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CARPO
Center for Applied Research
in Partnership with the Orient

NFDHR
National Foundation
for Development and Humanitarian Response
المؤسسة الوطنية للتنمية والاستجابة الإنسانية

"Women nowadays do anything."

Women's role in conflict, peace and security in Yemen

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About the Authors

Lead author: Marie-Christine Heinze

Marie-Christine Heinze is President of CARPO – Center for Applied Research in Partnership with the Orient. She holds a master's degree in Near and Middle Eastern studies, political science, and International and European law from the University of Bonn and a master's degree in peace and security studies from the University of Hamburg. Her PhD thesis on material culture and socio-political change in Yemen in the field of social anthropology at the University of Bielefeld was successfully completed in 2015. Marie has been working on policy-related issues in Yemen in the fields of gender, security, development and political change since 2008, partnering up with Yemeni organisations and institutions in many of her projects.

Contact: heinze@carpo-bonn.org

Co-author: Marwa Baabbad

Marwa Baabbad is a Yemeni researcher with a specific interest in the security sector and the current conflict in Yemen. She has previously worked as a development professional leading gender, peace and security and youth projects with Saferworld in Yemen, and has recently attained a master's degree in post-war recovery studies from the University of York as a Chevening scholar. Marwa was also a member of the Youth Consultative Group for UNDP's 2016 Arab Human Development Report.

Contact: marwa.baabbad@gmail.com

Acknowledgements

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Acronyms

AQAP	al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula
CARPO	Center for Applied Research in Partnership with the Orient
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
GPC	General People's Congress
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
PTSD	Post-traumatic Stress Disorder
NFDHR	National Foundation for Development and Humanitarian Response
UAE	United Arab Emirates
YPC	Yemen Polling Center

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Introduction

"Before the war, we had a sense of safety and security. We were hopeful that our children would enrol in high quality schools, wear the best of types of clothes, eat the best types of food and go to parks and resorts. Nowadays, we are facing hard times."
Female teacher, Dhu al-Sufal, Ibb.

THE WAR IN YEMEN IS NOW IN ITS THIRD YEAR and many parts of the country are on the brink of famine. The conflict has impacted most of the country and the vast majority of the Yemeni population, and its effects vary from governorate to governorate, from district to district, as well as from one segment of the population to the other. With this in mind, this report looks at the specific ways in which the conflict has affected the lives of women in two governorates in Yemen – Ibb and Aden – and the different ways women understand the roles they can play in conflict transformation and peacebuilding.

This study brings together the findings of qualitative research conducted in Ibb and Aden by the Yemen Polling Center (YPC) in cooperation with the Center for Applied Research in Partnership with the Orient (CARPO) and Saferworld. It looks at the impact of the war on women and their families in these two regions, particularly in terms of security-related issues, and the roles women play or have played in the conflict as well as in the building of security and peace.

Our research reveals that the war has had many complex consequences for Yemeni women, who have been severely affected by the violence that has spread through the country, including in gender-based forms. It has had a socioeconomic impact, as many women have been left responsible for running households and taking care of children by themselves. Displacement, the absence of income and basic services, the impact of the conflict on overall family health, the security and education of their children, and the proliferation of small arms are only some of the issues that have put women under psychological strain and at physical risk.

At the same time, women have been active agents in the political, conflict and security dynamics in both governorates. While only rarely engaged in direct combat, many women have contributed to the 'war effort' in other ways, including preparing and delivering food and water to fighters, nursing the wounded, manning checkpoints, fundraising and encouraging their husbands and sons to fight. On the other hand, women have led and participated in peacebuilding initiatives. They have contributed greatly to humanitarian efforts, particularly through first aid, child protection and psychosocial support within the community. Throughout the conflict, women have also been integral in developing strategies to secure their safety and that of their families, to provide for their children's needs, and to contribute to the well-being of the wider community.

Key findings

■ Women are having a positive impact in sustaining community cohesion and promoting peace at the local level through diverse strategies, including within their families, in humanitarian work, psychosocial support and in civic life. Participants in our research offered a holistic understanding of peace, which they saw as not only being about ending the war but also about ensuring access to basic services, including security.

