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REPORT WOMEN AS PEACEBUILDERS IN YEMEN*

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ACRONYMS

AQAP	al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula
CSSF	UK Conflict, Security and Stability Fund
CSO	civil society organisation
DFID	UK Department for International Development
GBV	gender-based violence
GPC	General People's Congress
(I)NGO	(international) non-governmental organization
IDP	internally displaced person
IRG	internationally recognized government
NAP	National Action Plan (on women, peace and security)
NDC	National Dialogue Conference
SFD	Social Fund for Development
SLC	Saudi-led coalition
STC	Southern Transitional Council
UAE	United Arab Emirates
YSP	Yemeni Socialist Party

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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, A FUTURE FOR THE NEXT GENERATION, EDUCATION, HEALTHCARE, SOCIAL EQUALITY;

SECURITY AND STABILITY: AN END TO THE WAR, CESSATION OF HOSTILITIES, SAFETY, ARMS CONTROL, DISAPPEARANCE OF GUNMEN, REMOVAL OF MILITIAS, REDUCTION OF CRIME, PRESENCE OF ACTIVE SECURITY AUTHORITIES;

STATEBUILDING AND GOOD GOVERNANCE: REINSTATEMENT OF STATE INSTITUTIONS, A RETURN OF GOVERNMENT, JUSTICE AND RULE OF LAW, SOCIAL JUSTICE, DEMOCRACY;

INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS: HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUAL CITIZENSHIP, FULL CITIZENSHIP RIGHTS, PUBLIC FREEDOMS, FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT AND EXPRESSION, POLITICAL PARTICIPATION FOR ALL AND RESPECT FOR DIFFERENT OPINIONS;

A STATE OF MIND: TRANQUILLITY, PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SPIRITUAL STABILITY, HARMONY, LOVE AND AFFECTION, COEXISTENCE, AND COMMITMENT TO ISLAM AS A RELIGION OF PEACE.



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WOMEN AS PEACEBUILDERS IN YEMEN - JUNE 2018

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We know that conflict is gendered: that men and women have different experiences and play different roles. We also know that although women are often politically, economically and socially marginalised, they still play a significant role in peace and stability. This research sought to understand *how* women in Yemen are engaging in conflict prevention, peace and stability activities in three target governorates (Ma'rib, Ta'iz and Lahij) and investigates how their *capacities and opportunities* to engage are affected by their experiences of conflict, insecurity and changes in the wider social and governance environment.

Our findings point to both a core set of overall trends which validate existing knowledge on women, conflict and peacebuilding in other parts of Yemen, as well as important local nuances and contrasts in each target governorate – and even within governorates.¹ It found that **women are at the frontline of sustaining families and communities and addressing the devastating effects of conflict**. In a protracted conflict such as Yemen's, de-escalation in ways which do not undermine long-term peace is a key need alongside efforts to address the dynamics that drive further conflict. Women are playing an essential role in this in a number of ways: by meeting humanitarian need and mitigating suffering; maintaining local services where government is inadequate or absent; addressing the psychological impact of violence; promoting peace; mediating between armed parties; and contributing to economic recovery.

Our research also highlighted the **very real risks of doing harm**. If not implemented thoughtfully, humanitarian distribution can provoke tensions by not providing for everyone in the community (or assessing areas without providing follow-up support), targeting only one segment (e.g. IDPs) of a highly vulnerable community, or using women's organisations purely as conduits for aid distribution, inadvertently diverting their agendas and priorities. Programming in support of women's empowerment could equally expose women to further risks if not very carefully designed in a context where women's public activity is being directly threatened by violent extremist groups, and domestic violence is increasing as traditional gender roles are challenged. There may also be times when international partners *should not* support women's effective local responses to conflict and instability, such as direct conflict mediation in tribal areas, for risk of undermining their local legitimacy. Time and again, local women emphasised **the need to work in partnership with them, and to make external support inclusive** of the whole community, whilst making the most of the opportunity to advance women's strategic interests and status.

Key findings

Gender-based violence (GBV)² has increased since the conflict began, in both public and private. This is in line with international experience³ and includes domestic (emotional/verbal, physical) violence; abduction; rape; sexual harassment in public spaces (by armed men); early marriage; and physical threats and attacks towards female activists.

¹ For example regarding visions for a future Yemen, responses varied even within target districts, with different target groups favouring either a united/central state as it exists now, a federal system of various regions, or to a lesser extent separation of the South from the North. Responses also varied regarding the existence and severity of GBV, with some participants not acknowledging that this is a problem in their area; and the extent to which women can contribute to peace and stability, with less educated or unemployed men and some less educated women making more restrictive comments.

² The term gender-based violence (GBV) was introduced by women's rights activists – and is most commonly used – to emphasise the link between gender discrimination and violence against women and girls. Whilst some actors include some forms of violence against men and boys in their use of the term GBV, in this report GBV is used to describe violence against women and girls unless otherwise stated due to the focus of the research on women, and the understanding that the vast majority of GBV is experienced by women and girls and perpetrated by men and boys.

³ See DFID VAWG Helpdesk query 159 on GBV and Conflict in MENA, and "No Safe Place: A Lifetime of Violence for Conflict Affected Women and Girls in South Sudan", DFID What Works Main Results Report 2017.

Women are more economically active than they were before the war, as men have been injured, killed or lost their jobs. This has brought a sense of empowerment for women but has also caused tensions between men and women, leading to more domestic violence. There is a risk that positive changes will be reversed once conflict ends if not proactively supported.

Women are playing an essential role in delivering an impressive local humanitarian response and sustaining community services and structures, even under direct threat and with extremely limited resources. This is considered an acceptable, “natural” role for women in public life across Yemen, although the significance of their contributions is not always recognised nor sufficiently supported, which women activists perceive as an obstacle.

Local understandings of peace are based on a broad human security framework emphasising basic services and jobs. Efforts by women to address poor living conditions, livelihoods and humanitarian need are understood as contributions to peace and stability.

Changes in the religious environment have had particular effects on women, especially a rise in radical religious rhetoric and greater influence of Islamist actors. In some areas (Ta’iz and Lahij), this has resulted in severe threats and violence against women activists and restrictions on women’s movement.

Women activists are often cooperating effectively with local governance structures and local leaders are receptive to women’s involvement in public institutions, although women are still generally excluded from formal decision-making and political structures.

Women are engaged in resolving conflicts, promoting peace, and providing security in a limited way in some areas. This includes directly mediating inter-tribal conflicts and conflicts over public resources, working as police officers (a few in urban centres), screening women at checkpoints, and supporting resistance fighters with food, money and moral support.

Recommendations

1. Continue to prioritise life-saving humanitarian support, including GBV mitigation and response, across conflict-affected parts of Yemen

The current UK focus on humanitarian aid in Yemen should be considered an opportunity to empower women, in line with UK commitments in the National Action Plan (NAP) 2018-2022 on women, peace and security. For DFID and its humanitarian partners, taking a gendered approach is essential to deliver effective responses, but will also help to sustain positive changes to gender roles emerging during conflict and strengthen women’s leadership and participation. At a minimum, this should include ensuring the participation of women-led civil society organisations (CSOs) and activists in decision-making on humanitarian aid. We recommend that DFID’s Humanitarian Team and other humanitarian donors explore:

- a. Encouraging humanitarian organisations to partner with local women-led CSOs to design and deliver humanitarian aid**, being careful not to simply use them as distribution mechanisms but to build their capacity to meet their own objectives.⁴ These CSOs and their leaders are experts in the needs, risks and entry points in each location and are ideally placed to advise international partners. Such partnerships should however assess risk of, and take steps to mitigate, backlash from men in the

⁴ A recent study by Oxfam and International Alert (Anderson, 2017) found that across the MENA region: “donors and INGOs are inadvertently hindering the gender justice agenda by exerting a disproportionate influence on the priorities, type of work and opportunities of WROs [women’s rights organisations] in the four contexts” included in the study, of which Yemen was one.

area who may feel excluded from job opportunities generated by humanitarian aid (see 3.a and 5.a below).

- b. Providing support and training to women involved in humanitarian activities**, such as psychosocial support, training them to be 'family experts' for other women in their communities, and to build networks with other women in similar roles beyond their area.

2. Address the causes of GBV and strengthen services for survivors

GBV should not be regarded as inevitable effect of conflict. From international experience we know it has the potential to cause further violence, e.g. revenge attacks, to undermine peacebuilding and stability efforts and long-term recovery. Effective responses do exist. We recommend the UK explore the potential for further action along the following lines:

a. Support public communications campaigns to address gender-based violence.

This could include using local media platforms to remind people of the existing social values and norms surrounding protecting women in public and private. A campaign could be implemented in partnership with women activists to ensure local appropriateness, as part of other strategic communications and norm change work (see below).

b. Encourage international humanitarian organisations to better mainstream GBV into their sector programmes and establish standalone GBV services for survivors, in line

with the Call to Action on Protection from Gender Based Violence in Emergencies and the agreed Roadmap made in 2016.⁵ This should include integrating the minimal initial service package (MISP) into all humanitarian response,⁶ as well as psychosocial support to both women and men (and specifically to couples and communities) affected by conflict, violence and economic hardship to support survivors and address the drivers of GBV perpetration, in line with global evidence.⁷

c. Promote peace, tolerance and gender equality among school children and youth

through school-linked peace clubs. This approach has been implemented successfully in contexts such as Nigeria, Pakistan and Afghanistan to address GBV and harmful gender norms within a wider pro-peace framework, and has been proven to reduce both levels of violence experienced by children as well as risk factors for perpetration (men) and experience (women) of GBV in later life.⁸ Women activists in Yemen are already promoting peace in schools and with youth so this would fit well with their existing activity.

3. Support women's roles in conflict prevention, peacebuilding and mediation

Existence of traditional norms regarding women's roles in resolving conflict offers an opportunity, but may be under threat. Women activists also cite a lack of recognition of women's contributions to conflict prevention, peace and stability as an obstacle. There may be space to do more to sustain networks between women working in this area, share ideas and experiences and encourage further action. We recommend that the UK considers:

⁵ See: <https://www.calltoactiongbv.com/> (10.06.2018).

⁶ The Minimum Initial Service Package (MISP) is a series of crucial actions required to respond to reproductive health needs at the onset of every humanitarian crisis. See UNFPA for more: <https://www.unfpa.org/resources/what-minimum-initial-service-package> (10.06.2018).

⁷ Multiple studies have highlighted that interventions which work with both men and women, intervene at the relationship level (i.e. with couples), or work holistically with the whole community, are significantly more effective in preventing GBV than single-intervention or women/men-only engagement. See for example: <http://www.whatworks.co.za/documents/publications/4-effectiveness-of-interventions-to-prevent-violence-against-women-and-girls/file> (10.06.2018).

⁸ See for example DFID's Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme (NSRP) Peace Clubs model: <http://www.nsrp-nigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSRP-How-to-Guide-Setting-up-and-Running-Peace-Clubs.pdf> or "Right to Play" programming as part of violence prevention work in Pakistan: <http://www.whatworks.co.za/about/global-programme/global-programme-projects/item/299-preventing-violence-against-women-and-girls-through-school-based-programmes> (10.06.2018).

- a. Promoting awareness of women's contributions to peace, stability and development through dialogue and strategic communication, in collaboration with local women activists.** This could include local dialogue meetings, billboards, radio and TV discussions on the positive roles women have played during the conflict, profiling local women role models, and engaging influential men in discussion – traditional, religious and political leaders. It could also involve working with moderate imams on religious education, shown to be a protective factor against radicalisation. Such work should consider risk of backlash and seek to promote positive examples of men and women working for peace and stability together.
- b. Establishing local 'family centres' with female staff only as a place women can turn to for advice and support,** together with local activists and with the support of local authorities. We found that there are no places women can turn to for help outside of the family, and yet women supporting other women is generally considered acceptable.
- c. Supporting and promoting gender-sensitive peace dialogue.** Many Yemeni activists speak positively of "dialogue tents" set up during the National Dialogue Conference (NDC). Such an initiative could be revived in partnership with local women activists and CSOs, integrating a focus on family-related issues and conflicts which are considered acceptable for women to engage in.

Risks of doing harm should be carefully considered in relation to any direct support to women as mediators or in conflict resolution. In some areas, such as where women are capitalising on tribal norms and customs, external support may undermine local legitimacy.

4. Support women's roles in civil society and local governance structures

Even operating under hardline Islamist restrictions, women have some space and agency to support victims of conflict and sustain communities. Preserving and if possible expanding this space to operate is essential. Local governance actors are also relatively open to, and would benefit from, women's greater participation in decision-making processes. Options to consider include:

- a. Provide broad-based capacity-building support to civil society,** such as establishing civil society resource centres where CSOs can access IT, training and technical advice on fundraising or implementation; facilitating peer networking between civil society leaders (technology and in-person meetings); and providing small-scale financial and in-kind support where this can be done without risking capture.
- b. Provide targeted support to women activists and CSOs.** This could include training in peacebuilding and conflict mediation, and peer networking between women activists. Such support would complement the above and could be integrated into a wider civil society support programme or be linked to a women, peace and security initiative.
- c. Promote inclusive local governance structures through small-scale support to local councils and similar structures** which incentivises the inclusion of women in leadership and decision-making processes. The Social Fund for Development (SFD) has successfully implemented a 'microfund' of this kind to some local councils – this could be a model to support in more stable areas.

5. Strengthen economic recovery and jobs

Greater economic empowerment of women is a common, positive effect of conflict, but in some cases reverses after the re-establishment of peace. Preserving the space for women's participation in economic activity will require active support. Inclusive economic

development will also address conflict drivers in Yemen.⁹ We recommend that the UK and other donors:

a. Support inclusive economic recovery and livelihoods programming, in partnership with women-led CSOs and with targeted support to women. Unemployment/loss of livelihoods is having a direct impact on GBV as well as contributing to vulnerability to extremism in more unstable areas. Inclusive (men and women, youth, not just IDPs/former combatants) livelihoods programming, incorporating direct or ring-fenced support targeted towards women to sustain positive changes to economic roles, would contribute to stability and gender empowerment in communities worst affected by conflict and deteriorating living conditions.

6. Support women as security actors

In some areas women are playing an active role in local security. Research findings suggest that some communities are supportive of women's greater engagement in local security, particularly in relation to GBV and family matters. Options for UK support include:

a. Establish and support women, peace and security fora in more stable areas. This could be a multi-agency forum bringing together women activists and civil society leaders with security agencies, humanitarian response and protection agencies, local government and community leaders to address local issues related to women, peace and security. Discussing child and youth security would be a locally appropriate entry point. This has been supported successfully by the UK in Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo and could work in Ma'rib, with potential to expand elsewhere.

b. Support to women in the police: Where present, women police officers could be trained and supported to provide more effective security on the street for women, address family issues and respond to GBV. Small-scale, piloted support where the community seems receptive and policewomen are already present (e.g. Ma'rib city) could sow the seeds for larger scale community safety work. Strategic communications work on women's roles and GBV could also incorporate positive images of policewomen.

c. As part of longer-term security and justice programming in more stable areas: establish women's sections in police stations in urban centres with a separate entrance for women, female staff, separate women's cells and bathrooms. This could be an expansion of the two activity areas above, and linked to local reform of security and justice services where possible, establishment of local Family Centres, shelter homes and support to women-led CSOs. We know that women rarely report GBV (or other crimes) due to an absence of female officers and fear of further violence from the police, and yet evidence suggests that women, particularly those most marginalised (IDPs, *muhammasheen*), would like to do so.¹⁰ This would be an important step forward in encouraging reporting and response to GBV and in strengthening women's participation in local security.

⁹ Inclusive economic development is one of five pillars within DFID's Building Stability Framework (2016), recognising that economic marginalisation is often a significant driver of conflict. This is certainly the case in Yemen, as discussed by Peter Salisbury in *National Chaos, Local Order* (2017).

