthi rule. As indicated by PIGDs from those areas, women working at cafes and restaurants, an unthinkable job before the pandemic, has become widely accepted, and women who established businesses and were able to maintain their families' livelihood came to be respected. However, very few KIs and PIGDs expressed their optimism regarding the sustainability of this social change in attitude once COVID-19 and the war are over. In their

opinion, this acceptance does not necessarily indicate an appreciation of women's work. They see in this lack of appreciation a major threat to the sustainability of those roles after COVID-19 and the war come to an end.

2. Positive impact of the conflict and pandemic: potential opportunities

a) Increased support from Yemeni women living abroad

The abovementioned dispersal of women activists was not without positive implications. Many of the activists outside Yemen have continued their fight for women's rights, especially the right of Yemeni women to assume their place in conflict resolution, peace making and peacebuilding. Free from restrictions imposed by warring factions, they have raised international awareness of the situation in Yemen and the violations of women's and human rights, thus providing significant support for their fellow activists at home.

With the threat of the pandemic looming over Yemen, women activists abroad have provided significant support for their fellow activists at home in various ways, mainly through (a) supporting the calls for a ceasefire made by the UN Secretary-General⁶² and the UN Special Envoy for Yemen;⁶³ (b) supporting the campaigns of activists inside Yemen; and (c) launching their own campaigns. Moreover, as some KIs revealed, some women in Yemen have been able to exploit their contacts abroad, especially with Yemeni immigrants and businessmen, to secure donations of financial, humanitarian and medical support. This can be built on to raise a sense of corporate social responsibility among Yemeni businesses inside and outside Yemen.

(b) Broadening the support base and geographical scope of the women's movement

Another positive impact highlighted in the interviews is the emergence of new individual activists and women's groups, from within and outside the elite class, such as the Association of Abductees' Mothers, and the formation of broad new alliances based around common interests and demands.⁶⁴ This broadening of the support base has been accompanied by a broadening of the geographical scope of the women's movement. The deteriorating security situation called for increased reliance on modern communication technology (internet, social media, etc.) to maintain contact, hold virtual meetings and launch national campaigns, especially those calling for ceasefires. This paved the way for participation by women's organizations and activists from across the country, who were previously unable to attend such events due to restrictions on their movement and/or the need to commute long distances across governorates. According to many KIs and PIGDs, this has had the advantage of (a) raising the interest of women from different socioeconomic backgrounds in learning how to use modern communication technologies, thus increasing their empowerment; and (b) decreasing the elitist character of women's activism through more involvement of ordinary women in political activity. This has the potential of establishing a sense of personal ownership and a broader support base for women's demands for more representation in peace making and peacebuilding among average Yemeni women, though to varying degrees in different areas of Yemen.

The pandemic has further expanded this broadening support base and geographical scope by creating shared problems and common grounds for joint work that transcend regional and political differences, and by increasing the reliance on modern communication technologies. A major and significant addition to the support base have been youth groups. As declared by many KIs and PIGDs, youth groups have cooperated

and coordinated with women's groups at different levels in responding to the pandemic. Youth groups joined hands with the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Health in drafting a response plan that meets the needs of society, contributed to its implementation, provided women with protection against assault and harassment, provided training for women on the use of the internet, participated in awareness raising campaigns, distributed humanitarian aid and provided support for various initiatives launched by women.

Among those initiatives is "I am volunteering, I am ready", launched by two women. Under this initiative, 400 young men and women were trained on spreading awareness of the Coronavirus and how to prevent its spread, with activities carried out in eight districts within the Aden governorate. This was paralleled by similar contributions by youth in other governorates, though to varying degrees and under different initiatives. However, while some KIs and PIGDs declared the participation of youth in implementing response plans and initiatives without specifying gender, one KI declared that "while women contributed in Aden, they disappeared in other governorates".