■ Women's roles in relation to peace and security during this conflict have not always aligned with preconceptions about their roles in Yemeni society. Some women in Aden report that the war has empowered them and made them stronger, more resilient, and more self-reliant than before, highlighting how conflict can affect gender roles in positive as well as negative ways.

■ At the same time, the conflict has also had an isolating impact on women, as a gendered understanding of risk obliges women to stay at home. Women identified several security obstacles to their public participation, including: checkpoints, restrictions by their families due to security concerns, threats posed by armed groups, and the resurgence of restrictive gender norms promoted by conservative groups.

■ Security and livelihoods emerged as women's biggest concerns. The proliferation of weapons and armed groups and the general sense of lawlessness were the most often cited security concerns. Unemployment, inflation, currency depreciation, shortages in essential goods and the threat of losing the head of household were significant worries concerning livelihoods. Women displaced by the war are the most vulnerable and are often excluded from community protection mechanisms.

■ Child protection also emerged as an important area of concern, with participants citing random shootings and unexploded ordinance, recruitment into armed groups, exposure to violent political and religious ideologies, and drugs as worries.

■ Participants reported that the war had negatively affected women's mental health, especially in Ibb. While in Aden the war is seen to be over, people in Ibb feel that they are still experiencing the worst of the conflict.

■ Community cohesion also suffers more strongly in Ibb, where respondents described an increase in divisions due to political and sectarian rhetoric. In contrast, in Aden the conflict has largely been understood as one between 'outsiders' (Ansar Allah/Saleh forces) and the community.

■ Women's understanding of their contributions to peace varied according to their specific experiences. In Aden women's activities such as preparing and delivering food and water for fighters, nursing the wounded, manning checkpoints, and – in a small number of cases – even taking up arms were cited as contributions to peace.

■ Participants identified opportunities for women's participation in peacebuilding, including: campaigns against violence and the bearing of arms; awareness-raising campaigns about community peace and education, particularly engaging youth; promoting the inclusion of women across all levels of decision-making, including in the security sector; psychosocial support within their communities; and child protection initiatives.

■ Local women-led initiatives need direct financial and institutional support, including from the international community in areas not directly related to humanitarian efforts. Capacity-building in technical and practical subjects should also be offered in areas such as psychosocial support, child protection, conflict transformation, and disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR).

Research methodology

All partners jointly undertook research methodology development. At a workshop on 3–4 April 2016, representatives from YPC, Saferworld, NFDHR, Wogood, and the lead author of this report, representing CARPO, came together in Amman, Jordan to agree on research objectives, methodologies, ethics, and tools; to select the research sites and target groups; and to draft an initial set of research questions. More specific research questions for the focus group discussions (FGDs) and individual interviews were jointly developed by the lead author, YPC, and Saferworld on the basis of the initial questions agreed with NFDHR and Wogood.

Research objectives: This research aims to provide insight into three questions:

(1) How have women been affected by the conflict in the research locations?

(2) What roles do women play in conflict transformation and peacebuilding in these two areas?

(3) What opportunities exist for women to play a role in peacebuilding in their areas?

Research sites: The locations selected for this research are al-Mu'alla and al-Mansura districts in Aden and al-Dhihar and Dhu al-Sufal districts in Ibb. The locations were selected according to the following criteria: (i) balance of rural and urban locations; (ii) level of conflict (as it was not possible to conduct research in areas with high intensity of conflict); (iii) presence of internally displaced persons (IDPs), in order to include their perceptions; (iv) varied social makeup and war experiences; and (v) a representative balance of the North and the South of the country.

Methodology and target groups: The research relied on a combination of FGDs and key informant interviews (KIIs). Separate male and female FGDs were conducted, for cultural reasons as well as to allow the space for women to speak without intimidation. Additionally, socioeconomic and educational diversity was taken into account during the formation of the FGDs to ensure that participants with lower educational levels were not intimidated (and the conversation not dominated) by those with higher education.