¹⁰ See research on public perceptions of the security sector and police in Yemen by the Yemen Polling Center (2013: 67-8): http://www.yemenpolling.org/advocacy/upfiles/YPCPublications_Public-Perceptions-of-the-Security-Sector-and-Police-Work-in-Yemen---January-2013.pdf (10.06.2018) and from 2017 (pp. 115-8): http://www.yemenpolling.org/advocacy/upfiles/YPCPublications_YPC-Data---Perceptions-of-the-Yemeni-public-on-living-conditions-and-security-related-issues---May-2017.pdf (14.06.2018).

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

This research has validated existing knowledge of how women are affected by, involved in and responding to conflict in Yemen, whilst pointing to significant geographical variations and some important changes in each governorate. These trends and variations are summarised in the below table, which highlights our key findings, discussed in detail in Sections 2-6.

Summary of key findings: trends and geographical variations

KEY TRENDS AND FINDINGS

GBV HAS INCREASED SINCE THE CONFLICT BEGAN, IN BOTH PUBLIC AND PRIVATE. THIS IS IN LINE WITH INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE AND INCLUDES DOMESTIC (VERBAL/EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL) VIOLENCE; ABDUCTION; RAPE; SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN PUBLIC SPACES (BY ARMED MEN); EARLY MARRIAGE; AND PHYSICAL THREATS AND ATTACKS TOWARDS FEMALE ACTIVISTS.

WOMEN ARE MORE ECONOMICALLY ACTIVE THAN THEY WERE BEFORE THE WAR, AS MEN HAVE BEEN INJURED/KILLED OR LOST THEIR JOBS. THIS HAS BROUGHT A SENSE OF EMPOWERMENT FOR WOMEN BUT HAS ALSO CAUSED TENSIONS BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN, LEADING TO MORE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND DIVORCE.

GEOGRAPHICAL VARIATIONS

MA'RIB - Early marriage considered a problem "among IDPs" entering the area. Harassment in public present but not as violent or widespread (mostly verbal/emotional violence against women activists). Women considered to be unable to protect themselves in public due to their traditional "secluded" role in the community. Tribal norms and traditions perceived to protect women from violence.

TA'IZ - Numerous accounts of abduction, rape and murder, both towards women in general and activists in particular. Strong sense of fear for women going out in public to do daily chores or work. Extremist groups (Ansar al-Sharia, a Salafi group under the leadership of Abu al-Abbas, AQAP, the so called 'Islamic State') seen as main threats in public spaces.

LAHIJ - Sexual harassment, assault, abduction and rape also described as recurrent problems but less so than in Ta'iz. Women working in agriculture or out collecting firewood said to be particularly at risk, especially in rural areas.

SO WHAT: GBV should not be regarded as inevitable effect of conflict. It signifies the undermining of traditional protective norms and penetration of extremist ideologies. From international experience we know it has the potential to cause further violence, e.g. in the form of revenge, it weakens women's participation in economic activity, and peace-building and stability efforts.

MA'RIB - Women positive about new economic roles and opportunities. More women going to university than before (first university recently opened). IDP women's rights seen as undermined by new pressure on them to work and earn a living. Highest number of people mentioning increased tension between husbands and wives due to women becoming breadwinners.

TA'IZ - Sense among men that women are "taking job opportunities" from men. Highest number of negative comments, mainly from less educated men, that women should not (or cannot, due to security - Salah) work outside the home. Women are less able to go out in public due to security risks - some thought this was negative as it prevented women from working.

LAHIJ - Women positive about new economic roles and opportunities. Sense of frustration among some men that women are "taking job opportunities" from men and that a woman is becoming "too outspoken" if she goes out to work while her husband does not.

SO WHAT: Greater economic empowerment of women is a common, positive effect of conflict, but in some cases reverses after the re-establishment of peace. Preserving the space for women's participation in economic activity (and the benefits this brings to society) will require active nurturing and steps to mitigate backlash from men, whatever the optimism on the ground.

KEY TRENDS AND FINDINGS

WOMEN ARE PLAYING AN ESSENTIAL ROLE IN DELIVERING AN IMPRESSIVE LOCAL HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE AND SUSTAINING COMMUNITY SERVICES AND STRUCTURES, AND THIS IS GENERALLY CONSIDERED AN ACCEPTABLE, "NATURAL" ROLE FOR WOMEN TO PLAY IN PUBLIC LIFE ACROSS YEMEN, ALTHOUGH THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS IS NOT ALWAYS RECOGNISED NOR SUFFICIENTLY SUPPORTED AND WOMEN ACTIVISTS PERCEIVE THIS AS AN OBSTACLE.

CHANGES IN THE RELIGIOUS ENVIRONMENT HAVE HAD PARTICULAR EFFECTS ON WOMEN, IN PARTICULAR A RISE IN RADICAL RELIGIOUS RHETORIC AND GREATER INFLUENCE OF ISLAMIST ACTORS.

GEOGRAPHICAL VARIATIONS

MA'RIB - Greater focus on longer-term development work and in rebuilding basic services. Many women involved in assessing needs in the community and collaborating with local authorities to deliver services and aid. Particular discussion of supporting IDPs who have entered the area. Culture of competition between NGOs described.

TA'IZ - Focus on emergency relief and psychiatric support to people affected by trauma. Food aid a big issue discussed, particularly as a source of conflict and means for activists to gain access to communities - armed men frequently demand food aid from activists to enter an area. Community awareness of women's role in peacebuilding said to be low.

LAHIJ - Sense that people in the community are generally supportive of women's involvement in community work. Focus on women working for other women in the area. Women addressing water and health shortages, health campaigns (awareness raising about cholera etc.) and leveraging funds from local philanthropists to keep schools and health clinics open.

SO WHAT: Even operating under hardline Islamist restrictions, women have some space and agency to support victims of conflict and sustain communities; they are negotiating access with numerous armed groups, and finding creative ways to meet need. Preserving and if possible expanding this space is essential.

MA'RIB - Increase in Qur'an education sessions and lectures discussing what is and is not permissible for women. Increase in radical rhetoric opposing women working, style of dress or going out without guardian. Increasing control and influence of Islah Party and affiliated imams.

TA'IZ - Greatest increase in radical rhetoric and extremism, focusing on women's dress, freedom of movement and working alongside men. Increasing calls to separate boys and girls at school and university. Increase in physical attacks and threats to women activists by extremist groups. Attacks against and murders of moderate imams and clerics.

LAHIJ - Most positive picture of religious changes. Reports of extremist discourse decreasing. More women described as engaging in religious education.

SO WHAT: Islamist attempts to consolidate power and enforce restrictive laws on women are not universally accepted, and have been successfully resisted in some areas. Religious education and working with moderate imams on women-related projects may be a key part of successful resistance.

KEY TRENDS AND FINDINGS

WOMEN ACTIVISTS ARE COOPERATING EFFECTIVELY WITH LOCAL GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES AND LOCAL MALE LEADERS ARE RECEPTIVE TO WOMEN'S INVOLVEMENT IN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS, ALTHOUGH THEY ARE STILL GENERALLY EXCLUDED FROM FORMAL DECISION-MAKING AND POLITICAL STRUCTURES.

WOMEN ARE ENGAGED IN RESOLVING CONFLICTS AT DIFFERENT LEVELS AND PUBLICLY PROMOTING PEACE, AND ARE INVOLVED IN PROVIDING SECURITY IN A LIMITED WAY IN SOME AREAS.

GEOGRAPHICAL VARIATIONS

MA'RIB - Generally positive picture of local government continuing to operate and cooperate with women activists. Some women present in governorate government offices. Proposal by female official for government gender quota.

TA'IZ - Most political leaders supportive of women running for local council or working in local services, including those affiliated with Islah and GPC.

LAHIJ - Local authorities supportive of women in public office but focused on "women's issues" or "family issues". Women's political activism discussed, and encouraged by Islah-affiliated leaders. Particular challenges in cooperating with local authorities in al-Hawta.

SO WHAT: Women are playing a leading role in sustaining local services and meeting community needs. Local governance actors are open to, and would benefit from, their greater participation in formal decision-making processes.

MA'RIB - Strongest role for women in conflict mediation. Many positive stories of women influencing or negotiating agreements between tribal groups, sometimes over resources (e.g. water). Women capitalising on local norms through symbolic acts to call for ceasefires/peace. Women helping at local checkpoints and fighting highway robbery. Women police reported to be present in Ma'rib city.

TA'IZ - Highest number of negative comments from regular men and women that women "play no role outside the household". Activists described limited community awareness of women's contributions to peace. Political, religious and traditional leaders generally positive about women resolving conflicts and promoting peace/non-violence. Women helping to address conflicts over local roads and services.

LAHIJ - Particular discussion of women resolving conflict among women or at a domestic level. Fewer examples of women mediating disputes over resources. Women also described as promoting peace but mostly among other women. Women reported to have joined local security services (police and similar informal initiatives) in a number of areas.

SO WHAT: Existence of traditional norms regarding women's roles in resolving conflict has been useful, but may be under threat now. There may be space to do more to sustain networks between women working in this area, share ideas and experiences and encourage further action.

1. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

1.1 Research purpose and overview

The UK Conflict, Security and Stability Fund (CSSF) for Yemen¹¹ commissioned this qualitative study to understand more about women's engagement in conflict prevention, peace and stability in Yemen. The research was implemented by Social Development Direct (SDDirect)¹² in partnership with the Yemen Polling Center (YPC)¹³ and Marie-Christine Heinze and was carried out between February and May 2018, including five weeks of qualitative fieldwork across Yemen. This report was authored by Marie-Christine Heinze and Sophie Stevens, with input from Mark Segal and the research team at YPC.

The ultimate aim of the research was to **inform UK policy and programming in support of women's engagement in conflict prevention, peace and stability activities in Yemen**, based on up to date, locally-specific evidence. This aligns with the UK's National Action Plan on women, peace and security 2018-2022, which recognises that greater gender equality contributes to peace and stability; that peace processes and their outcomes are more effective and durable when women can meaningfully engage; and that people experience conflict differently according to their gender, with women facing particular risks and forms of violence. Specifically, the research therefore sought to:

- Identify and analyse **how particular factors inhibit or enable** women's engagement with activities that promote peace and stability or prevent conflict in Yemen. This included exploration of how women's experiences of violence, changes in gender norms and roles, religious discourse, local governance arrangements and local security impact on women's capacity and opportunity to engage with such activities.
- Get a **broad range of perspectives** on women's engagement in peace and stability in Yemen, with a particular emphasis on the voices of local women leaders and activists – not just high-profile individuals with an existing international platform – and a range of men, including religious, traditional and political leaders. The research also sought greater representation of rural areas compared to other recent studies.
- Understand the **entry points and risks** for supporting different types of activity, with an explicit focus on understanding the particular local context in each district.

1.2 Geographical focus

This study focused on three governorates – **Ma'rib, Ta'iz, and Lahij** – selected to give the research variety and contrast in terms of their histories, cultural practices, political context and situation within the conflict. These are also governorates which are less well-covered by existing research into women, conflict and peacebuilding in Yemen and therefore where

¹¹ The CSSF is a global UK Government fund which provides development, peacebuilding, conflict prevention, stability and security support to countries at risk of conflict or instability. This study was funded by CSSF Yemen under the joint supervision of FCO and the Department for International Development (DFID). For more information see: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/conflict-stability-and-security-fund-cssf/conflict-stability-and-security-fund-an-overview> (27.05.2018).

¹² SDDirect is a leading provider of high-quality, innovative and expert social development assistance and research services. We offer in-depth thematic expertise in conflict prevention and peacebuilding, governance voice and accountability, girls' education, women's economic empowerment, health rights and violence against women and girls. For more information see: <http://www.sddirect.org.uk/> (27.05.2018).

¹³ YPC is an independent research centre and registered NGO in Yemen. YPC works with a range of national and international partners on quantitative and qualitative research and advocacy initiatives, to influence social and economic policy in favour of political participation, human rights and development in Yemen. For more information see: <http://www.yemenpolling.org/> (27.05.2018).

we can add most value, compared for example to Aden or Sana'a,¹⁴ and are areas where the UK can realistically implement programmes in the future.

Three districts were selected from each governorate: two rural and one urban (Ma'rib city, Salah in Ta'iz city, and al-Hawta, the capital of Lahij). As with the governorates, districts were selected to provide a breadth of viewpoints so that the research was not dominated by one type of experience. The areas represented in this research therefore include districts experiencing high levels of insecurity and conflict (Sirwah in Ma'rib, Salah in Ta'iz city, al-Maqatira in Lahij); areas that have been heavily impacted by the war (Sabr al-Mawadim in Ta'iz and Tuban in Lahij); areas with a strong tribal culture (al-Juba in Ma'rib); and areas witnessing relative stability and interesting attempts to rebuild local authority (al-Shamayteen in Ta'iz and Ma'rib city). A detailed analysis of the current conflict, security and governance situation in each governorate and district is provided in **Section 2** below.

1.3 Methodology

This was a qualitative study based on 94 in-depth, semi-structured interviews and 6 focus group discussions. All interviews and discussions explored a core set of topics and questions, whilst focusing on different aspects depending on the target group. This included:

1. The **conflict and security situation** in the local area, with a particular focus on any recent changes, as well as any specific security risks and concerns for women;
2. **Violence against women and girls** in the local area, exploring how such violence has changed since the conflict began and why;
3. **Gender roles and relationships** between men and women, noting any changes as a result of the conflict, security or humanitarian situation;
4. **Changes to the religious environment** in the area, including religious discourse, actors and activities, and how this has affected gender roles and relationships;
5. **How women are active in conflict prevention, peace and stability**, including what they do, how they work with others, successes, obstacles, and how to support them;
6. **Expectations and hopes for peace and Yemen's political future**, including how peace can be achieved and who needs to be involved to achieve it.

Six target groups were selected for the research, including regular men and women from the target areas; women active in preventing conflict and working for peace and stability in their area; traditional and religious leaders with influence and understanding of their locality; and local authorities such as village councils, political parties and other forms of local government or administration. A detailed breakdown of the target groups is provided in **Diagram 1** below.

Limitations and challenges

The research team encountered some challenges during fieldwork due to the sensitive subject matter and difficult security and living conditions in certain areas. Participants were **generally reluctant to discuss changes to religious concepts, actors and activities**. Some were suspicious of why these questions were being asked, and in some cases – particularly in Ta'iz, where there has been violent conflict between extremist religious groups – only

¹⁴ See, for example, Gressmann, W. (2016), From the ground up: Gender and conflict analysis in Yemen, Care, GenCAP and Oxfam: <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/from-the-ground-up-gender-and-conflict-analysis-in-yemen-620112> (10.06.2018); Heinze, M and Baabbad, M. (2017), "Women nowadays do anything." Women's role in conflict, peace and security in Yemen, SaferWorld, CARPO and YPC: <https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/1125-awomen-nowadays-do-anytinga-womenas-role-in-conflict-peace-and-security-in-yemen> (27.05.2018); and Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) (2017), Feminism at the frontline: Addressing women's multidimensional insecurity in Yemen and Libya: <http://wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/LIBYA-YEMEN-WEB.pdf> (27.05.2018).

answering once the recording device had been disabled. One participant told the interviewer that “we are afraid to mention specific groups such as Abu al-Abbas”, a Salafi militia supported by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) while other participants were afraid to mention the Islah Party. Religious leaders were especially hesitant due to the “spread of assassinations against imams and clerics” which several participants mentioned in the area.

There was a **general reluctance to discuss security**, with some women activists only revealing the extent of threats or harassment they had faced once the interview was formally over. One woman activist in Ta’iz was afraid as she told the interviewer, after the audio recording was stopped, because she was threatened by an extremist group for working for a CSO. Another woman activist mentioned that she received a death threat because she does not wear the *yashmak* (veil covering all of the face except the eyes). These stories were common among women activists in Ta’iz city, but were also mentioned by women in the community and other participants from the area. In Ma’rib and Lahij, traditional leaders and local authorities were more noticeably uncomfortable discussing security. Several participants in Lahij were afraid to mention *al-hizam al-amni* [security belt] forces affiliated with the Southern Movement and supported by the UAE. Many participants said during interviews that it provides security in the area, but once recording stopped, said that they find it a threatening institution which has not contributed to stability.