This high level of enthusiasm among the youth, their unprecedented coordination and cooperation with women's groups and activists and readiness to defend them against militants obstructing their work hold an important opportunity for building a culture of social cohesion, social responsibility and gender equality among the new generation. This constitutes a cornerstone for peacebuilding and changing discriminatory cultural norms and gender roles.

(c) Unity is the best means for making women's voices heard

Women's abovementioned frustration with the ineffectiveness of democratic mechanisms (NWC and political parties) in securing

women's rights, coupled with restrictions on their work, have led women activists to turn to alternative means to make their voices heard and ensure they can contribute to peacebuilding and be represented in the successive negotiations to end the war. In responding to the question of the most effective means for achieving these goals, a significant majority (around 60 per cent) of KIs and PIGDs emphasized alliance building and cooperation with other civil society organizations, i.e. unity and broadening the support base. Around 15 per cent of KIs and PIGDs assigned priority to appeals and petitions both to local and international actors, mainly the UN Special Envoy for Yemen. The rest were distributed between those who gave priority to policy papers and academic research, meetings with politicians and members of the international community and protest politics. No more than two interviewees considered political parties as the most effective means for making women's voices heard. According to the majority of KIs and PIGDs, the pandemic, a common enemy that is not selective in choosing its targets, provided an opportunity to unify women's movements around common demands and goals, especially demanding a ceasefire to contain the spread of the virus, and to a lesser degree, the release of prisoners and abductees.⁶⁵ This is an opportunity that can be built on if well exploited.

(d) The emergence of alternative ways to contribute to peacebuilding

Neither the severity of the conflict nor the lack of political will to engage women in the political process in general and in the official processes of peace making and building in particular have stopped women's intensive efforts to find the space to ensure their participation in responding to the pandemic and their representation in the peace making and building processes at their various levels. They were able to secure indirect, though

effective, participation in the Kuwait (April 2016), Stockholm (December 2018) and Riyadh talks (November 2019). According to many women activists interviewed, the reason behind the minimal and token representation of women in the official negotiations was the result of “men’s fear of women having a voice at the negotiating table”. But this did not discourage women. Most interviewees declared that women’s contribution to peacebuilding is not limited to representation and participation at the level of decision-making. As such, women engaged in (a) humanitarian and relief work in all governorates without exception, (b) attempts to help warring factions find common ground, (c) prisoner exchange deals, d) the release of abductees, and e) the legal field, mainly by exposing violations of international law committed by all warring factions. Although these activities started during the conflict, they have intensified since the outbreak of the pandemic.

Women have also found other ways to respond to the pandemic and contribute to peacebuilding. Many women who lost their businesses during the conflict have ventured into the business of sewing protective masks. According to many KIs and PIGDs, these women were not only driven by the need to secure an income, but also by recognition of their communities’ urgent need for masks whose prices were skyrocketing. No matter how big or small such contributions are, they constitute major components of peacebuilding.⁶⁷

Moreover, and as highlighted in interviews, a scarcity of resources has not stopped women’s activism. Many women’s organizations are operating through self-funding, with little support from outside sources. Examples are the Amnesty Initiative and the Association of Abductees’ Mothers.⁶⁸ All their activities fall under one or more of the components of peacebuilding as defined in this report. This

self-funding was considered a distinguishing mark and a source of pride by the interviewees involved in the work of these organizations or initiatives. Many interviewees see the potential of such experiences for women’s organizations working on critical issues in the context of the current conflict, first to overcome a lack of funding and second to improve their ability to free themselves from the dictates of local and foreign donors’ agendas. The latter was particularly clear in interviews which raised the issue of the lack of cooperation between the UN Special Envoy for Yemen and women’s initiatives for the release of the prisoners and the kidnapped.

e) Women’s mediation: a stepping stone towards a greater role in pandemic response and peacebuilding