Six FGDs were conducted in each district: four female-only and two male-only FGDs; the female groups were divided as follows: (1) illiterate and marginalised women; (2) displaced and marginalised women; (3) teachers, health workers, and students; and (4) women leaders, activists, and media representatives.[1] The male group discussions brought together: (1) men from the community; and (2) male community leaders. Additionally, eight KIIs were carried out in each governorate with activists, media representatives, members of local councils, and police officers.

Ethical considerations: The research team provided the participants with background information on the research topic, the researchers, and the organisations implementing the work. It was also made clear to them that they had the right to stop the interview and leave the room at any point if they chose to; they also were given consent forms to sign to take part in the interview. In addition, each focus group had the same gender facilitator to moderate the discussion.

Timeframe: The research was implemented between 20 November and 22 December 2016. The transcripts for all FGDs and KIIs were subsequently translated into English and – together with discussion summaries of the most important results to a set of questions pre-defined by CARPO and Saferworld – sent in both languages to the lead author for analysis. From 22–23 February 2017, the partner organisations (except YPC, whose staff was unable to travel due to security concerns) met in Amman for a collaborative data analysis workshop. The lead author presented the initial research

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1 Throughout the report, groups (3) and (4) are sometimes referred to as 'higher status groups' to point to differences between the responses in the various FGDs. This 'higher status' generally refers to the fact that these women have higher education levels and positions in civil society and the media, *and* have not been displaced.

findings to be discussed in detail with the Yemeni civil society representatives present. These discussions provided context for the points raised by the research participants. This report is based on the research findings and the context knowledge provided by the Yemeni colleagues at our workshop in Amman.

Box 1. Context Aden

The southern port city of Aden was the former capital of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (also referred to as South Yemen) until unification with the North in 1990. Since 2007, it has been the centre of the widespread Southern Movement, which initially demanded reforms from the regime in Sana'a and later began calling for secession ('independence') from the North. In March 2015, Aden experienced brutal and destructive warfare after the forces of Ansar Allah (also commonly referred to as 'Houthis') and of former President Ali Abdallah Saleh (hereafter referred to as Ansar Allah/Saleh forces) entered the city. The city was 'liberated' by local resistance fighters with the help of the Saudi-led coalition in July 2015 (throughout the FGDs and interviews, references to 'after the war' refer to the period after July 2015). Since then, Adenis have suffered from a city-wide security vacuum that has been exacerbated by conflict between various security forces, some of which have since been set up with the help of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). While Adenis were united against a common enemy in 2015, competition over control of the city and its various districts has since begun to divide the population. By November 2016, the recruitment of men into various armed forces in Aden also resulted in an increased presence of armed men from the surrounding governorates of Aden (al-Dhali', Shabwa, and Abyan), where tribal and regional affiliations play a stronger role.

The two research sites in Aden, the districts al-Mansura and al-Mu'alla, differ in several aspects: al-Mu'alla's population size (50,000 inhabitants) is less than half of al-Mansura's (115,000 inhabitants).[2] During the 2015 war, al-Mu'alla experienced heavy destruction of houses and the displacement of a large number of its citizens within its own area. In al-Mansura, a lower degree of violence resulted in fewer houses being destroyed; al-Mansura thus received more IDPs from surrounding areas. After the war, however, al-Mansura experienced a greater infiltration of armed groups and a worsening security situation, compared to al-Mu'alla.
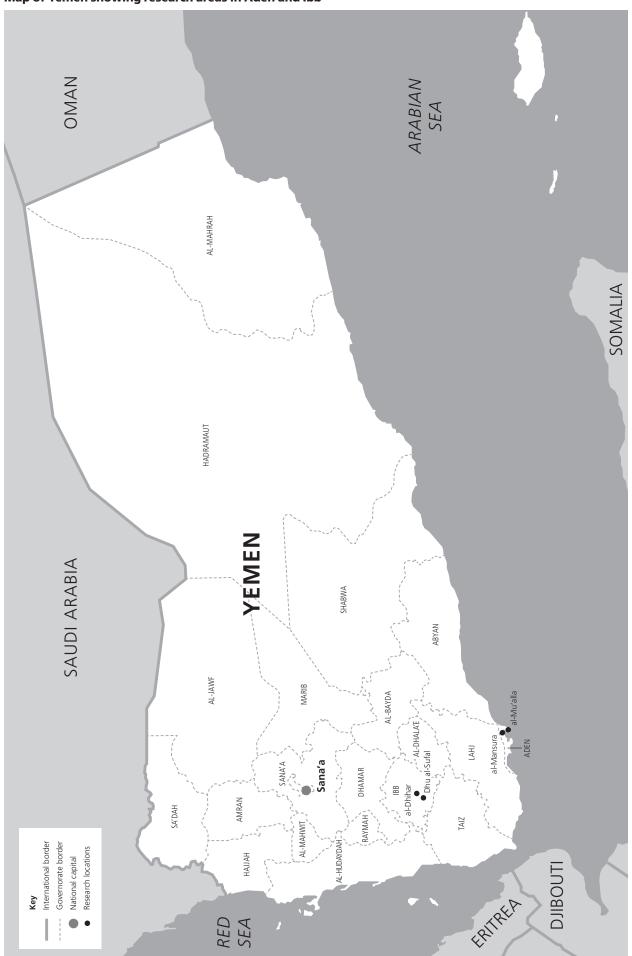