Many of the regular men and women interviewed **wanted to discuss their difficult living conditions**, such as lack of income, food and water shortages, and **did not see the value in discussing women’s security or activism**. In some interviews this led to limited or unclear answers to questions on religion and security, with responses such as “there is no change in religious discourse”, “no change in security” or “no change in women’s roles”. In one such interview the participant became upset, shouting “We have no jobs! This is the point! Women are still there living as they used to live in the past. What will happen to them?” (unemployed man, 24, al-Shamayteen, Ta’iz). Researchers found this especially challenging in al-Maqatira, Lahij, one of the poorest areas of Yemen, where participants were very distressed about their living conditions.

It is important to note that whilst this study provides an indicative picture of issues and trends, **the research design was not intended to provide a comprehensive or representative picture of the situation** in each governorate. Instead, it has enabled in-depth exploration of sensitive and complex topics which have not been covered significantly by other studies in these target governorates, such as gender-based violence, security and the religious environment, and implications for women.

We took a **broad definition of conflict prevention, peace and stability** as a starting point, in line with UK policy and international best practice. Whilst we found that women *are* directly mediating and helping to resolve conflicts in some areas, particularly in Ma’rib, it is important not to exclude or minimise the significant contributions women are making to peace and stability in multiple other ways: addressing the effects of violence and trauma, sustaining basic services and helping to defend their communities against armed actors. The UK NAP recognises this diversity of contributions, ranging from women’s leadership in humanitarian response to their participation in police forces.¹⁵ Social norms governing what is and is not acceptable for women to do in public life can also limit women’s participation and influence in more formal or political processes, reinforcing the need to think beyond direct forms of conflict resolution¹⁶.

¹⁵ UK National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security 2018 – 2022, January 2018: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/677586/FCO1215-NAP-Women-Peace-Security-ONLINE_V2.pdf (10.06.2018).

¹⁶ See Section 3.2 for a more detailed discussion of gendered social norms surrounding women engagement in public life in Yemeni society.

Conflict prevention, peacebuilding and stabilisation are overlapping concepts which encompass activities at different levels to address the drivers, effects and structural causes of violent conflict, strengthen local capacities to manage conflict peacefully, and build security and legitimate political authority. This can include initiatives to de-escalate immediate tensions, for example negotiation with warring parties; addressing the effects of conflict which can themselves become drivers, such as psychological trauma, loss of livelihoods and basic necessities; as well as longer-term efforts to address root causes of conflict, such as exclusion of particular groups from political power, development processes or economic resources.

It can also be about strengthening conflict resilience: a highly relevant issue in what is now a protracted conflict in Yemen. This could involve efforts to strengthen relationships, trust and social cohesion within and across family and community networks, or to adapt to changing circumstances through new forms of governance and service delivery in the absence of a functioning state (OECD 2016; Menkhaus 2013; Galtung 1967; UK Building Stability Overseas Strategy, 2013).

In light of this understanding, we considered the following activities as part of women's contribution to conflict prevention, peace and stability: 1) humanitarian response, including aid, psychosocial care or other support to people affected by conflict and crisis; 2) local service delivery; 3) activism for peace or against violence, extremism and conflict, including within family networks (e.g. calling on male relatives not to join extremist groups); 4) local security, such as policing, intelligence gathering or manning checkpoints; 5) participation in conflict mediation, dialogue or negotiation; 6) engagement with local governance and decision-making structures, including religious and traditional leaders, local government and political leaders; and 7) leadership in civil society.

Diagram 1: Research Target Groups



2. KEY FINDINGS: CONFLICT, SECURITY AND GOVERNANCE

This section will present key findings on the current conflict, security and governance situation in each target governorate and district. Whilst this research focused on women's engagement in conflict prevention, peace and stability, participants also spoke in some detail about the governance, conflict and security dynamics in each place. Understanding this wider context will be important when considering women's activities and experiences in later sections.

2.1 Ma'rib

2.1.1 Status of the conflict and governance

The conflict's frontline runs through Ma'rib and has been continuously pushed West by the anti-Houthi forces over the course of the past year. Currently, the district of Sirwah is the only area in the governorate left that continues to experience ongoing fighting.

The local government of Ma'rib under the leadership of Shaykh Sultan al-'Arada – affiliated with the internationally recognised government (IRG) (as well as – to a large extent – the Islah Party) has successfully turned **Ma'rib city** into a new 'boom town' in Yemen, using money resulting from the sale of natural resources available in the governorate for this purpose, amongst others. Working with formal and informal security providers as well as local authorities, the government is praised by many in the city as a provider of both security and services. The IRG is also considered to be in control of **al-Juba**, a district with strong tribal structures. Government-affiliated troops provide security to the area alongside tribal *shaykhs*, who are seen by many participants as the ones more responsible for resolving local conflicts. Services are provided to a limited extent through the local government and local councils as well as through village councils (no strong presence so far) and (I)NGOs. Control of **Sirwah** is divided between the Houthis and tribal groups affiliated with the IRG. Tribal groups are considered responsible for providing security in the area, while formal authorities are only seen as having a limited presence, particularly through the local authority which, next to INGOs and village councils, seems to have a role in service provision.

2.1.2 Current security situation

Accordingly, most participants in **Ma'rib city** observed that the security situation had significantly improved over the course of the last year. They attributed this largely to a strengthening of the formal security sector, particularly the police (and functional police stations), as well as the instalment of security cameras. One participant, however, said that he felt worried by intimidating behaviour of security authorities and increasing detentions.

In **al-Juba**, too, the security situation was largely considered as good and stable, which was mainly attributed to the strong tribal structures in the area. Some participants also credited this to the deployment of new security forces ("military unit") to the area. An issue of concern over the course of the past year seems to have been highway robberies (particularly on the road to Sana'a), but the situation was seen to have improved more recently. Other issues mentioned were tribal disputes and disagreements over humanitarian assistance allocations.

In **Sirwah**, the area most affected by the ongoing conflict, the security situation was generally considered to be bad. Tribal *shaykhs* and local community leaders were seen as the main actors responsible for maintaining local security. As most participants from Sirwah were interviewed in IDP camps, their observations focused more on the security situation in the camp and its vicinity rather than on the situation in Sirwah itself.

2.2 Ta'iz

2.2.1 Status of the conflict and governance

Ta'iz governorate has been one of the hardest hit in the ongoing conflict and its capital, Ta'iz city, has certainly been the urban area worst affected by the conflict to date. Since the Houthi/Salih forces entered the governorate in March 2015, resistance groups of various affiliations have taken up the fight. Particularly in Ta'iz city, these various anti-Houthi militias (affiliated with Islah, the Salafiyya, AQAP, and - to a smaller degree - the local Nasserite Party) have also clashed with one another, particularly due to the rivalry between Hadi- and UAE-backed forces, rendering the conflict in the city the most fractured in the country.

Salah was initially under Houthi control, but is now controlled by rivaling resistance factions affiliated with the Islah Party (Hadi-backed) on the one side and UAE-backed Salafi factions (Abu al-Abbas) on the other. One participant also reported an AQAP presence in the area. **Sabr al-Mawadim** was also initially controlled by the Houthis, but factions affiliated with the resistance have now been in control for more than a year. **Al-Shamayteen** has never been under Houthi control, but under resistance groups since the beginning of the war. In all three districts, the resistance factions work with local actors (*'aqils*, *shaykhs*, the police) in providing security, but no formal government institutions are providing services. While in Salah and Sabr al-Mawadim the provision of services is mainly handled through (I)NGOs, in al-Shamayteen local self-organisation (mainly through village councils) has resulted in an improvement of service provision and local conflict mediation.

2.2.2 Current security situation

Overall, participants in Ta'iz continue to perceive the security situation as bad or getting worse. The deployment of policemen in some areas (as well as of policewomen in Salah) was, however, mentioned as contributing to an improvement of the local security situation.

Salah - as part of the heavily contested city of Ta'iz - continues to experience conflict until today. Participants in Salah reported experiencing Houthi shelling of the area, recurring gunfire between Islahi and Salafi groups, snipers attacking individuals and forcing residents to leave the lights out at night, an increase in murder and assassinations, theft and harassments and a general situation of lawlessness. Most participants said that the security situation had gotten worse over the course of the past year, but a few said it was better than before.

Sabr al-Mawadim has experienced conflict until very recently. The situation thus continues to be highly fragile with violent clashes flaring up intermittently and people being afraid that the conflict might resume at any time. Participants largely reported observing an improvement in the security situation, although some mentioned occasional Houthi shelling of the area as still ongoing. Moreover, participants mentioned the ongoing availability of arms and resultant gunfire exchanges as a continued security concern as well as a higher incidence of thefts.

Al-Shamayteen, in contrast, has seen hardly any fighting as part of the overall conflict at all (except for a limited number of days in 2015). Nonetheless, a large number of participants reported perceiving the security situation as very bad, attributing this - amongst others - to the widespread availability of small arms (and stray bullets from weddings), assassination attempts on government officials, a growth of armed gangs, an increase in theft and a general situation of lawlessness. A particular concern in the area mentioned by a significant number of participants seems to be a sharp increase in land disputes as a result of IDPs returning to the area and reclaiming their property. Local *shaykhs* and imams mentioned mediating more of such disputes recently.

2.3 Lahij

2.3.1 Status of the conflict and governance

This governorate situated in the political South has theoretically been under the control of the IRC since summer 2015. In reality, the governorate is controlled by local militias and military units supported by the UAE or the IRC. It also has an active frontline in al-Maqatira, which is considered one of the most intense battlefields in Yemen. Accordingly, participants from the three districts targeted here set the beginning and end date of the conflict at very different points in time. The governorate's capital al-Hawta and the surrounding district Tuban are both in the direct neighbourhood of Aden and were "liberated" from the Houthi/Salih militias in 2015. Tuban experienced extremely heavy fighting back then. Most participants in both districts thus set the start and end point of the conflict in 2015. In al-Maqatira, in contrast, the war was perceived to have started in 2016 and to be ongoing. Parts of the governorate, including al-Hawta, also had an AQAP presence for a while, but participants reported this to have ended.

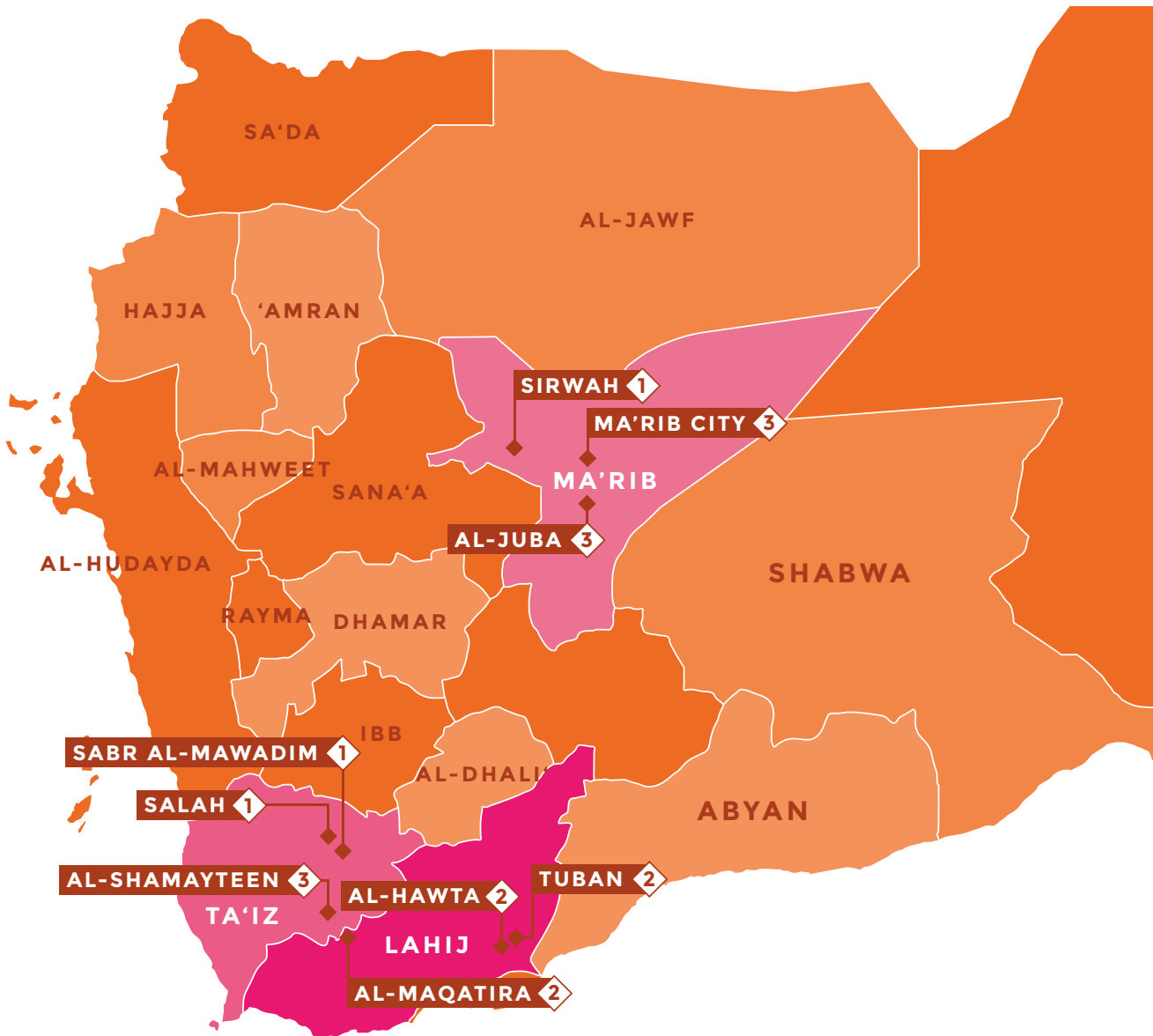
Regarding governance, participants in both **al-Hawta** and **Tuban** reported the city being under the control of two different authorities: the IRC on the one side and the Southern Movement or the Southern Transitional Council (STC) and UAE-affiliated Security Belt forces on the other. The local council was perceived to be no longer functional by some and biased with the Southern Movement by others. One participant also mentioned the Islah Party (affiliated with the IRC) as in control of public institutions. The governor/the state, the UAE and (I)NGOs as well as local (village-based) committees (in Tuban) were said to provide services. In **al-Maqatira**, resistance groups (both Islah and Salafi groups were mentioned) have been in control of large parts of the district since the Houthis retreated to the mountains. According to the participants, local authorities or government institutions were not involved in providing services, but (I)NGOs provided food and medical aid.

2.3.2 Current security situation

Most participants in **al-Hawta** and **Tuban** said that the security situation had improved over the course of the last year and crimes like assassinations, random shooting, (highway) banditry, illegal land grabbing and encroachments on private property were reported to have decreased. In al-Hawta, one participant mentioned ongoing concern among families in the area that their children might join armed groups; another in the same district pointed to an "increasing fanaticism and security crackdown" on citizens with Northern ID cards. In Tuban, one participant expressed concern about the role of the Security Belt, as it raids people's homes and arrests innocent and vulnerable people and "has them forcibly disappeared". Such detentions and home raids "without justification" by the security bodies was also mentioned by another participant. In both districts, participants said that security was generally provided by the UAE-affiliated Security Belt and the police, but that local conflicts were arbitrated through community leaders such as *'aqils* and *shaykhs*. In Tuban, participants also mentioned local community councils affiliated with the Southern Movement to be playing the roles of *shaykhs* and *'aqils*.

In **al-Maqatira**, most participants said they felt safer since the Houthis had retreated to the mountains and fighting was no longer taking place so close to their villages. Nonetheless, some participants reported (fear of) continued shelling and sniping by the Houthis and concern that their villages might be invaded once again. Two participants also mentioned armed gangs as posing a risk on the roads and one participant was concerned about the easy availability of small arms to anyone interested. There were different perceptions among the participants whether the resistance groups present in the area actually provided security or whether the resolution of conflicts (beyond keeping the Houthis out) was not mainly provided by *shaykhs*, *'aqils* and other local personalities.