One important peacebuilding activity carried out by women during the conflict is mediation and reconciliation at the community level. The COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with other epidemics, torrential floods, drought and deteriorating economic conditions has added to the pressures on Yemeni people and the pre-existing drivers of conflict. The need for water and food to protect oneself and family from the pandemic has increased the possibility of conflicts over these limited resources. Demand for mediation has increased. According to many of the PIGDs and KIs, women have effectively mediated conflicts over water, land and revenge before and after the pandemic. Among the examples provided are: (a) the 60 year old women who proposed a strategy for settling disputes among families over the work schedule for building walls to prevent floods, a strategy that was adopted by the Social Fund for Development in its other projects in Ibb; (b) the young woman who, while working as a consultant in the Rawafid project, helped settle disputes among residents of Sadda over water by designing a water network and building it with the help of young men; (c) “Taiz

Women's Initiative for life" negotiated the opening of roads closed by warring factions; and (d) the woman who assumed the position of Head of the Neighbourhood (A'akil Al Hara) and mediated to successfully resolve a dispute over land between two tribes in the Hajja governorate.

By doing this, women are eliminating potential drivers of conflict and building social cohesion. While such mediations are carried out in both urban and rural areas, they are more successful and more common in rural areas. As clear from many of the group discussions, women's ability to play this role emanates from the high esteem in which many tribes hold women. Women's ability to conduct effective mediation is improved if they have a strong personality, personal communication skills influence and authority in their community, respect from its members and a history of providing social services to the community. Family history in mediation and education are assets but not prerequisites for women mediators, as is clear from the examples provided and the election of women for the Head of the Neighbourhood (A'akil Al Hara) position. Some women mediators may seek introduction by, and/or recommendations from, men of standing which adds to the chances of their success. This mediator role carries great potential if well exploited. Building on the community's respect for women mediators, and highlighting them as role models, may lead to greater social appreciation and acceptance of women's engagement in the political and public spheres.

f) Leveraging women's experience for post-war reform of the security forces

Despite interviewees' negative view of women joining the security and military forces of the warring factions, women's experience in these fields can be helpful in any future reform of security and military institutions, which is one of the cornerstones of

peacebuilding.

This can be done through the National Plan for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325, which was drafted and adopted by the Prime Minister of the IRG at the end of 2019. Despite the various criticisms directed at the process of drafting this NAP, and objections to some of its provisions, this plan may open many opportunities if all types of needed support are provided, and if it is accompanied by the drafting of a national strategy for women.

g) Greater appreciation of the role of the United Nations and its agencies

The majority of KIs and PIGDs were highly appreciative of the role of United Nations agencies, mainly UN Women and UNFPA for the support they have been providing for Yemeni women. The role of the UN Special Envoy for Yemen in making women's voices heard at the UN Security Council since 2015 was mentioned by some interviewees.⁶⁹ Many women activists mentioned the importance of the formation of the Women's Technical Advisory Group in 2018, the periodic consultation between the UN Special Envoy and this group⁷⁰ and their engagement in peace talks, though in an unofficial capacity. Some KIs also noted the virtual consultations held on 8 and 9 June by the Office of the Special Envoy with over 500 Yemenis. Opinion was divided over their success and effectiveness, mainly due to women constituting only around 30-35 per cent of the participants. During these consultations, "participants expressed their thoughts on the prospect of a nationwide ceasefire, the future of the political peace process and key humanitarian and economic measures that are needed to alleviate humanitarian suffering in Yemen and improve the country's response to the COVID-19 outbreak".⁷¹ The importance of this event lies in providing contact between the Special Envoy and Yemenis outside the Office's usual

circles.⁷² However, as indicated by many KIs and PIGDs, this further supports the need and importance of training women from all governorates on the use of modern communication technology to facilitate their participation in

such consultations and make their voices heard. Broadening the scope of such consultations in the future, and engaging more women in them, carries great potential in informing United Nations work in Yemen.