Box 2. Context Ibb

The governorate of Ibb is located in the lower highlands of Yemen and is known as Yemen's 'greenest governorate', because annual rainfall provides excellent conditions for agriculture. A consequence of this is that there are many land conflicts. Politically, Ibb is part of what was Northern Yemen before unification, and the population is considered to be very conservative. Since 2015, Ibb has nominally been under Ansar Allah/Saleh forces control, and resistance to their militias has mainly come in the form of ambushes and hit-and-run attacks, mainly between Islah affiliates and Ansar Allah. The Hizb al-Islah (Reform Party, with close ties to the Muslim Brotherhood), which is one of the main rivals of Ansar Allah, continues to wield strong influence among the governorate's population. Due to its geographical location, Ibb is directly affected by the ongoing battle in Ta'iz. Ibb receives large numbers of IDPs fleeing from Ta'iz and also supplies fighters and other support to both sides of the conflict in Ta'iz City. Because of the large number of IDPs, the humanitarian situation in the governorate has deteriorated significantly. In general, the governorate is considered to be politically tense, although local *shaykhs* and community leaders have committed to not letting outright warfare enter the governorate's territory, while the various warring parties (Ansar Allah, Hizb al-Islah, General People's Congress, al-Qaeda) pursue their own respective agendas. The resulting fissures in the social fabric of the governorate are tearing families apart.

The two research sites in Ibb, al-Dhihar and Dhu al-Sufal districts, differ in several aspects. While both have a similar population size,[3] al-Dhihar district is an urban community situated in Ibb City, whereas Dhu al-Sufal is a rural district on the south-western governorate bordering Ta'iz. Dhu al-Sufal is also known as 'the gate to Ta'iz', and has consequently received a much larger number of IDPs than al-Dhihar. Due to widespread poverty and the large number of marginalised people in Dhu al-Sufal, the district is not only much more heavily dependent on humanitarian aid than al-Dhihar, but it also faces stronger pressure as boys and men are recruited to fight in Ta'iz.

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2 Figures based on 2004 census with population growth estimates at the governorate level (data provided by YPC as the website of the Central Statistical Organization of Yemen is no longer accessible).

3 Al-Dhihar's population is approximately 154,500 and Dhu al-Sufal's population is approximately 163,000 (source as footnote 2).

Map of Yemen showing research areas in Aden and Ibb

OMAN

ARABIAN SEA

SOMALIA

AL-MAHRAH

HADRAMAUT

SAUDI ARABIA

YEMEN

SHABWA

ABYAN

AL-JAWF

MARIB

AL-BAYDA

al-Mu'alla

AL-DHALAE

LAHJ

al-Mansura

ADEN

SANA'A

Sana'a

DHAMAR

IBB

Dhu al-Sufal

al-Dhihar

SA'DAH

AMRAN

RAYMAH

TAIZ

AL-MAHWIT

AL-HUDAYDAH

HAJJAH

RED SEA

ERITREA

DJIBOUTI

Key

International border
Governorate border
National capital
Research locations

This map is intended for illustrative purposes only. Saferworld takes no position on whether this representation is legally or politically valid.