MAP: CONFLICT, SECURITY AND GOVERNANCE IN YEMEN



KEY: CURRENT SECURITY SITUATION

- ① **LEVEL 1: SEVERE/UNSTABLE** Salah and Sabr al-Mawadim in Ta'iz, Sirwah in Ma'rib
- ② **LEVEL 2: MODERATE/MIXED** al-Maqatira, al-Hawta and Tuban in Lahij
- ③ **LEVEL 3: STABLE/IMPROVING** Ma'rib City and al-Juba in Ma'rib, al-Shamayteen in Ta'iz

3. KEY FINDINGS: IMPACT OF THE CONFLICT ON WOMEN

3.1 Security risks and gender-based violence

When asked about specific **sources of insecurity for women** and to what extent security concerns for women in the area differ from security concerns for men, most participants (male and female) in all three governorates applied a wider concept of human security to their answers, pointing particularly to poor living conditions and the resultant concerns women had for their families. Next to these everyday concerns that occupied almost everyone, the safety of husbands and the future of their children were also mentioned as specific security concerns, also seen as causing anxiety and psychosocial stress for women. Regarding the more specific issue of physical integrity and security, many participants said that the security concerns of women were not any different from those of the men, particularly what the war was concerned. More specific issues were related to the concrete context in the governorate and are addressed in the respective paragraphs below.

Issues relating to women specifically that were mentioned in all three governorates were **different types of GBV**, ranging from verbal/emotional and physical violence to abduction and rape, as well as early marriage. One issue mentioned by participants in all three governorates was an increase in domestic violence (both verbal/emotional and physical; practiced by husbands against wives and fathers against daughters). Many participants (male and female) justified this behaviour with reference to poor living conditions and economic hardship, as the pressure on the man to provide for the household and his inability to do so were seen to result in frustration and aggression towards the women of the house “for demanding things he couldn’t provide” (*shaykh*, 40, al-Maqatira, Lahij) as well as with the stress and trauma resulting from warfare: “A husband usually unleashes his wrath on his wife” (female activist, 26, Salah, Ta’iz). In Ta’iz, this rise in domestic violence was also reported to have resulted in an increase in divorce rates.

A further issue mentioned by participants in all governorates was early marriage,¹⁷ “to the extent that some complaints have been filed in court” (female activist, 28, Sirwah, Ma’rib). Here, similar to domestic violence, many participants in all target areas justified this with the current economic hardships in the country, forcing families to marry off their daughters at an early age. In Ma’rib, many were quick to point out that this was mainly an issue among IDPs and not necessarily in their own communities, whereas in Ta’iz participants also mentioned increasing school dropout rates among girls due to war as a reason: “Instead of going to school, a girl has become a bride even at a younger age,” a female activist, 29, in al-Shamayteen observed. In Lahij, too, several people mentioned the lack of (quality) education available to girls in recent times, resulting in early marriage. One female activist, 25, from Tuban, however, whose brother had married a twelve year-old girl, emphasized that early marriage was not only confined to poor homes, but that affluent and educated families also married their sons and daughters at a younger age: “People prefer this,” she said, possibly pointing to the pervasiveness of early marriage that had already existed before the war.

¹⁷ According to UNICEF data from 2013, 32% of Yemeni girls married before the age of 18 and 9% married before the age of 15 (UNICEF, 2016). These numbers are expected to have risen particularly since the onset of the ongoing war.

In **Ma'rib**, security risks mentioned by participants that were considered specific to women and not directly related to GBV were often related to women's traditional roles in the community. Women were considered to be less exposed to community life, making them more anxious and less resilient in return. Their psychological wellbeing was thus considered to be more easily threatened. Women were also believed to be unable to protect themselves the same way men were able to, exposing them more easily to threats outside the house and limiting the role they can play in the public space. The loss of the male breadwinner of the household was also mentioned as a security concern for women. In Sirwah and al-Juba, specifically, participants mentioned strong tribal values as a source of protection for women. Regarding GBV, participants, particularly those active in their communities, mentioned verbal violence against women in the public space particularly by "extremist men" and others unhappy with women's activism. Some participants also pointed to a general marginalisation and lack of encouragement from the community for women to play a role in public life. In general, however, tribal norms and traditions were perceived by many to be protecting women from sources of insecurity.

Public and private violence against women

"Violence against women has increased as people think that women are less than men in the community. For example, if a woman has a dress in the street that people don't like, she faces harassments and people shouting at her (why do you wear such a dress!) sometimes they carry a stick to hit her – I have been harassed by those people and I think they belong to al-Qa'ida. In the house violence against women has also increased because of the bad economic conditions and war making men more aggressive in dealing with women, beating and humiliating them. Such behaviour is because of their bad mood due to the war as they suffer from stress, unpaid salaries and poverty. Many cases of divorce have happened due to these reasons.

Early marriage has also increased; in our neighbourhood as well as in the whole area people are more likely to marry girls under 15. I think that youth prefer to marry small girls because they believe such girls have no past in their life (love stories) while the older girls have experiences of love in their past, which is not true at all". (Female humanitarian activist, 36, Salah, Ta'iz)

In **Ta'iz**, security risks mentioned that were considered specific to women and not directly related to GBV were handbag and jewellery thefts outside on the street (at times committed by motorcyclists), which resulted in a greater fear of women going out alone and restricting their movements. Regarding GBV, the number of participants mentioning physical and verbal harassment in public, domestic violence, early marriage, abductions and rape was much higher than in Ma'rib. In the public space, women in all three districts reported being subject to harassment, threats and hassling over their style of dressing, particularly by (gangs of) young men, members of resistance forces and extremist groups on both sides of the sectarian spectrum. One female participant who works as a street cleaner in Ta'iz city, for example, complained that some armed men took photos of her with their mobile phones and used indecent language. Even more concerning are the numerous accounts of abductions, rape and incidents of murder of women and girls in Ta'iz as well as the lack of follow-up against the perpetrators. In Sabr al-Mawadim, for example, participants mentioned that a twelve year-old girl had been kidnapped and raped. The criminal was arrested for a few days and subsequently released because he was a fighter in the resistance forces. In another instance, a child was raped by members of the resistance forces. The victim's father was subsequently threatened to be thrown out of his house if he told anyone about this crime. Women activists also reported facing murder threats from armed groups with influence on the community.

In **Lahij**, security risks mentioned by participants considered specific to women and not directly related to GBV concerned two issues: Firstly, as in Ma'rib, a number of participants mentioned the higher psychosocial impact the war had on women in comparison to men as a result of the women worrying about their husbands, fathers, brothers and children. Secondly, some felt concerned by security operations and threats from ongoing warfare: Some women mentioned "raids on homes" conducted by the security forces in search of al-Qa'ida elements as well as the "unjustified" searching of women at checkpoints; and in al-Maqatira, a *shaykh* shared his concern about Houthi snipers targeting girls going to school. Regarding GBV, several participants mentioned sexual harassment, assault on women, abductions and rape as recurrent cases of GBV in their areas. In Tuban, this seemed to particularly occur to women working in agriculture or collecting firewood as these chores left them unprotected in the public space for long hours.

3.2 Gender roles and relationships

Women's roles in their communities in the three governorates varied significantly before the war began. In general, women's roles at home and in public life are governed by two competing perspectives: "firstly, a conservative and widespread perspective that accrues to women the role of 'interior minister' in the family and to men the role of 'exterior minister' and thus emphasises the latter's 'natural role' in public life. The second is an 'egalitarian ethic' (Adra 2016: 316), particularly among Yemeni tribes, a traditional role of women in the local economy in rural areas, and 'Yemeni notions of honour and men's respect for and attachment to their mothers and sisters' (ibid.). This results in an openness of men and women towards female leaders and a pragmatic acceptance of the importance of women for society" (Heinze 2016: 5).

In **Ma'rib** with its strong tribal structures, for example, this egalitarian ethic has resulted in the fact that women in Ma'rib have been known to drive cars, carry guns (when on their way to the fields) and mediate in tribal conflicts. In **Ta'iz** with its strong civic structures and good education system (in comparison to other Yemeni governorates), women in the urban areas have participated in public life for a long time. Also, women in Ta'iz are said to have a strong role in agriculture and to sell their goods on the markets in colourful clothes and with their faces uncovered. **Lahij**, as the southern governorate most closely situated to Aden (as the

former capital of South Yemen before unity), has experienced socialist feminism in the past. Nonetheless, in all three governorates – as in the rest of Yemen – a professed social ideal of woman's role in the house, and a need to protect women as they are 'weak', governs the discourse on gender norms.

There was widespread consensus among participants in all three governorates that the war had brought about a change in women's roles resulting mainly from the absence (or injury) of men, which had **forced women to take on roles as breadwinners**. Moreover, women were said to have become more involved in community and humanitarian work, assisting with the registration of IDPs, distributing humanitarian aid, raising awareness or supporting their communities. The war was also seen as having created jobs for women in the humanitarian sector. While many female participants perceived these changes as positive and empowering (particularly in Ma'rib¹⁸ and Lahij¹⁹, where not many women had held such roles before), a number of women also mentioned that these positive changes remained limited to certain groups within the community, whereas others pointed to the heavy burdens now resting on women's shoulders, which also contributed to increasing their psychological stress.

Other participants pointed out, however, that these **new chores and duties** had actually undermined the rights of women as they were busy with providing the most basic needs for their families rather than participating in public life or continuing their education or the jobs they had previously held. This topic particularly concerned IDPs, as some female participants in Ma'rib pointed out. In Ta'iz, moreover, where more women had been used to being active in public life, many women observed that the role of women outside the house had decreased in comparison to before the war. Women had lost their jobs, were no longer able to go to the market by themselves or participate in other ways in public life. The reasons for this were seen to lie in the bad security situation, risks posed by extremist groups, and (or including) harassment women now face in public spaces. A fear of harassment limiting women's freedom of movement was also expressed by a participant in al-Juba (Ta'iz). Female participants expressed hope that these negative changes would not last beyond the end of the war, when the security situation has once again improved.

Regarding the **positive changes to women's roles** as breadwinners and humanitarian agents, many participants (both men and women) expected these changes to last. Quite a number qualified this assertion with certain conditions, however, saying that these changes would only last if women received further support and encouragement from their families and communities, who needed to be made aware of the importance of women's contributions; if more awareness among women was created (a male participant); if men were made more cooperative and more aware of the important role of women (one female participant each in Ma'rib, Ta'iz and Lahij); if women were involved more broadly in community service and decision-making; if the state established more control on the ground, provided services, paid salaries and strengthened security; if the government, local authorities and NGOs provided material and moral support to women and allowed them to engage with men in community development; or if they were given the opportunity to learn, innovate and contribute to community development. Only one participant from all governorates (literate housewife, 34, al-Maqatira, Lahij) believed that the positive changes for women would disappear with the end of the war when men came back to their jobs.²⁰

¹⁸ One female participant (social worker, 35) in Ma'rib city also mentioned that women had become more empowered due to the fact that men were now unable to travel outside the governorate unless they were accompanied by his wife or a female relative. This made women feel stronger than men. Also in Ma'rib, another female participant (unemployed, 24, al-Juba) mentioned that parents now allowed their daughters to go to university and complete their higher education. This is probably also a result of the fact that Ma'rib has recently opened the first university in the governorate.

¹⁹ There were conflicting views on women's role in political life in Lahij, however. Of two female activists in al-Hawta interviewed for this research, one observed that the political role of women had decreased, whereas the other observed that women had become more engaged in political activism.

²⁰ One male participant (unemployed, 40) in Tuban (Lahij) said that he expected these positive changes to last, but that women should not be made equal to men, nor should men have their rights undermined or lose their jobs for the advantage of women.

These changes in the roles of women as a result of the war were perceived by most people to have **negatively impacted on the relationship between men and women**. This perspective was particularly strong in Ma'rib (but was also mentioned in Ta'iz and Lahij), where almost all participants from the target districts said that the relationship between husbands and their wives had become tense, either because men were unable to provide according to their traditional roles as breadwinners; because women had become confined at home due to the security situation and thus more dependent on men; or because women had taken over the role as breadwinners and men were unable to deal with this change in relationship. Some participants also observed that men believed women were taking all available job opportunities, leaving the men unemployed (this was particularly mentioned in Ta'iz and Lahij). Two men also observed negative changes in women's behaviour after becoming breadwinners, one saying that "a woman becomes arrogant when she has a job while her husband doesn't" (male student, 35, al-Hawta, Lahij) while the other observed that women who worked changed their characters and became more outspoken than their husbands (unemployed male, 40, Tuban, Lahij).

As discussed in the previous section, these changes – in Ta'iz as well as in Ma'rib and Lahij – were said to be resulting in an increase in domestic violence as well as in the number of divorces.²¹ A limited number of men and women in both Ma'rib and Lahij, however, observed that men had become more supportive of women assuming new roles.

3.3 Signs of broader change? Changes in religious norms

Changes in the roles of women observed above coincide with changing religious norms and behaviour in the target governorates that could stop these positive changes from lasting in the long-term. In all three target governorates, participants observed changes in religious concepts, actors and activities in their area that seemed to be connected to the religious dimension of the war (the Houthis with their specific understanding of Shi'i Islam vs. their conservative or fundamentalist Sunni counterparts, the Muslim Brothers, the Salafis, AQAP and the so called 'Islamic State') as well as the large number of fighters and militias with strong religious affiliations on both sides.

In **Ma'rib**, two general observations were made by research participants: firstly, that there had been a general increase in Qur'an education sessions and religious lectures as well as an increase in people's interest in religious issues; and secondly, that religious discourse had started to focus on the war, politics, and security-related issues at the expense of topics concerning "religious faith and righteousness", and that new actors had brought a new "extremist discourse" with them. In general, the increasing control of the Islah Party – in which many members of the Yemeni Muslim Brotherhood are assembled, amongst others – over the governorate and the ongoing war in its West seem to have resulted in an increase of Islah-affiliated imams and religious speakers in the area. Numerous people noted that many clerics had shifted their attention to speaking to their audience about the difference between Sunni and Shi'i Islam,²² explaining the (Sunni, or rather: Muslim Brotherhood) concepts people should adhere to or "calling for jihad against the apostates" (i.e. the Houthis).

²¹ One participant (*shaykh*, 37) in Sirwah (Ma'rib) mentioned that at times, political disagreements also led to family disintegration and divorce. As examples he mentioned a woman who had separated from her husband because of his support for the Houthis as well as another woman who was assaulted by her pro-Houthi nephew for her critical writings on the Houthi movement.

²² It should be noted that in general the two dominant religious affiliations in Yemen, the Shi'i Zaydiyya and the Sunni Shafi'iyya, have lived peacefully together, praying in the same mosques and intermarrying. Indeed, there are many Yemenis who have only recently (through these new sectarian divisions) learned which strand of Islam their family has traditionally been affiliated with. "In the pre-war period," a woman in al-Juba (Ma'rib) noted, "we did not hear of Zaydis, Shafi'is etc."

“The religious environment was starting to change during the recent time of war as several religious parties emerged – Islah Party that was there before war as well as other religious groups and some individuals, who belong to groups in the city such as ‘the organisation’ [APAQ]. These groups never call for love and tolerance; rather they are only pretending to be religious while they have political purposes. They are extremists who always say this is prohibited, ‘haram’, and this is permissible, ‘halal’, and calling for jihad and claiming that the whole community is in need to do jihad. However, we all stood against them along with all wise people in the area and we were able to bridge the gap they were trying to create.” (Sufi cleric, 52, Sabr al-Mawadim, Ta’iz)

In **Ta’iz**, too, many participants observed that religious sessions and lectures had increased and that religious discourse was very much shaped by the ongoing war. Reflecting the diversity of actors fighting for control of the governorate and particularly Ta’iz city, mosques were now seen to be divided between (religiously-affiliated) political groups such as the Islah Party, the Salafiyya, AQAP and the so called ‘Islamic State’. More participants than in Ma’rib pointed to the increase in radicalism by the various religious actors as well as to the fact that many of them were trying to recruit young men for battle by calling for jihad. A Sufi cleric in Sabr al-Mawadim, however, reported that moderate religious leaders like himself had successfully contributed to preventing extremist thought from influencing people’s behaviour.