III. SUMMARY AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The above analysis highlighted the major factors that have been at play in obstructing or enabling Yemeni women's participation in politics at different stages of Yemen's history. Our review started with the decades of anti-British struggle that preceded British withdrawal and the declaration of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), which lasted from 1967 to 1990, the Arab Republic of Yemen (1962-1990) and Yemeni unification from 1990 to the present. The interviews and group discussions supported the findings of the desk review and helped us determine the prerequisite conditions for achieving a) the long term goal set by this research, i.e. ensuring sustainable qualitative and quantitative women's political participation at all levels and in all fields, and securing their engagement in peacebuilding and crisis management processes (such as the response to the pandemic); and b) the intermediate goals of ensuring women's political participation in national and local plans for responding to the pandemic and the currently ongoing national peace making and peacebuilding processes.

One major research finding stands out and should be taken into consideration when implementing the recommended interventions: none of the factors discussed below is by itself a necessary and sufficient condition to achieve the desired goals. As such, the process for achieving the desired goals is a multi-faceted process which requires working in parallel to establish the enabling conditions on one hand, and working to remove, or at least mitigate, the obstructing factors, as

dictated by TOC, on the other. This multi-faceted process requires cooperation and concerted efforts by all stakeholders. If well implemented, this process will help us meet the requirement of providing the "necessary and sufficient" conditions needed to achieve the set goals.

The findings of the field and desk research on the conditions for increasing women's political participation and rendering it sustainable in the future are presented below in the assumptions. They are the basis for the following recommendations for action by the various stakeholders.

A. Assumptions

Achieving sustainable qualitative and quantitative women's political participation at all levels and in all fields, and women's engagement in peacebuilding and crisis management processes, requires:

- Women's solidarity and unity around common goals and demands;
- Broad support for women's common demands;
- Women's economic empowerment;
- Women's persistence in proving their abilities;
- Political will based on a belief in the importance of women's role in national human, economic and political development, especially within political parties;
- Legal and security structures empowered to

secure protection for women, especially women activists, against all forms of gender-based violence;

- Prevalence of a national identity that transcends atomistic identities and loyalties;
- Culture based on respect for human rights and tolerance;
- Peace and restoration of government institutions;
- Constitutional guarantees of gender equality and banning of discrimination;
- Removal of all gender-based discrimination from legislation, in particular personal status laws;
- Adoption of new laws to protect women from all forms of gender-based violence, especially domestic violence;
- Eradication of illiteracy among women and girls, especially legal illiteracy among women;
- Firm support from the international community.

B. Policy Recommendations

Based on the above assumptions, the following recommendations were prepared for the different stakeholders. The recommendations are presented below under three titles representing the goals of this research, i.e. securing and increasing women's effective participation in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and the peace making and peace-building processes, followed by the recommendations for sustaining women's political participation and engagement in peacebuilding and crisis management.

1. Increasing women's engagement in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Women's organizations and activists are advised to build on the current social acceptance, though with regional differences, of their initiatives and role in raising awareness

and providing various types of aid and services to respond to the pandemic. This can be achieved by (1) networking between women's groups across the country who worked on responding to the pandemic in their areas, (2) conducting consultations to identify and prioritize the needs in each of the governorates, (3) drafting a plan, or a revision of the existing national plan, based on the identified needs and lessons learned from working in the field (community based) and ensuring that gender is mainstreamed in the proposed plan and that it includes monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess progress, (4) seeking the support of UN Women, WHO and the Ministry of Health in drafting this plan and ensuring its adoption by the government;

- Women's organizations and activists are advised to mobilize local support, especially of youth groups, and support from other human rights organizations to ensure decision makers adopt the plan and implement it across the country;

- Women's organizations and activists are advised to network with the private sector and seek their support in responding to the pandemic as part of corporate social responsibility;

- Yemeni decision makers are advised to adopt the proposed plan, as it is based on a needs assessment within the social setting, which increases the potential to establish a sense of community ownership. This will increase the likelihood of compliance and ensure its effectiveness in containing the spread of the virus and mitigating its repercussions;

- Women's organizations and networks are advised to broaden awareness raising campaigns on the virus and measures to prevent its spread. Emphasis must be placed

on countering allegations that it is a weapon of war used by the enemy;

- As the pandemic, coupled with limited resources, has provided fertile ground for an increase in the drivers of conflict at the community level, women's organizations and networks are advised to work on designing and organizing workshops in various governorates and among IDPs aimed at building the capacity of potential young male and female mediators. Women who have been conducting successful mediations can be an asset in this process;

- United Nations agencies, mainly UN Women, ESCWA and WHO, and international donors are advised to provide all types of support for the above interventions to ensure effective containment of the pandemic and its repercussions.