2

Main issues affecting women in Aden and Ibb

Security-related threats

UNSURPRISINGLY, SECURITY-RELATED THREATS emerged as a primary concern affecting families in both Ibb and Aden, with the proliferation and misuse of arms emerging as a common worry across all locations; however, specific issues differed between the two governorates.

In Aden, particularly in al-Mu'alla, the proliferation of arms (exacerbated by the dropping of weapons from Saudi-led coalition aeroplanes to arm resistance fighters) in areas that had previously not seen such widespread possession has had negative consequences. Respondents highlighted that the influx of (male) fighters from neighbouring areas has contributed to the proliferation of dangerous practices such as celebratory gunfire at weddings.[4] Some also highlighted the increase in accidents from men playing with weapons,[5] and many mentioned a growing fear of random shootings and gunfire – with use of small arms and light weapons and also heavier ordinance.

There are historical and cultural reasons for why arms proliferation was cited as a concern in Aden. In areas in Yemen where carrying weapons has been common for many decades, established rules and norms used to regulate practices of weapons usage.[6] In cities like Aden, where there is no cultural history of carrying weapons, there are no established rules, and therefore more accidents. A twenty-five year old woman from al-Mu'alla explained:

"Unlike other communities, we in Aden had not been accustomed to seeing armed men in the streets. I lived in Sana'a for a while and I used to see armed men in the street, but that was not the case here in Aden where I felt safer. In the pre-war time, only military soldiers or policemen were seen carrying guns in Aden. In the present time, you see armed men in the street, in the marketplace, on the bus and elsewhere."

The fear of random shooting is not just a concern for the safety of women themselves, but also a major worry when it comes to the safety of all family members. For instance, some women in the FGDs brought up the fear of stray bullets hitting their children while they were going to school or playing outside.[7] Closely linked to the fear of being caught in a random shooting is the fear of coming across unexploded ordinance.

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4 According to interviews conducted by the lead author in Aden in 2009, bearing arms had become more prevalent in the city in the decade before the war. However, they were far from ubiquitous in public spaces, as used to be the case in the North.

5 For example, one participant described witnessing armed men trying to get the attention of a waiter in a restaurant by shooting in the air.

6 These rules have weakened for various reasons over the last decade. For more on arms bearing cultural practices, including norms and regulations on gun usage, see Heinze (2014).

7 Where people, in particular IDPs, live in make-shift huts, bullets are feared to go through the roofs and walls of the premises, posing a threat to people indoors as well as outdoors.

A woman in al-Mansura explained how her siblings were exposed to these risks:

"After the war, I have been advising my younger sisters against taking unexploded explosive ordinance. I did so having seen them bringing home casings of ammunition and rocket shrapnel, mistaking them for toys. One day, my little brother brought home an object resembling a hand grenade. Had it exploded, what the aftermath would have been! We keep on advising them, saying such objects are not toys and they may cause death. We warn them against taking whatever metal object they find on the ground."

Other security concerns for women in both districts in Aden were harassment, particularly on public transport, and possible abduction. Many participants said this potential threat came from bus drivers, the young men who collected the fare, as well as fellow male passengers. A twenty-four year old woman recounted her experience:

"Once I was on a bus driving from al-Mu'alla to the university in Khor Maksar and the driver seemed to be a political security officer. From his appearance, he did not look as if he was from Aden. His eyes were reddish and his appearance was horrifying. I had just YR150 (Yemeni rial) in my pocket, and when other people got out, I thought that I had to go on foot for the rest of the distance to the college. As I was trying to get out, he drove faster while I was knocking at the seat for him to stop, but he refused to stop. Another person driving a land cruiser approached us and asked the bus driver to stop for me to get out. He helped me avoid a potential threat to my safety."

Other security-related threats highlighted by women in Aden included: 1) theft and robbery, specifically incidents on public transport, banditry on roads, and house break-ins by men and women (many of whom pretend to be beggars); 2) the presence of AQAP (al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula), and associated bombings and explosions at security checkpoints; 3) the lack of a special prison for women,[8] as detention centres for women have been used to imprison AQAP suspects – thus leaving female prisoners exposed to harassment and sexual assault; 4) a general fear of armed men, given the spread of arms and the increasing number of armed groups with unknown affiliations; 5) the weakness of formal security structures, contributing to a general sense of lawlessness.