In **Lahij**, responses tended to be more divided in regard to changing religious discourse. While some expressed the feeling that religious discourse had become more moderate recently, others had the impression that it had become more fundamentalist. Salafi groups and AQAP were considered to be exploiting the poverty of people and the absence of formal authorities to promote their religious discourse and moderate voices were observed to have been excluded. An influential Salafi cleric in al-Hawta also observed that people no longer trusted imams and were no longer as easily influenced by religious discourse as in the past, since the politicisation of religion (particularly since the emergence of terrorism) had resulted in a broader distrust towards clerics. A recurrent topic was also the ongoing assassinations of imams in Aden (many of them affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood).

Regarding the impact of these changes in religious discourse on people’s behaviour and particularly on women, most participants perceived these changes to be negative, although there were more positive trends observed in Lahij. In general, it was observed that people were now being viewed and judged according to their political affiliations, which very often coincided with various religious affiliations (Houthi, Islahi, Salafi...). One female activist (social worker, 35) from Ma’rib city felt that: “[Y]ou feel that a new form of religion has recently appeared through the behaviour of some parties, even at the neighbourhood level. Such newly emerging religious behaviour in the performance of rituals has fuelled intercommunity disagreements”.

Regarding women, some participants in **Ma’rib** reported observing more sermons and lectures about what is permissible and what is prohibited from a religious perspective (i.e. focusing more on the rules governing ‘being Muslim’ rather than more complex matters of faith and morality) and that much of this also centred around what was prohibited and permissible for women. The more “radical rhetoric”, as several participants called it, focused

on opposing women going out to work, their style of dress or going out without a *mahram* [male guardian]. One female community activist (30) in Ma'rib city recounted: "Once I was invited to a radio programme during which I criticised the radical religious rhetoric. When I finished with the programme, one of those men, who knew me, called me on the phone saying: 'Don't create enemies for yourself.'" While some in Ma'rib city blamed this particularly on new people (IDPs) in the area, who had brought their fundamentalist ideas with them, a community activist (39) in al-Juba noted that she had observed positive changes in her area and attributed this to IDPs from other governorates where communities were more open. A fellow community activist (35) from the same area (but working with a different organisation) also noted that Islahi (i.e. Muslim Brotherhood) rhetoric in her area had changed positively: "Instead of instructing women about prudency, it is promoting women's involvement in public service, saying that 'woman is the sister of man and she has to take part in public life.'"

In **Ta'iz**, the general increase in fundamentalist rhetoric also resulted in a much less diverse picture of the consequences of religious changes for women than in Ma'rib. Women spoke about the "radical discourse" focused on how they dress ("those religious extremists don't hesitate to slam any woman for wearing varied clothes"), their freedom of movement (including going out to work) and women working alongside men or appearing with men in public places. A woman (employee, 39) in Salah also spoke about hearing increasing calls for separating boys and girls at school and university and blamed this on the growing influence of Islam as well as radical groups such as Ansar al-Shari'a and the so called 'Islamic State'. After the tape recorder was turned off, a woman in Salah spoke about seeing "someone kicking a woman in the street in front of everyone only because she was wearing a *balto* he doesn't like".²³ The same person also mentioned having received death threats if she continued walking in the street wearing no veil.

Responses in **Lahij** as to whether religious changes had an impact on women's lives were extremely scarce and hardly allow for making generalisations. Those few who did respond mostly mentioned that communities were resisting the fundamentalist rhetoric of "extremist groups" when it came to restricting women's roles. Female participants in Tuban pointed out that women had recently become more involved in religious education, enrolling in respective centres and passing on the teachings to family members. "Religious discourse has gotten better and the tone of extremism has decreased," one of these women (housewife, 23) observed. "Women have been positively impacted by the current religious discourse."

²³ A *balto* is a long black garment worn by women above the clothes when leaving the house.

4. KEY FINDINGS: WOMEN'S ENGAGEMENT IN PEACE, STABILITY AND CONFLICT PREVENTION

This section presents findings on how women are engaging in different forms of conflict prevention, peace and stability initiatives in the target governorates, highlighting regional similarities and differences and entry points for future support. As in other similar studies (see fn. 14), this research found that Yemeni women are actively working to resolve conflicts, meet people's basic needs, sustain services, promote peace and security and support those most affected by the trauma and destruction of war, often at significant risk to themselves. Findings are discussed below according to five key areas of activity: 1) women's leadership in civil society; 2) humanitarian response and service delivery; 3) conflict mediation and resolution; 4) participation in conflict and security; and 5) local governance.



WOMEN-LED CIVIL SOCIETY

Women-led CSOs were found to be present and active in each location, even where conflict is ongoing and the security situation remains severe.



HUMANITARIAN ACTION AND SERVICE DELIVERY

We found a clear picture across governorates of women playing a major and impressive role in sustaining local services and responding to humanitarian needs.



CONFLICT MEDIATION AND RESOLUTION

Women were described as participating in mediating and resolving family, community and inter-tribal conflicts in all three governorates, especially in Ma'rib.



PARTICIPATION IN THE CONFLICT AND SECURITY

In some areas women are playing an active role in security, as policewomen, security guards or by engaging in intelligence gathering whereas in other areas this was not mentioned at all. Women in all areas described supporting fighters with food and money.



LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Women activists are cooperating to a greater or lesser extent with local authorities in their area to do their work, and some women are present in governance structures, although these are very few.



4.1 Women-led civil society

Women-led CSOs were found to be present and active in each location, even where conflict is ongoing and the security situation remains severe. Whilst there was some interesting geographical variation in the profiles of these organisations, discussed further below, almost all of them were described as fitting into one of two categories. Either: 1) women-focused CSOs providing help to other women in the area, for example giving out food, money and clothing, psychiatric support or livelihoods and skills training to other women, some with a particular focus on girls or youth; or 2) general relief and development charities, providing or coordinating humanitarian support and basic services in the area. Only one out of the 19 CSOs mentioned had an explicitly stated focus on peace and security, the ‘Mothers of Abductees League’ in Ma’rib City. Several political groups were also mentioned, including the Southern Women’s Association and the women’s sector of the Islah Party.

Echoing this, women leaders and activists **generally understood their contributions to peace and stability in a holistic way**. When asked how they are working towards stability, peace or preventing conflict and insecurity in their area, all women activists replied by describing a wide range of activities, often in the same sentence, from mediating between warring parties, monitoring crime and policing, humanitarian relief for IDPs, keeping children in school, training people in vocational skills, publicly speaking out against violence, and more.²⁴ Most described themselves broadly as “community activists”, identifying and responding to local needs and issues as they saw them, without labelling themselves as a “rights activist”, “humanitarian”, “mediator”, and so on. Participants from other groups also expressed this, describing women’s humanitarian or charitable work and peace activism in tandem, with comments such as “women have a role in promoting peace among women, and providing help to vulnerable people” (unemployed man, 40, Tuban, Lahij).

Much of women’s civil society leadership was therefore found to involve working for and with women-led organisations and supporting other women, but was not described as “women’s rights” work or “women’s activism”.²⁵ This is important for understanding how to frame future support to women’s rights and involvement in peacebuilding in Yemen. Of the women leaders interviewed, around half were formally associated with local CSOs, a third were not associated with any particular organisation but worked as individual activists cooperating with local and international NGOs, and a small number (four) were working with INGOs.

In **Ma’rib**, women-led CSOs appeared to be well-organised and operating in a more formal way than in other governorates. This is likely linked to the more stable governance context and continuing presence of local government institutions and bureaucracy, as well as to a greater focus by CSOs on longer-term development activities compared to in other areas (see more below under 4.2). Several women leaders even referred to a culture of competition between NGOs in the governorate, with one activist commenting that “there are NGOs which steal project ideas and implement the projects by themselves” (focus group with women leaders, Ma’rib), or expressed frustration with what they perceived as preferential treatment by local authorities to some NGOs over others.

In **Ta’iz**, researchers found the fewest examples of women’s civil society leadership, with only three local women-led initiatives described across the three districts. This is unsurprising given the security situation and presence of violent extremist groups, some of whom are directly threatening women civil society leaders in the area. This is sadly an indicator of how

²⁴ This echoes research by Wameedh Shakir on Yemeni women and peacebuilding. She notes that “it was difficult to identify organisations, projects or women’s groups that call themselves peacebuilders. These organisations, projects and groups perform conflict resolution and/or peacebuilding work within a wide spectrum of other sectors such as women’s empowerment, development, human rights, democracy and governance” (Shakir, 2015: 6).

²⁵ This reflects findings by Oxfam and International Alert (2017) from across the MENA region that women rarely self-identify as “women’s rights activists” but in practice, this is what they are doing.

rapidly the area has changed in recent years since historically Ta'iz had some of the highest levels of education and a strong civic culture among both men and women. One activist working with an international CSO addressed this directly, suggesting that "it is difficult to engage women in any activities. It also difficult to run women-targeted activities due to extremist religious discourse" (humanitarian and peace activist, 35, al-Shamayteen).

In **Lahij**, women seemed to have slightly more space to engage in and lead civil society work than in Ta'iz. Local women activists described how women "take part in public life as civil and rights activists" and in "CSO and community leadership". This echoes discussion of women's political activism in Lahij, discussed below. Other women in Lahij talked about women's contributions to local stability "through women's organisations concerned with women's development or assistance in the community" (housewife, 28, Tuban) or mentioned "female activists who help other women in the community" (housewife, 23, Tuban). Some women in Lahij also said women work as volunteers or employees with local and INGOs.



4.2 Humanitarian action and local service delivery

We found a clear picture across governorates of **women playing a major role in sustaining local services and responding to humanitarian needs**. In fact, this was the most prevalent form of women's engagement in peace and stability described in the research, and was considered acceptable by men and women from different backgrounds, including traditional and religious leaders and individuals associated with conservative religious and political groups.²⁶

Participants across locations interpreted security in a broad sense and viewed humanitarian and service delivery work as contributions to security. Many made comments such as "women take part in providing security at the local community level through the provision of humanitarian assistance to those in need" (unemployed man, 24, al-Juba, Ma'rib) or saw "mothers educating children" as a contribution to security.

Common forms of humanitarian activity described include: providing first aid or first aid training; providing food and clothing to destitute families and IDPs; providing psychiatric support to traumatised women and children; livelihood-oriented training to women and youth in hairdressing, henna or sewing skills; and awareness-raising around health, education and peace/non-violence. Many participants also spoke generically of women providing "relief" or "assistance" to vulnerable households. Women leaders across locations were engaged in keeping schools and healthcare centres open, mobilising funds for salaries and basic materials. However, different types of activities were emphasised in each governorate, reflecting both pre-existing norms around women's roles in public life as well as the severity of the conflict, security and humanitarian context in each place. For example, in Ta'iz, where the security situation is particularly severe, psychiatric support was a major area of activity mentioned by participants, whereas in Ma'rib this was only mentioned once.

In **Ma'rib**, there was an emphasis on women's engagement in longer-term activities, particularly community development projects and service delivery. Many participants specifically used the word "development" and there were fewer mentions of "humanitarian" work compared to Ta'iz and Lahij. This reflects the more hopeful atmosphere across much of Ma'rib, where the security situation has stabilised, and there has been an observable rise in local efforts to rebuild institutions and services (see Section 2.1.1). Many women activists described women playing an active role in community needs assessment, particularly for IDPs who have entered the area. Initiatives described include working with international

²⁶This includes Islah-affiliated leaders. One politician in al-Shamayteen, Ta'iz, described how the Islah Party "has a 'women's sector' in its structure, which undertakes a variety of development activities related to healthcare, peace and political awareness". The party runs a number of affiliated societies and institutions, such as al-Islah Charitable Society or the University of Science and Technology. The 'women's sector' mentioned here is part of al-Islah Charitable Society.

and local NGOs to identify needs and distribute aid and various types of assistance to IDPs and vulnerable households, including food, blankets and shelter. As in other areas, support to livelihoods for poor, vulnerable or IDP populations was mentioned by many, with some even using the language of “economic empowerment” for women and youth. This generally referred to training in hairdressing, henna and sewing.

Vulnerability to extremism: lack of services, jobs and trauma

Recent research by UNDP on vulnerability to violent extremism in Africa found that **“positive experience of effective service provision is confirmed as a source of resilience: participants who believed that governments’ provision of education was either ‘excellent’ or ‘improving’ were less likely to be a member of a violent extremist group”**. A lack of or insecure employment was also **“the single most frequently cited ‘immediate need’ faced at the time of joining [an extremist group]”** (UNDP, 2017: 5). This validates the work Yemeni women are doing to keep schools and health centres open and provide economic and livelihoods support as direct contributions to conflict resilience.

Similarly, the UNDP research affirmed the **value of psychosocial support to people traumatised by violent conflict** in preventing extremism. Arrest or death of a family member or friend by armed forces was described as the most significant ‘tipping point’ or ‘trigger’ for individuals to join an extremist group (ibid: 6). Support to community-led trauma counselling was a key recommendation to address this (p. 9).

Participants from all target groups described women in Ma’rib as being active in sustaining basic services, in particular water, health and education, and this was widely seen as an appropriate role for women to play in local peace and stability. Activists in Ma’rib highlighted the links between their work delivering basic services and wider peace and stability more than in other governorates; one teacher and humanitarian activist in Ma’rib city commented that **“there is a need for special projects to address existing gaps in education, health and the economy in order to achieve peace”** (community activist, 31, Sirwah). Local NGOs, many women-led, were also credited by men and women as major actors in local service delivery, particularly in Sirwah, where government authorities have less presence. Some felt that **“local NGOs have proved to be more effective in community service than international NGOs, which are not substantially present in Ma’rib”** (student, 22, Ma’rib city). Several interesting stories emerged from Ma’rib of women helping to resolve conflicts between different tribal groups over water, a theme which also came up in Lahij.

In **Ta’iz**, psychiatric support was a major theme discussed by women activists and leaders, in particular in Salah and Sabr al-Mawadim, where the security situation remains especially severe. However, this was mentioned across Ta’iz as a primary way women are contributing to peace and stability. Interestingly, only very few other participant groups highlighted this. Instead, most women and men at community level as well as religious and traditional leaders from all backgrounds tended to emphasise women’s work in more general humanitarian relief and assistance to the vulnerable in the area, particularly first aid, food and money, as well as maintaining health and education services. Some mentioned support to wounded fighters. **“Awareness-raising”** in relation to health and education were also commonly mentioned.

Resolving water conflicts

“There was a dispute between two tribal groups over a well in the area, and each group was insisting to be the only beneficiary... I told them that this is a general project and it is not specific to one tribal group. I was able to persuade both parties to resolve the problem and end the dispute, and an agreement was made to continue operating the well and provide water to both sides based on need. I did not require any resources because such an issue simply requires effective communication”. (Peace activist, teacher and IDP, 29, Sirwah, Ma’rib)

Whilst women activists in Ta’iz perceived their humanitarian activities and support for the vulnerable as contributions to peace and stability as elsewhere, and described them as such, participants from other groups in Ta’iz did not make this connection, agreeing that women are active in these ways but then saying that women have no role to play in peace and stability. This likely reflects a rise in radical religious rhetoric as well as more severe living conditions. One local activist in Sabr al-Mawadim suggested that “[t]here is low community awareness about the role of women in peacebuilding. The community... currently thinks about food aid only”. She also described aid as a means to secure cooperation from armed actors, saying “if you don’t distribute food aid, armed men will not allow you to enter a neighbourhood” (humanitarian activist, 25). Findings regarding food and other humanitarian aid as a source of local conflict are discussed in more detail under Section 5.1 below.

In **Lahij**, as in other areas, women activists clearly understood their humanitarian and charitable work as contributing to peace and stability. One leader in al-Hawta felt that “securing the basic needs of families will increase satisfaction and reduce the potential for violence” (independent activist, 35). In focus groups with women across Lahij most participants agreed that the people are largely supportive of women’s involvement in community work. Echoing this, one traditional leader felt that “women provide positive projects to the community better than men” (*‘aqil*, 52, Tuban). Women were often described as working closely with local and international NGOs to meet the needs of vulnerable people, particularly IDPs, destitute families and people with disabilities in the area.