2. Increasing women's meaningful participation in peace making and building processes

- Women's organizations and networks are advised to (a) support the creation of a network among women's groups from all governorates, (b) launch consultations to identify their peace and security priorities (social, economic, political, legal, security reforms, etc.) that should be a subject of discussion during negotiations over any proposed peace plan, (c) network with influential youth and human rights groups (male and female) advocating and supporting women's involvement in peace negotiations and consult with them over their priorities in any proposed peace plan, (d) in cooperation with the Women's Technical Advisory Group to the UN Special Envoy, draft a preliminary peace plan proposal/agenda which integrates the concerns and demands of the consulted groups in the different governorates, (e) seek

the assistance and support of UN Women in drafting this plan, (f) propose this plan to the UN Special Envoy for Yemen and discuss available means to put it on the negotiating table and ensure that women are represented in peace negotiations;

- The United Nations is advised to cooperate with all international donors to use all means at their disposal, including the threat of withholding aid, to convince all warring factions to comply with the NDC outcomes, UPR and CEDAW recommendations and UNSCR 1325 regarding women's representation and participation in peace negotiations;

- To avoid raising males' fear of losing their seats at the negotiating table, the Special Envoy can propose the addition of an independent women's delegation constituting 30 per cent of the total number of members of other delegations in compliance with the NDC outcomes and UNSCR 1325. This option guarantees women a real voice at the negotiating table. The Office of the UN Special Envoy for Yemen is also advised to provide support for women's groups in adopting a clear mechanism for nominations of members of the women's delegation. Strict adherence to the women's peace plan/agenda must be a non-negotiable requirement for nominations;

- Women's national alliances are advised to provide all possible support to women's organizations active in areas under Houthi control to pressure those in power to (a) end restrictions on women's organizations; and (b) implement UNSCR 1325, especially regarding representation of women in peace talks;

- Intensify and broaden the scope of public awareness campaigns, especially those targeted at women, on the importance of women's participation in the peace making and peace-building processes.

3. Sustaining women's participation in crisis response and engagement in peace-building

- Women's organizations and networks are advised to start a legislative reform workshop aimed at identifying latent or manifest discrimination against women in the laws in effect, prepare draft amendments to these laws, and drafts of new laws needed to secure women's rights (including a draft law on compulsory and free education). Seek UN Women and other international donors support for carrying this out;

- Women's organizations and networks are advised to design and implement (a) training for women partisans on how to play a more active role in their political parties, (b) training for male and female youth on the nature and scope of politics and peacebuilding, the various available levels for participation, and the social returns of such participation, (c) training for potential male and female young leaders on mediation and conflict resolution, (d) programmes for eradicating legal illiteracy among women, (e) adult literacy programmes, computer literacy, modern communication technology programmes for women in all governorates, and running e-business and marketing (f) women and youth economic and political empowerment programmes in the various governorates. UN Women, other UN agencies, and international donors are advised to provide support for those activities;

- Women's organizations and networks are advised to advocate and push for the restoration of the role of national women machineries, including in Houthi areas, and provide them with the required authorities and resources to enable them to carry out their intended functions, draft a national women's strategy and implement the National Plan for UNSCR 1325;

- As the technical, human and financial resources needed for the revision and implementation of the UNSCR 1325 Action Plan and for the drafting of a national women's strategy are locally lacking, United Nations agencies, mainly UN Women, and international donors are advised to provide the needed support. Same support is also needed for the drafting of a strategy to deal with issues pertaining to IDPs;