Women in Lahij were widely described as being active in sustaining services and solving water and health shortages. As in Ma’rib, conflicts over water were mentioned by several people, and some women discussed how women’s activism in the area had contributed directly to resolving such conflicts. One young activist led a fundraising campaign for establishing a water project in the area where there had been severe shortages, working in cooperation with a local NGO and mobilising support from a local officials, young activists and philanthropists in the area. One woman from the community said that “the new project helped resolve many of the problems related to water that used to arise from time to time. It helped end a recurring dispute between two local villages over a water source in a borderline between the two sides” (focus group with women, Lahij).

Other activists spoke of their “great achievements in community health” through hygiene promotion and awareness raising, “thus reducing the risk of cholera in the local areas” (focus group with women activists, Lahij). Many women also spoke of mobilising community contributions (financial and in-kind) to furnish local schools, provide poor children with uniforms and keep health facilities open. Psychiatric support was also a prominent theme, particularly in al-Maqatira, which has seen some of the fiercest fighting in Yemen. Several women leaders there described how their efforts are “helping members of the community overcome the impacts of the war like trauma” (humanitarian and psychosocial activist, 27) or contributing “towards the psychological wellbeing of women” (human rights activist, 28).



4.3 Conflict mediation and resolution

Women were described as participating in mediating and resolving family, community and inter-tribal conflicts in all three governorates, although this theme was especially prominent in Ma'rib, where tribal customs provide a clear role for women in this arena. Most political, religious and traditional leaders were positive about women working to resolve conflicts, but this was often with an emphasis on working “with women” or conflicts “in the family”.

Women mediators in Ma'rib

“Women have succeeded in mediation efforts where men couldn't. A group of women launched an initiative for a ceasefire agreement between al-Hada and another tribal group, capitalising on tribal customary rules that show respect for women, and therefore they were more able to play such a mediatory role. Following some prior training, they sent 6 women and 4 men to the warring tribes. After arriving, they stayed under sunlight refusing hospitality invitations from tribal leaders until their call for a ceasefire was accepted. Consequently, the warring tribal groups were receptive and a week-long ceasefire agreement was reached.” (Female activist and IDP, Sirwah, Ma'rib)

Women in **Ma'rib** were described as being more active in public peace activism and directly mediating conflicts than in Ta'iz and Lahij.²⁷ A number of women leaders explicitly referred to tribal customs in their area, which they felt ensured women were respected and could have their voices heard. Several stories emerged of women publicly shaming armed men to demand that they stop fighting and fulfil their protective responsibilities, in some cases using highly symbolic public actions such as shaving their hair off, refusing hospitality as a means of demanding dialogue, and even publicly beating armed tribesmen to force a peace. One activist recounted how she negotiated with government troops not to launch an attack against Houthi fighters in the village where she and her children were living. She felt that this “was made possible thanks to the tribal customary rules the community strongly believes in” (female activist, 35, al-Juba).

In **Ta'iz**, there were different views among the target groups about women's direct contributions to conflict resolution. Whilst several men and women from the community categorically stated that women “are not supposed to play a role at the community level”

²⁷ Heinze (2016) notes that “[i]n the tribal highlands, for example, outside urban areas, cases relating to disputes that concern the community are not only discussed among men, but also among women in separate meetings nearby. Children channel back and forth between the male and female gatherings and update both sides on the deliberations of the other” (p. 6).

(male student, 18, al-Shamayteen) or that “no roles are played by women outside the household” (housewife, 48, Sabr al-Mawadim), women activists, traditional and religious leaders were more positive. This perhaps reflects a limited awareness among communities of women’s contributions to peace, an issue mentioned by some activists interviewed. Several *shaykhs* agreed that women can take part in conflict resolution in their local area and can engage with traditional and religious leaders by “promoting peace and mitigating conflicts and violence” (activist, 40, Sabr al-Mawadim). Political leaders in Ta’iz also described women resolving conflicts through community-based mediation groups (village council member, Yemen Socialist Party, 52, al-Shamayteen). Examples mentioned include women resolving disputes over roads between different villages in the area by paving alternative roads or water sources.

Community mediation in local councils

“In the village council, there are women who play a big role in resolving disputes and increasing awareness. In our relief work, we ask for help from women as they can enter houses and make sure if they meet the requirements of aid distribution. Women also contribute to resolving problems in the area, particularly family conflicts. They also help with family stability by providing them with aid.” (Shaykh, 53, Sabr al-Mawadim, Ta’iz)

Beyond directly mediating conflicts, many women in Ta’iz were described as engaging in “awareness-raising” in support of peace and security. One activist discussed women’s work in “raising people’s awareness about the importance of peace and the rejection of violence” and particularly organising “workshops about women’s roles in the community and the importance of strengthening peace” (activist, 40, Sabr al-Mawadim). Several men spoke positively of women “raising community awareness about the effects of disagreements”.

In **Lahij**, a number of participants suggested that women play an active role in resolving conflicts in the area, but most described this in terms of solving conflicts *among women* or at a domestic level. Several women in the community discussed female teachers resolving “domestic disputes” in their area. One activist described how she mediated a dispute over local resources, but this was the only story of this kind to come from Lahij. Similarly to Ta’iz, others in Lahij spoke more frequently of women “raising awareness for solving community problems through peaceful means” (medical activist, 22, Tuban) or playing a role in promoting peace among other women. There was agreement among women activists from across Lahij during a focus group that “many women activists are working in awareness campaigns about peace and offering voluntary services making citizens’ voices heard by relief organisations. Women can also work as rights activists to monitor violations”.



4.4 Participation in the conflict and security

Perspectives on women’s roles in the conflict and contributions to security were quite varied across governorates. Providing food and other material support for fighters was almost universally mentioned across locations. In some areas of Lahij and Ma’rib women were described as having a much more active role in security, as policewomen, security guards or by engaging in intelligence gathering. In contrast, in Ta’iz all but one participant felt that women play no role in providing security.

In **Ma'rib**, women were described as playing a more active and direct role in local security and policing than in the other governorates. In Ma'rib city, several women mentioned the presence of policewomen in the area. They were described as playing a particular role distinct to that of *policemen*, focused on "providing security during social occasions and in women's prisons" (female social worker, 35) or "inspecting suspicious homes as it is difficult for males to do this job" (female student, 22). Another participant confirmed that "they don't come out to the street" (housewife, 45). Several men in al-Juba agreed that policewomen contribute to security in the governorate, although suggested that they were not present in al-Juba itself.

Several men in al-Juba also described women playing a role in "raising security awareness and sharing intelligence" (unemployed man, 26) as well as working with local men and government authorities to combat highway banditry. This was described as a "tribal initiative ensuring the safety of road users, which customarily provides for 'capital punishment of bandits'" (female civil society leader, 35, al-Juba). In contrast, in Sirwah, the only part of Ma'rib still suffering from ongoing conflict, there was consensus among men and women that women are not involved in providing security. In all areas, men and women recognised women's contributions to advocating against violence, in schools, youth centres and other public facilities, and for the release of prisoners.

Unlike the other governorates, many people in Ma'rib described women's primary role in the conflict as supporting fighters "spiritually", "psychologically" or by "motivating" them. This was discussed in terms of encouraging their relatives to fight and praying for victory, and many saw this as a key contribution to local security. For example, a young female student described how "some women encourage their children to go to fight, and this is considered the largest sacrifice made" (22, Ma'rib City). Interestingly, "spiritual" support specifically was not mentioned in Ma'rib city but was a common theme in both Sirwah and al-Juba, the two rural districts in Ma'rib, where tribal culture remains more influential. Women in Ma'rib were also described as providing food for fighters, but most suggested that material support was only given occasionally. This was a much more prominent theme in Ta'iz and Lahij.

In **Ta'iz**, as in Lahij, there was near-universal agreement that women play a role in providing food to fighters. Many people in Ta'iz also mentioned women giving money to fighters, with some recounting stories of how some women "sell their jewellery and donate the money to the war effort" (housewife, 35, al-Shamayteen). Several participants also mentioned women providing medical help for wounded soldiers. In a focus group with women from communities across Ta'iz, five of the seven participants confirmed that they had personally supported fighters with food, money and clothes within the past two years.

With just one exception, all those interviewed in Ta'iz agreed that women are not involved in providing security. This was also unanimous in focus group discussions with women activists and women at community level. Only one woman from Salah district said that women can be engaged in policing, since her sister is a policewoman. Some participants from Salah district specifically noted the "disappearance of women" from police services in the area since Islamist groups had taken over. One man described how the police station is now "dominated by the Islah Party... Formerly, there were women police in this police station, but now there are not" (male worker, 39, Salah district).

In **Lahij**, there was consensus among men and women that providing food for fighters is a key role that women played in the conflict across the governorate. One or two participants also mentioned other types of support, including "helping in the passage of weapons, as women are not subject to thorough search at checkpoints" and also "playing a role in intelligence sharing" (male student, 35, al-Hawta). Some mentioned women providing first aid or help to wounded soldiers, particularly trained nurses and doctors. A few individuals

across districts also mentioned women playing a role in boosting morale or encouraging fighters to defend themselves and their village.

Women providing security in Lahj

“Women are contributing to providing security and we heard about women in the police at the investigations department... i.e. part of indirect security services. There are women who were chosen to play this role and they are highly qualified. There were policewomen in the past but they have not been active since the beginning of war”. (Unemployed man, 40, Tuban, Lahij)

In al-Hawta district, where the Security Belt forces and the STC are in control, there was agreement among men and women that “many women have joined the security service” either as policewomen, security guards at public facilities, or were involved in sharing intelligence. Al-Maqatira, one of the most intense battlefields in Yemen, was a different picture however – all except two people said that women are not involved in providing security. Those who did mention this described female teachers resolving family disputes or general security-related awareness-raising. Responses for Tuban were more mixed, either suggesting that women play no role, or mentioning engagement in intelligence gathering and reporting problems.



4.5 Local governance

Women activists across locations described cooperating to a greater or lesser extent with local authorities in their area to do their work. Relationships with local government were generally seen positively, as were relationships with local traditional leaders (*shaykhs* and *‘aqils*). However, the research only identified one woman in government or political leadership, although some participants in Ta’iz mentioned the presence of female local councillors who are currently “inactive” due to the conflict situation. The majority of traditional leaders also said that women had little to do with their work or should not be engaged in formal decision-making.

In **Ma’rib**, most women leaders described having a positive relationship with local government authorities, liaising with them to coordinate relief and development activities or to seek support or approval for new projects, including in Sirwah, where conflict is ongoing. Several individuals mentioned submitting proposals to the district office for the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (MoSAL), which appeared to be functioning in all locations. The only challenge mentioned by some activists was in getting local officials to attend events and workshops. Government officials in Ma’rib city identified women employees within the Governor’s Office for the Western Districts, the governorate Women Affairs Office and the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) office for the governorate.

Several officials and traditional leaders mentioned recruiting women to support them with surveys and data gathering to inform local development initiatives.

The only female government official identified in the research was working in Ma’rib as Head of the governorate’s Women’s Development Department. She spoke of a proposal she submitted to governorate authorities seeking a quota for women in public positions in all the government offices.

In **Ta'iz**, despite several comments from regular men and women that women should play no role in public life, several influential male leaders across the governorate were supportive of women running for office in local council elections – including a leading GPC²⁸ council member in Salah and an Islah-affiliated council leader in Sabr al-Mawadim. Another leader in the al-Shamayteen local council spoke positively of women “taking part in preparing plans and budgets” and “making inputs into proposals for service projects”. Some leaders in al-Shamayteen suggested that there are women members in the district council, but their work is limited to “distributing relief aid and solving domestic problems” (village council member, 38). Another suggested that women are present but “inactive”. In Salah, a GPC official confirmed that there were some women representatives in the local council but that they had been displaced to outside the city.

Many women activists in Ta'iz discussed cooperating with traditional leaders (*shaykhs* and *'aqils*) and local authorities in the area to seek protection for them and their teams ahead of any planned activities. *'Aqils* were described by several as “the most helpful group” and most were also positive about their engagement with village councils whom they cooperated with regularly. However, one participant noted that “there is no problem in our relationship with the local authority, but this authority doesn't have full control of the situation, nor could it provide security each time” (female activist, 40, Sabr al-Mawadim). Threats from extremist groups was the most significant obstacle activists described in Ta'iz. This is discussed in more detail under Section 5 below.

In **Lahij**, several participants discussed women as being engaged in “political activism”, including within the Islah Party, which has significant influence in the governorate. A senior Islah official spoke of this and suggested that women's political activism would be “encouraged” in the local area. There was a general sense in Lahij that women's public work should focus on supporting other women, with many describing women's engaging in “solving women's problems” or supporting families in the areas. Similarly, women leaders were only identified in the Women's Development Department in the local council in al-Maqatira and helping to “address women's issues” in the al-Hawta village council. Female activists in Tuban were not very positive about their relationship to local authorities in the area, including local *shaykhs*, who some felt were prone to inventing fake names of recipients to “misappropriate assistance”. In al-Maqatira, activists were more positive about their cooperation with local councils. Some of the female activists in Lahij were part of the NDC of 2013/14 and spoke positively of this experience during a focus group discussion.

²⁸GPC stands for General People's Congress, the party headed by former President 'Ali 'Abdallah Salih until his death in December 2017 and the ruling party in Yemen for many decades.

5. KEY FINDINGS: BARRIERS, CHALLENGES AND RISKS TO WOMEN'S ENGAGEMENT

Overall, the research found significant geographical variation in the barriers, challenges and risks women face in engaging in their work towards preventing conflict and building peace and stability. Insecurity, serious threats and harassment towards activists and restrictions on women's movements were prominent themes in Ta'iz and Lahij, whereas in Ma'rib there was more concern over rising prices and lack of awareness among the population regarding the work of NGOs. Lack of funding and provisions (such as food and other relief items) was again a major concern in both Ta'iz and Lahij but less so in Ma'rib. Activists across all locations mentioned restrictive gender norms as a challenge to some extent. Lack of support from, or in some cases corruption and nepotism within, local political and governance structures was also discussed as an obstacle in some places.

5.1 Insecurity, threats and restrictions on movement

Many activists mentioned direct threats to themselves as well as general security risks in their area as significant barriers to their work. Direct threats to women activists and civil society leaders were most pronounced in Ta'iz, and to a lesser extent, Lahij. Similarly, restrictions on movement for women due to general conflict and insecurity was described by many in Ta'iz as a major challenge. Hostility to NGOs from local political and armed actors was most prominent in Lahij, particularly in relation to the UAE-backed Security Belt forces and AQAP.

In **Ma'rib**, across districts, activists spoke of how the war has generated new suspicion towards women activists in the area and a greater sense of fear and anxiety among the people. They also discussed experiencing hostility from local people towards NGOs in some areas due to a sense that they screen community needs without providing adequate follow-up support. However, such hostility was not described as violent, in contrast to Ta'iz and Lahij, discussed further below. Restrictions on movement were described by some in Ma'rib, but this was in relation to conservative social or religious views as opposed to security risks.

In **Ta'iz**, women leaders described severe threats to their personal safety and significant hostility to their work. Key threats mentioned included: death threats from extremist groups; threats, harassment and violence at road blocks or security checkpoints; beatings and attacks for not wearing a full veil; and forceful taking of food or other humanitarian goods by armed actors. Many participants mentioned radical armed groups as posing the most significant threat, mentioning the so-called Islamic State, AQAP, Ansar al-Shari'a and other fundamentalist Sunni groups, although some also mentioned Houthis. Researchers reported that both women and men in Ta'iz city recounted threats to women by such groups for their activism and humanitarian work. There was, however, agreement that although the situation for activists now is bad, it was worse when the Houthis were in control.

Restrictions on movement for women were also most pronounced in Ta'iz and were attributed to the extremist groups operating in the governorate, particularly in Salah.

Many activists in Ta'iz described being threatened by armed men if they were not given food aid. For example, in Sabr al-Mawadim, one activist described how her NGO's posters and cameras were smashed and she was verbally abused in the street whilst trying to distribute aid. "They were asking us to give them food assistance under gun threat", she said (activist, 40, Sabr al-Mawadim). This activist ceased her work and left the area after this experience. Another described being denied access to homes connected to armed men who suspect activists of sharing intelligence with rival groups; this was also described in other districts. Some in Salah had experienced shootings during their activities.

Threats to activists in Ta'iz

"Some women activists have faced murder threats while distributing money to families of the martyrs and wounded. One received an envelope with a bullet inside. Another was intercepted by masked gunmen." **(Focus group with women activists, Ta'iz)**

Another activist received death threats from extremist groups for walking in the street without a veil. *"I don't like the niqab but I had to wear it. You could say I am afraid of their threats! Yes, I am. A day after the death threat I went out wearing my veil".*

Hostility from locals towards NGOs and humanitarian workers was also discussed by several activists in Ta'iz, often related to their desperate living conditions and the inability of NGOs to meet their needs, sometimes resulting in violent clashes. Some mentioned conflicts and shootouts over the distribution of food aid, either between armed actors or community members. Another described murder threats from community members who were not included in aid distribution. In al-Shamayteen "recurrent tensions between IDPs and host community members" were highlighted as a particular challenge. Many activists also described how "people no longer trust NGOs that often conduct mapping of families in need without providing subsequent relief assistance" (humanitarian activist, 25, Sabr al-Mawadim).

Conflicts over food aid

"Members of the host community protest for being excluded from relief assistance, which only includes IDPs. This results in conflicts... such protests sometimes develop into shooting and threats of murder." **(Activist, 24, al-Shamayteen, Ta'iz).**

"My colleagues were beaten by militants because we didn't provide them with food aid, as we only distribute to IDPs, who were impacted by war. We were threatened with weapons, and the food aid was taken from us and it was later sold." **(Activist, 25, Sabr al-Mawadim, Ta'iz)**

In **Lahij**, general insecurity and lawlessness, especially when travelling between villages, was also discussed as a major challenge to women's activism. Several activists in al-Maqatira talked about a lack of security and stability "specifically on roads between villages where there are armed bandits and highwaymen posing threats to relief efforts" (activist, 25, al-Maqatira). In Tuban, one activist said that the Security Belt forces had "created numerous obstacles" to their work in the area, while another described attacks by AQAP on local and INGO offices in the district. Yet another activist in Tuban described "gangs" which she said are "hindering NGO access to the community" and "provide unreal names in an attempt to misappropriate aid allocations" (female activist, 25, Tuban). Suspicion among locals towards NGOs was also described by some as a barrier across districts in Lahij, including rumours that NGOs are "Jewish" (similar things were mentioned in Ma'rib in relation to suspicions that NGOs were Jewish or engaging in "Christianisation").

5.2 Lack of funding and resources

Lack of resources, including funding, transport and humanitarian materials, was mentioned by activists across governorates as one of the most significant obstacles they face. Such comments were most acute in districts where conflict has been or continues to be intense, such as Tuban and al-Maqatira in Lahij, Sirwah in Ma'rib, and Salah in Ta'iz. Some made emotional comments about how this had affected them and their work, or said that they had given up their work in the face of such need and their inability to meet it.

In **Ma'rib**, particularly Ma'rib city, some activists mentioned the high cost of living as an increasing barrier to women's voluntary work in the area, echoing Salisbury's (2017: 6) findings of dramatic rises in property prices and general economic boom in the city. Others mentioned low incomes and lack of transportation as related barriers to women's activism.

In **Ta'iz**, several activists talked about how insufficient resources coupled with the particularly desperate humanitarian context in the governorate had resulted in direct threats to them and their work. One participant described how she had faced murder threats from community members protesting lack of assistance for them, which forced her and her team to leave the area. Most activists described working with *shaykhs* and *'aqils* to resolve these problems, but this was not always successful.

Overwhelming need

"I think I have failed to play a role in improving healthcare standards in Lahij due to lack of resources. Due to lack of funding, I often resort to closing my door before community members seek help... The authorities don't help me when I request medicines or medical appliances necessary for me to continue with the job." (Medical activist, 37, al-Hawta, Lahij)

In **Lahij**, activists in al-Maqatira seemed most concerned about a lack of materials for humanitarian relief activities. They described the increasing needs of IDPs in the area in particular. Across Lahij, several women spoke of their entrepreneurial efforts to mobilise the support of local philanthropists and tradesmen in the area to secure food aid, in some cases successfully. When asked about the barriers women activists face in Lahij, women from the communities highlighted the "lack of material support and encouragement for women running activities related to promotion of stability, peacebuilding and conflict prevention, such as women skill development programmes and productive family projects" (focus group with women in the community, Lahij).

5.3 Limitations to acceptable public activity

Restrictive views on the role women should play outside the home was a barrier discussed by activists to differing degrees across locations. There was notable variation across target groups on this topic: Women activists and local political or government leaders were generally supportive of women playing a role in public activities. Traditional and religious leaders were also generally positive about women's contributions to peace, stability or economic activity whilst emphasising certain limits or restrictions – for example that they should support other women, or focus on domestic and family-related issues and disputes. Negative comments that women should not (or do not) play any role outside the home came from less educated men and women from communities, particularly the men who often linked this to comments about their own living conditions or lack of employment.

In **Ma'rib**, there was a picture of deep-seated conservative social norms surrounding the roles of women in public life, coupled with a rise in conservative religious views. Almost all activists and several local women described “conservative local traditions” or “prevalent tribal culture” as a primary obstacle to women's engagement in peace, stability and community development more broadly. As in other governorates, many women felt that “the community doesn't understand the role of women” nor their contributions to the community (housewife, 22, al-Juba). Others mentioned men's religious perceptions which restrict what is considered acceptable for women to do in public. The need for a *mahram* was also mentioned by several activists in Ma'rib as a barrier to women's work in the community, more than in other areas.

In **Ta'iz**, these views were particularly pronounced, although this was potentially due to the desperate humanitarian situation, which meant some participants were not interested in discussing women's contributions to peace and stability. Multiple similar statements were recorded from less educated or unemployed men (and some women) such as “women don't play any role outside the home. Women's roles are limited to the education of children only” (unemployed male, 24, Salah). Activists in Ta'iz described difficulties in engaging local women in activities and projects since there is “low awareness among community members as to women's work with NGOs. There are men who are still opposed to women working in public” (peace and humanitarian activists, 35, al-Shamayteen). This activist also talked about how “there is also difficulty running women-targeted activities due to extremist religious discourse”. Other women in the community talked about how their male relatives would not like it if they went out to work outside the household, or mentioned the “impact on the marital relationship or increasing problems between couples” as an issue they would face. Traditional leaders, interestingly, were generally divided on women's roles in public.

In **Lahij**, there were also a number of negative comments suggesting that “men have a negative impression of women activists” (focus group with women in the community) or that “the roles of women are limited to the home, and they cannot play any role towards stability, peace or conflict presentation” (labourer, 51, al-Maqatira). Several activists mentioned the negative views of men in the community towards women activists, and another suggested that “some girls, specifically those influenced by religious radicalism, are opposed to women's activism” (activist, 37, al-Hawta).

These findings reinforce the need for awareness-raising among ordinary people of what women are currently doing and can do to support development, peace and stability.

6. KEY FINDINGS: EXPECTATIONS OF PEACE AND VISIONS FOR POLITICAL FUTURE

6.1 Visions for peace and how to achieve it

Concepts of peace among research participants were highly varied but quite consistent with the broad understanding of peacebuilding we found in this research, discussed above in Section 4. Responses can be summarised under the following categories, all of which are related and/or interconnected: **living conditions**: a decent standard of living, food security and availability of basic necessities, services, job opportunities, payment of salaries, economic prosperity, an end to IDP suffering, social welfare benefits to vulnerable families; **sustainable development**: community development, a future for the next generation, education, healthcare, social equality; **security and stability**: an end to the war, cessation of hostilities, safety, arms control, disappearance of gunmen, removal of militias, reduction of crime, presence of active security authorities; **statebuilding and good governance**: reinstatement of state institutions, a return of government, justice and rule of law, social justice, democracy; **individual rights and freedoms**: human rights, equal citizenship, full citizenship rights, public freedoms, freedom of movement and expression, political participation for all and respect for different opinions; **a state of mind**: tranquillity, psychological and spiritual stability, harmony, love and affection, coexistence, and commitment to Islam as a religion of peace.

"In my opinion, peace is the peace you feel inside yourself... it begins from within... Peace doesn't vary between the different places in Yemen. However, the means to achieving peace may differ from one place to another. I think peace can be achieved by specific actions in specific fields... For example, I need to control the high cost of living to achieve peace in Ma'rib, we also need to increase awareness on security and political issues as well as accepting differences within the community; all these will contribute to achieving peace." (Female community activist and conflict settlement trainer, 31, Sirwah, Ma'rib)

When asked *what needed to happen in order for these visions of peace to be achieved*, many participants, particularly in Ta'iz where the effects of the ongoing war were most acutely felt, tended to be less concrete and more focused on the **national level**, demonstrating how closely local issues are considered to be connected to the war as a whole. Suggestions made by many included the need for all parties to lay down their arms, enter into dialogue and put the supreme national interest before their own by making compromises and concessions; to promote political reconciliation; reform or rehabilitate the security sector and enforce the rule of law; establish justice; ensure fair power-sharing including checks and balances; strengthen the presence of the state on the ground; and address the root causes of the conflict.

“Peace is the safety and comfort of people; the spread of love and peacefulness... people getting their rights and encouraging women to work. If women were encouraged by the community, they would help their community a lot.” (Housewife, 28, Tuban, Lahij)

Regarding strategies for achieving peace at the **local level**, participants mentioned community-based initiatives through local NGOs in the form of awareness activities focused on peace and stability; initiatives for the settlement of disagreements through mediation efforts of community leaders; promoting a culture of coexistence and solidarity; promoting a community-based dialogue; enhancing social cohesion; promoting respect for social traditions and popular heritage; creating cultural awareness in the community and throughout Yemen; ending psychological pressures; giving guarantees for freedoms and security in the community; providing women with the knowledge and means to set up their own small enterprises; providing services and improving living conditions; strengthening the role of education; raising religious awareness and returning to the true religious practices; and controlling individuals who are spoilers of the public interest.

For a significant number of participants, particularly in Ta’iz but also to a lesser extent in Ma’rib and Lahij, peace can only be achieved through a clear defeat of those they considered its spoilers, summarised through repeated calls to “end the coup” (i.e. Houthi control over central state institutions) and to “exterminate the Houthis”.

Actors mentioned who should be involved in such a process ranged from ‘the state’ or the IRG via the Houthis, political parties, the Southern Movement, the Southern Transitional Council and the Security Belt forces (the latter three all mentioned in Lahij) and other groups involved in the conflict to *shaykhs*, *‘aqils*, tradesmen, women, local and international NGOs, youth, researchers and educational institutions, local authorities, local communities, village councils, community figures, district directors, activists, women, media representatives, educated people, religious figures (imams), doctors and engineers, as well as Iran and the Gulf States including Oman. A number of regional and international actors were also mentioned: the UN, EU, US, UK, France, Russia, China, Turkey, Pakistan, Jordan, Egypt and Morocco. Interestingly, many participants in Ma’rib emphasised that only Yemeni actors should be involved in a peace process and not any external groups as they were believed to be having a negative impact on steps towards peace. In Ta’iz and Lahij, in contrast, the number of participants calling for the involvement of external actors in the peace process was much higher; although here, too, a number of participants insisted that a peace process should involve only Yemenis, some arguing that foreign actors were not serious about ending the crisis in Yemen, that they did more harm than good to the peace process or that they had tried before and failed.

6.2 Existing initiatives to achieve peace

Existing initiatives mentioned as working to achieve peace in the area again reflected the broad understanding of peace that many research participants had, ranging from raising awareness about peace to the distribution of relief assistance. The number of initiatives mentioned by participants in Ma’rib was also significantly higher than in Ta’iz and Lahij, reflecting Ma’rib’s current situation as an area experiencing positive development. In **Ma’rib**, initiatives mentioned included youth initiatives for conflict resolution; local NGO

'protection' work to separate juveniles from adult prison inmates; an initiative called 'Peace Messengers'; another called 'Fighting Violence Against Civilians' said to have been run by GIZ; the '2250 Tawt'een' initiative focused on participation, protection and partnership; the 'Peace for Children' initiative; a 'child rehabilitation' initiative sponsored by the King Salman Relief Centre; peace promotion initiatives and other activities raising community awareness about the role of youth in achieving peace; a youth-led initiative for resolving a tribal border conflict; an 'Assistance for the Handicapped' initiative run by a female activist; a water well initiative led by a female activist; a cholera awareness initiative run by a female activist; providing relief and education to IDPs; distribution of aid and help with shelter; psychological rehabilitation to traumatised people, said to be implemented by UNOCHA; maintenance of security checkpoints; and tribal initiatives to reduce highway robbery.

In **Ta'iz**, most participants replied that no such initiatives working towards peace existed. It was mainly female activists interviewed in the course of this research who were able to point to existing projects, among them: 'Glimpse of Hope'; 'Kalbunian'; 'Wiam' initiative and 'Peace Voice' initiative, providing psychosocial support to affected families; 'League of Women Towards Peace' established in al-Shamayteen, said to have been hindered by local people alleging it serves the Houthis; and a charity providing financial assistance to those in need, thus contributing to maintaining stability.

"Peace is a dream to me well as to every Yemeni citizen. I am asking if there is a day when we achieve this dream? I really don't know! Peace is not only a need because of this war. I live in Ma'rib and I have never lived in peace since I was a child; I never felt in peace due to tribal conflicts, the 2011 revolution and the political upheavals which were shortly followed by the current war. Peace is a dream that Yemenis can't achieve. If it is left for Yemeni people, the war would be over in a few months but the issue is more than a Yemeni issue; the stronger countries are selling arms to make the civil war endless in Yemen as they benefit from the sectarian differences between Yemeni people, so peace still seems unattainable, at least in the near future." (Female community activist and former delegate to the NDC, 35, al-Juba, Ma'rib)

In **Lahij**, awareness of ongoing initiatives was broader than in Ta'iz, but was mainly limited to participants in al-Hawta (urban centre and capital of Lahij). One person mentioned that some local community-based organisations had been shut down for being affiliated with the Islah Party. Existing initiatives mentioned in al-Hawta were initiatives at the community level to solve problems; an initiative aiming to curb celebratory gun firing at weddings; NGO activities creating job opportunities and raising community awareness; youth groups employed by NGOs working on identifying IDP needs; street cleaning campaigns run by youth (mentioned as 'School Youth Initiative for Cleaning' by another participant); and community contributions to the water supply network. No existing initiatives were mentioned in al-Maqatira and the following were mentioned in Tuban: workshops and activities raising awareness on the risk of terrorism; the '[Search for] Common Ground' initiative financed by the Social Fund for Development, which has trained teachers and local authority officials on "how to get the message across to the community level"; peace promotion campaigns in schools; an initiative resolving a conflict over a water project in the community; a street cleaning campaign run by a woman with support from the Cleaning & Improvement Fund; distribution of relief aid to destitute families and IDPs; digging water wells.

6.3 Visions for Yemen's political future

Regarding participants' visions for the political future of Yemen, these ranged between scenarios that have been on the table for some time, i.e. a unified state under a central government; a federal state of two to six federal regions; or an independent southern state. Supporters of the establishment of a federal state expressed the hope that this would lead to efficient management and a fair distribution of resources; a reduction of the potential for corruption; positive competition for community service and development; effective involvement of local people in formal decision-making; and establishment of justice for everyone. Not all of these supporters were necessarily in favour of the current plan to split Yemen into six regions, saying that regions should be split on the basis of geographical and cultural factors; on the basis of population size; and/or on resource allocation in a way that ensures fair distribution.