- Women's organizations and networks are advised to cooperate with national human rights organizations, major universities and concerned ministries for the inclusion of courses on human and women's rights in (a) the curricula of the Judges' Training Institute and in the training of security forces; (b) various university specializations; and (c) school curricula. They are likewise advised to work to revise school curricula to remove any gender-based discrimination from books and include material capable of building a culture of human rights, tolerance and peace among the new generation;

- Despite the increasing international concern with humanitarian and relief assistance, United Nations agencies and other international donors are advised not to cut or decrease their support for programmes aimed at improving the status of women (education, health, political participation, etc.) due to the acknowledged importance of women's empowerment and participation in public and political life in securing sustainable peace;

- Women's organizations and networks are advised to cooperate with WHO, the Ministry of Health and other international donors to (a) launch a national mental health programme to help Yemeni people, especially women and girls, overcome the various types of traumas resulting from the cumulative impact of the conflict, the many epidemics

and the pandemic, which may drive them to resort to negative coping mechanisms and threaten family and social cohesion and (b) design and implement programmes targeting potential perpetrators of domestic violence and other forms of violence that leverage the experience of other Arab countries in this field;⁷⁴

- ESCWA is encouraged to estimate the prevalence of multi-dimensional poverty in Yemen and identify locations of concentrated poverty in the country. United Nations agencies are advised to build on the results of the poverty estimates and encourage the funding of “graduation from poverty” programmes targeting both men and women as they have been proven to build resilience and sustainable livelihoods, the lack of which are main drivers of conflict;⁷⁵

- International donors, especially humanitarian agencies, are advised to change their approach to women IDPs as mere passive recipients of aid. They are advised to consult with them, identify the type of income generating activities they can perform and provide them with the means to carry out these activities (e.g., vocational training, small loans to start small businesses, etc.). This will help women IDPs restore their livelihoods and empower them to challenge the causes of gender-based violence;⁷⁶

- International donors are advised to ensure

gender mainstreaming and transparency in all funded projects, the adoption of a bottom-up approach that involves targeted communities in the design process and consideration for regional differences. This will build a sense of community ownership of projects and improve their implementation and effectiveness;

- United Nations and other international donors are advised to increase women’s engagement in humanitarian work as doing so will improve women’s ability to effect change in their communities;

- UN Women is highly advised to provide the needed guidance and support for women’s organizations in carrying out the above interventions;

- The United Nations and international community must build their credibility in the eyes of the Yemeni people by taking a firm stance on the many violations of international humanitarian and human rights law by all factions that have been widely reported by international human rights organizations and confirmed by the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen established by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR),⁷⁷ and exert all possible pressure on the warring factions to go back to the negotiating table and reach a permanent and just peace.

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- 50- Ibid. p.46.
- 51- Interview with KI from Sana'a on 26/8/2020.
- 52- Interview conducted with KI from Aden on 20/8/2020 and an interview with a KI from Sana'a on 18/8/2020.
- 53- Department for International Development (18 June 2020). UK calls for drastic action in Yemen as corona virus infections reach one million. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-calls-for-drastic-action-in-yemen-as-coronavirus-infections-reach-one-million>.
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- 55- Ibid.
- 56- Interviews with KIs, and group discussions with participants from areas under Houthi control.

57- Interview conducted with a KI from Sana'a on 26/8/2020.

58- Ibid.

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60- UNFPA (29 May 2020). A matter of life and death for Yemen's women and girls as funding dries up. <https://www.unfpa.org/news/matter-life-and-death-yemens-women-and-girls-funding-dries>. And Statement by Dr. Natalia Kanem delivered at the High-level Pledging Event for the Humanitarian Crisis of Yemen, (2 June 2020). <https://www.unfpa.org/press/high-level-pledging-event-humanitarian-crisis-yemen>. Both retrieved 3 September 2020.

61-Motahar, G. (2018). Empowering Yemen's Displaced Women. <https://www.thecaireview.com/essays/empowering-yemens-displaced-women/>.