"Peace is a demand for me and for all people. Insh'allah everything will be fine, the war will be over and security achieved. The northern and southern people will always be brothers and everyone will have his own country since we are tired of unity." (Illiterate housewife, 49, al-Hawta, Lahij)

It is important to note that many of the participants who considered the establishment of a federal state with six regions the best solution for the political future of Yemen believed that this decision (i.e. dividing Yemen into six regions and the distribution of the governorates under these regions) had been taken in the NDC rather than in a non-inclusive committee appointed by President Hadi after the conclusion of the NDC as happened in reality. This widespread belief is important to bear in mind should a redrawing of federal boundaries occur as part of peace negotiations or a subsequent transition process, as this might not get the support of citizens who believe that this decision has been taken under NDC consensus.

Opposition to federalism was sometimes justified with the concern that citizens would no longer be able to travel freely between the federal regions. This belief among Yemeni citizens as well as activists and politicians has been quite widespread in Yemen ever since the introduction of federalism has been a topic of discussion in the country. Supporters of as well as opponents to federalism mentioned the need to keep Yemen united as a whole so that the country would be 'stronger' on a regional and international level. As one participant (male freelancer, 50, Ma'rib city) put it: "I am against the division of Yemen into two states because unity is strength and division is weakness." Supporters of a unified state under a central government also voiced concern that a division of Yemen into regions or two independent states would only lead to further conflict and that they would no longer be able to travel freely between regions.

Regarding regional differences on visions for Yemen's political future, the majority of participants in **Ma'rib** tended to support the establishment of a federal state of several regions or specifically six regions "in accordance with the NDC outcomes", many of them also emphasising that they would like to see Yemen remain unified. A significant number of participants also supported upholding the current political system with a unified state and a central government. In **Ta'iz**, participants were almost evenly divided in their support for either a federal state of six regions "in accordance with the NDC outcomes" (two participants

opted for a federal state of two regions) and support for a unified state with a central government “as it was before the war”. In **Lahij**, interestingly and quite contrary to the often-portrayed picture of ‘everyone in the South wanting an independent state’, the majority of participants argued pro-unity and only two (out of 31) opted for the establishment of an independent southern state.²⁹ Amongst those opting for unity, opinions were divided between those supporting a unified state under a central government and those supporting federalism of various kinds, although the latter were in the majority. Two participants opting for a federal state of two regions, for example, explained their preference with the belief that too many regions or a secession of the South would create more problems to the people of Yemen (*‘aqil*, 48, al-Hawta) and that this solution would best serve to maintain relations among Yemenis (female student, 35, al-Hawta).

²⁹This is in accordance with YPC findings in a nation-wide (except Sa’da and Socotra) survey conducted among 4,000 participants (50% female) in February and March 2017, in which only 19% of participants in Lahj supported the separation of the South from the North (60% opposed, 21% didn’t know). See Yemen Polling Center, 2017.

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Our findings point to both a core set of overall trends which validate existing knowledge on women, conflict and peacebuilding in other parts of Yemen, as well important local nuances and contrasts in each target governorate – and even within governorates.³⁰ It found that **women are at the frontline of sustaining families and communities and addressing the devastating effects of conflict**. In a protracted conflict such as Yemen's, de-escalation in ways which do not undermine long-term peace is a key need alongside efforts to address the dynamics that drive further conflict. Women are playing an essential role in this in a number of ways: by meeting humanitarian need and mitigating suffering; maintaining local services where government is inadequate or absent; addressing the psychological impact of violence; promoting peace; mediating between armed parties; and contributing to economic recovery.

Our research also highlighted the **very real risks of doing harm**. If not implemented thoughtfully, humanitarian distribution can provoke tensions by not providing for everyone in the community (or assessing areas without providing follow-up support), targeting only one segment (e.g. IDPs) of a highly vulnerable community, or using women's organisations purely as conduits for aid distribution, inadvertently diverting their agendas and priorities. Programming in support of women's empowerment could equally expose women to further risks if not very carefully designed in a context where women's public activity is being directly threatened by violent extremist groups, and domestic violence is increasing as traditional gender roles are challenged. There may also be times when international partners *should not* support women's effective local responses to conflict and instability, such as direct conflict mediation in tribal areas, for risk of undermining their local legitimacy. Time and again, local women emphasised **the need to work in partnership with them, and to make external support inclusive** of the whole community, whilst making the most of the opportunity to advance women's strategic interests and status.

Recommendations

Long-term peace in Yemen can only be achieved through a comprehensive and inclusive peace process, involving all parties to the conflict. However, recognising that there does not appear to be an immediate incentive for key actors to participate in such a process, the best strategy for the UK may be to pursue a range of interim approaches aiming to build the potential for a successful peace process in future.

The UK is leading the way globally on the women, peace and security agenda, and is well-placed to be a key partner on this within Yemen. We believe there is scope for the UK to address at least four of the seven Strategic Outcome areas of the latest UK National Action Plan,³¹ building on existing support to UN Women and other partners. Namely: increasing women's participation in decision-making (including conflict prevention and peacebuilding at local level) (SO1), addressing GBV (SO3), humanitarian response that meets women and girls' needs and promotes women's leadership (SO4), and security and justice, making local security and justice actors more responsive to women's needs (SO5).

³⁰For example regarding visions for a future Yemen, responses varied even within target districts, with different target groups favouring either a united/central state as it exists now, a federal system of various regions, or to a lesser extent separation of the South from the North. Responses also varied regarding the existence and severity of GBV, with some participants not acknowledging that this is a problem in their area; and the extent to which women can contribute to peace and stability, with less educated or unemployed men and some less educated women making more restrictive comments.

³¹ UK National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security 2018 – 2022, January 2018: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/677586/FCO1215-NAP-Women-Peace-Security-ONLINE_V2.pdf (10.06.2018).

RECOMMENDATIONS



With this in mind, we have identified six key areas where the UK (CSSF, DFID), its partners, and other international actors can strengthen the impact of what they are already doing, and do more to enhance women's contributions to conflict prevention, peacebuilding and stability. This is described in detail below. As noted above, there is potential for external actors to do harm, exposing women and others to risk, or for conflict actors to capture support. There is a need for strong and locally-specific conflict sensitivity analysis of potential interventions beforehand, and small-scale piloting of new activities may be advisable.

1. Continue to prioritise life-saving humanitarian support, including GBV mitigation and response, across conflict-affected parts of Yemen

The current UK focus on humanitarian aid in Yemen should be considered an opportunity to empower women, in line with UK commitments in the National Action Plan (NAP) 2018-2022 on women, peace and security. For DFID and its humanitarian partners, taking a gendered approach is essential to deliver effective responses, but will also help to sustain positive changes to gender roles emerging during conflict and strengthen women's leadership and participation. At a minimum, this should include ensuring the participation of women-led civil society organisations (CSOs) and activists in decision-making on humanitarian aid. We recommend that DFID's Humanitarian Team and other humanitarian donors explore:

a. Encouraging humanitarian organisations to partner with local women-led CSOs to design and deliver humanitarian aid, being careful not to simply use them as distribution mechanisms but to build their capacity to meet their own objectives.³² These CSOs and their leaders are experts in the needs, risks and entry points in each location and are ideally placed to advise international partners. Such partnerships should however assess risk of, and take steps to mitigate, backlash from men in the area who may feel excluded from job opportunities generated by humanitarian aid (see 3.a and 5.a below).

a. Providing support and training to women involved in humanitarian activities, such as psychosocial support, training them to be 'family experts' for other women in their communities, and to build networks with other women in similar roles beyond their area.

2. Address the causes of GBV and strengthen services for survivors

GBV should not be regarded as inevitable effect of conflict. From international experience we know it has the potential to cause further violence, e.g. revenge attacks, to undermine peacebuilding and stability efforts and long-term recovery. Effective responses do exist. We recommend the UK explore the potential for further action along the following lines:

a. Support public communications campaigns to address gender-based violence. This could include using local media platforms to remind people of the existing social values and norms surrounding protecting women in public and private. A campaign could be implemented in partnership with women activists to ensure local appropriateness, as part of other strategic communications and norm change work (see below).

b. Encourage international humanitarian organisations to better mainstream GBV into their sector programmes and establish standalone GBV services for survivors, in line with the Call to Action on Protection from Gender Based Violence in Emergencies and the agreed Roadmap made in 2016.³³ This should include integrating the minimal initial service package (MISP) into all humanitarian response,³⁴ as well as psychosocial support to both women and men (and specifically to couples and communities) affected by conflict, violence and economic hardship to support survivors and address the drivers of GBV perpetration, in line with global evidence.³⁵

c. Promote peace, tolerance and gender equality among school children and youth through school-linked peace clubs. This approach has been implemented successfully in contexts such as Nigeria, Pakistan and Afghanistan to address GBV and harmful gender norms within a wider pro-peace framework, and has been proven to reduce both levels of violence experienced by children as well as risk factors for perpetration (men) and experience (women) of GBV in later life.³⁶ Women activists in Yemen are already promoting peace in schools and with youth so this would fit well with their existing activity.

³² A recent study by Oxfam and International Alert (Anderson, 2017) found that across the MENA region: "donors and INGOs are inadvertently hindering the gender justice agenda by exerting a disproportionate influence on the priorities, type of work and opportunities of WROs [women's rights organisations] in the four contexts" included in the study, of which Yemen was one.

³³ See: <https://www.calltoactiongbv.com/> (10.06.2018).

³⁴ The Minimum Initial Service Package (MISP) is a series of crucial actions required to respond to reproductive health needs at the onset of every humanitarian crisis. See UNFPA for more: <https://www.unfpa.org/resources/what-minimum-initial-service-package> (10.06.2018).

³⁵ Multiple studies have highlighted that interventions which work with both men and women, intervene at the relationship level (i.e. with couples), or work holistically with the whole community, are significantly more effective in preventing GBV than single-intervention or women/men-only engagement. See for example: <http://www.whatworks.co.za/documents/publications/4-effectiveness-of-interventions-to-prevent-violence-against-women-and-girls/file> (10.06.2018).

³⁶ See for example DFID's Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme (NSRP) Peace Clubs model: <http://www.nsrp-nigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSRP-How-to-Guide-Setting-up-and-Running-Peace-Clubs.pdf> or "Right to Play" programming as part of violence prevention work in Pakistan: <http://www.whatworks.co.za/about/global-programme/global-programme-projects/item/299-preventing-violence-against-women-and-girls-through-school-based-programmes> (10.06.2018).

3. Support women's roles in conflict prevention, peacebuilding and mediation

Existence of traditional norms regarding women's roles in resolving conflict offers an opportunity, but may be under threat. Women activists also cite a lack of recognition of women's contributions to conflict prevention, peace and stability as an obstacle. There may be space to do more to sustain networks between women working in this area, share ideas and experiences and encourage further action. We recommend that the UK considers:

- a. Promoting awareness of women's contributions to peace, stability and development through dialogue and strategic communication, in collaboration with local women activists.** This could include local dialogue meetings, billboards, radio and TV discussions on the positive roles women have played during the conflict, profiling local women role models, and engaging influential men in discussion – traditional, religious and political leaders. It could also involve working with moderate imams on religious education, shown to be a protective factor against radicalisation. Such work should consider risk of backlash and seek to promote positive examples of men and women working for peace and stability together.
- b. Establishing local 'family centres' with female staff only as a place women can turn to for advice and support,** together with local activists and with the support of local authorities. We found that there are no places women can turn to for help outside of the family, and yet women supporting other women is generally considered acceptable.
- c. Supporting and promoting gender-sensitive peace dialogue.** Many Yemeni activists speak positively of "dialogue tents" set up during the National Dialogue Conference (NDC). Such an initiative could be revived in partnership with local women activists and CSOs, integrating a focus on family-related issues and conflicts which are considered acceptable for women to engage in.

Risks of doing harm should be carefully considered in relation to any direct support to women as mediators or in conflict resolution. In some areas, such as where women are capitalising on tribal norms and customs, external support may undermine local legitimacy.

4. Support women's roles in civil society and local governance structures

Even operating under hardline Islamist restrictions, women have some space and agency to support victims of conflict and sustain communities; they are successfully negotiating access with numerous armed groups, and finding creative ways of meeting needs. Preserving and if possible expanding this space to operate is essential. Local governance actors are also open to, and would benefit from, women's greater participation in formal decision-making processes.

We recommend that the UK and other international donors explore supporting women's roles in civil society and in local governance. Options to consider include:

- a. Provide broad-based capacity-building support to civil society,** such as establishing civil society resource centres where CSOs can access IT, training and technical advice on fundraising or implementation; facilitating peer networking between civil society leaders (technology and in-person meetings); and providing small-scale financial and in-kind support where this can be done without risking capture (for example transport or communications solutions). Such initiatives could be implemented by coalitions of INGOs and national NGOs, with programme incentives to include women-led and local CSOs.

b. Provide targeted support to women activists and CSOs. This could include training in peacebuilding and conflict mediation, and peer networking between women activists. Such support would complement the above and could be integrated into a wider civil society support programme or linked to a women, peace and security initiative.

c. Promote inclusive local governance structures through small-scale support to local councils and similar structures, which incentivises the inclusion of women in leadership and decision-making processes. The Social Fund for Development (SFD) has successfully implemented a ‘microfund’ of this kind to some local councils – this could be supported in more stable areas.

5. Strengthen economic recovery and jobs

Greater economic empowerment of women is a common, positive effect of conflict, but in some cases reverses after the re-establishment of peace. Preserving the space for women’s participation in economic activity will require active support. Inclusive economic development will also address conflict drivers in Yemen.³⁷ We recommend that the UK and other donors:

a. Support inclusive economic recovery and livelihoods programming, in partnership with women-led CSOs and with targeted support to women. Unemployment/loss of livelihoods is having a direct impact on GBV as well as contributing to vulnerability to extremism in more unstable areas. Inclusive (men and women, youth, not just IDPs/former combatants) livelihoods programming, incorporating direct or ring-fenced support targeted towards women to sustain positive changes to economic roles, would contribute to stability and gender empowerment in communities worst affected by conflict and deteriorating living conditions.

6. Support women as security actors

In some areas women are playing an active role in local security. Research findings suggest that some communities are supportive of women’s greater engagement in local security, particularly in relation to GBV and family matters. Options for UK support include:

a. Establish and support women, peace and security fora in more stable areas. This could be a multi-agency forum bringing together women activists and civil society leaders with security agencies, humanitarian response and protection agencies, local government and community leaders to address local issues related to women, peace and security. Discussing child and youth security would be a locally appropriate entry point. This has been supported successfully by the UK in Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo and could work in Ma’rib, with potential to expand elsewhere.

b. Support to women in the police: Where present, women police officers could be trained and supported to provide more effective security on the street for women, address family issues and respond to GBV. Small-scale, piloted support where the community seems receptive and policewomen are already present (e.g. Ma’rib city) could sow the seeds for larger scale community safety work. Strategic communications work on women’s roles and GBV could also incorporate positive images of policewomen.

c. As part of longer-term security and justice programming in more stable areas: establish women’s sections in police stations in urban centres with a separate entrance for women, female staff, separate women’s cells and bathrooms. This could be an expansion of the two activity areas above, and linked to local reform of security and justice services where possible, establishment of local Family Centres, shelter homes

³⁷Inclusive economic development is one of five pillars within DFID’s Building Stability Framework (2016), recognising that economic marginalisation is often a significant driver of conflict. This is certainly the case in Yemen, as discussed by Peter Salisbury in National Chaos, Local Order (2017).

and support to women-led CSOs. We know that women rarely report GBV (or other crimes) due to an absence of female officers and fear of further violence from the police, and yet evidence suggests that women, particularly those most marginalised (IDPs, *muhammasheen*), would like to do so.³⁸ This would be an important step forward in encouraging reporting and response to GBV and in strengthening women's participation in local security.

³⁸ See research on public perceptions of the security sector and police in Yemen by the Yemen Polling Center (2013: 67-8): http://www.yemenpolling.org/advocacy/upfiles/YPCPublications_Public-Perceptions-of-the-Security-Sector-and-Police-Work-in-Yemen---January-2013.pdf (10.06.2018) and from 2017 (pp. 115-8): http://www.yemenpolling.org/advocacy/upfiles/YPCPublications_YPC-Data---Perceptions-of-the-Yemeni-public-on-living-conditions-and-security-related-issues---May-2017.pdf (14.06.2018).

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