62-The UN Secretary-General made his first call for a ceasefire in all areas of military conflict on 23/3/2020 and reiterated his call on 3/4/2020. <https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sgsm20032.doc.htm> and <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/03/1059972> Retrieved 8 August 2020.

63-The UN Special Envoy for Yemen made his first call on 8/4/2020 and reiterated it in a meeting with during a meeting with Yemeni President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi on 30 June 2020. <https://www.arab-news.com/node/1697796/middle-east> and <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/note-correspondents/2020-04-08/note-correspondents-statement-the-special-envoy-of-the-secretary-general-for-yemen-martin-griffiths-the-unilateral-ceasefire-joint-forces-command> Retrieved 8 August 2020.

64-Among those are the Women Alliance for Peace and Security formed under the auspices and support of UN Women with 60 members from different backgrounds, Women Solidarity with its 270 members from different backgrounds who work towards peacebuilding and ending war and is not funded by IOs, The Group of Nine which interviewees agree on its being a pioneer group whose work must be sustained, and the Group of Southern Women for Peace.

65- Besides the Association of the Abductees' Mothers, this was mentioned in statements made by the Group of Nine and Women Solidarity demanding a ceasefire.

66-With the exception of the Kuwait negotiations in which there were 2 women in the IRG delegation and one in the Houthis delegation, one woman was included in only one of the delegation. (2020). (بلقيس أحمد أبوصبح). op.cit.

67-World Bank (2007). op.cit. p. 25. These components are also stressed by the vast majority of international organizations and international NGOs working in conflict areas around the world.

68-Interviews with Amat Al Salam Al Haj head of the Association of Abductees' Mothers on 17/8/2020 and with Hana'a Mokbel, head of Yemeni Women Pact for Peace and Security and in charge of the Amnesty Initiative on 26/8/2020.

69-On 23 October 2015, during his briefing the UN Security Council on the situation in Yemen, UN Special Envoy for Yemen, Ismail Ould Sheikh, "presented a letter prepared by Yemeni women, in which they call for an end to the violence and the inclusion of women voices in all peace efforts". <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2015/10/yemeni-women-call-for-their-inclusion-in-peace-efforts>.

70-The Yemeni Women's Technical Advisory Group was formed by the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen (OSESgy), in line with the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008). <https://osesgy.unmissions.org/yemeni-women%E2%80%99s-technical-advisory-group-plays-active-role-during-sweden-consultations>. Retrieved 3 August 2020.

71-UN Special Envoy's Office concludes first online mass consultations. (10 June 2020) <https://osesgy.unmis->

sions.org/un-special-envoy%E2%80%99s-office-yemen-concludes-first-online-mass-consultations Retrieved 3 August 2020.

72-Ibid.

73-For example, funding cuts for UNFPA's projects in Yemen are expected to have grave consequences for women and girls, such as not receiving humanitarian aid.

74-Example ABAAD Men Centre in Lebanon. For more on this see <https://www.abaadmena.org/direct-services/men-centre>. Retrieved 3 August 2020.

75-IPA. The ultra poor graduation approach. <https://www.poverty-action.org/impact/ultra-poor-graduation-model>. And USAID (2020). Microenterprise and pathways out of poverty. And UNHCR. The graduation approach. <https://www.unhcr.org/55005bc39.pdf> and Can the graduation approach help end extreme poverty (2017). <https://insights.som.yale.edu/insights/can-the-graduation-approach-help-to-end-extreme-poverty>, and World Bank (2013). Graduation program: creating pathways out of extreme poverty into sustainable livelihoods. <https://www.world-bank.org/en/results/2013/04/04/graduation-program-creating-pathways-out-of-extreme-poverty-into-sustainable-livelihoods>. Retrieved 3 August 2020.

76-Motahar, G., (2018). op.cit. This was considered by many PIGDs as an important means for empowering women.

77-OHCHR (9 September 2020) UN Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen releases their third report Yemen: A Pandemic of Impunity in a Tortured Land. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26218&LangID=E>.



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