These security-related concerns paint a vivid picture of the general security situation in Aden, a city where various armed groups loyal to different leaders, tribes, regions, and ideologies all compete for control in the city. This struggle for power, combined with assassination attempts, suicide attacks at checkpoints and army bases, and a general sense of lawlessness, indicates the challenges facing Adeni residents since Ansar Allah/Saleh-affiliated forces were forced out of the city.

With both a sense of humour and dismay, one female participant of a focus group in al-Mu'alla spoke about the effects of living in such an unpredictable security situation:

"The assassinations used to be mostly carried out at night. But, more recently, they started to take place even during the daytime. The assassins have confused us: we don't know what the time is!"

In Ibb, security issues facing women differed from those in Aden in several aspects. While participants also mentioned the problem of arms proliferation in their discussions, the sources of insecurity in both al-Dhihar and Dhu al-Sufal were not so easily identifiable. Instead, participants reported generalised feelings of insecurity, attributed mainly to fear of air strikes,[9] "armed people", increased incidents of "banditry, murder and thefts", and the growing sense that people are becoming "more hostile" to one another. As an example, participants mentioned that blood feuds and revenge attacks

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8 According to YPC research conducted in January 2017 in the framework of its EU-funded project on 'Enhancing legal security, arrest procedures, and detention conditions of women and girls', female prisoners in Aden are currently held in the building of the security administration. They are not put in the central prison of the governorate as al-Qaeda militants are currently being held in what was previously the women's section of the central prison. (The results of this research will be published in the coming months and we are grateful to YPC for giving us permission to use some of them here.)

9 People mentioned their fear of airstrikes despite there not having been any in Ibb since 2015, and them having been quite sparse compared to other Yemen governorates.

were becoming "more complicated". Participants also spoke about increased "abductions" of women and children, and increased verbal and physical harassment and intimidation of women, including at checkpoints.

One female focus group participant from al-Dhihar explained the situation as:

"Now, we live in a state of lawlessness: no security, no protection and no functional law enforcement authorities. A person may be shot dead for a trivial thing. The security situation doesn't look like it did in the past. Now, there are informal groups behaving as if they were law enforcement authorities. These groups have power, and their power is the law. They use force against whoever disagrees with them or criticises their behaviour."

Respondents in Ibb, more so than in Aden, also noted an increased climate of political and sectarian divisions within the community. The prevalence of this in Ibb, compared to Aden, is partly due to the conflict in Aden being mostly seen as one where an 'outside' force has invaded the community, whereas in Ibb the local community itself has been divided between warring factions. Respondents were concerned about the impact of these divisions on community, and even familial, relationships. In al-Dhihar, and also to a lesser extent in Dhu al-Sufal, many respondents voiced concerns about weakening social and interfamilial relations, not only as a result of displacement but also due to the divisive and hateful political and sectarian rhetoric. In Ibb, many of these rifts are ideological, and can tear communities and families apart. In Aden, in contrast, current rifts are primarily geographical, mainly focused on areas under the control of different militias and security units, and therefore less destructive to family relationships.

Within this context, women who are marginalised, and particularly those who are internally displaced, often face additional threats to their security and safety. Women IDPs highlighted the threat of homelessness and poor living conditions, the psychological impacts of the displacement, the division of families, and the interruption of children's education. In both districts in Ibb, women IDPs noted that they suffered from social exclusion, verbal abuse, and sexual abuse, among other concerns. A woman who had been displaced from Ta'iz to al-Dhihar observed that:

"[The host community in Ibb] view *[those of us from Ta'iz] as being disruptive or impolite. Some locals disapprove of us; they criticise us, blaming us for the destruction of Ta'iz. I had never imagined that the people of Ibb would be criticising us that way."*

A consequence of social exclusion is the lack of access to community protection mechanisms. Displaced women explained that with their displacement came their removal from their communities' protection mechanisms, thus making them an easy target for abuse in foreign communities where protection mechanisms do not extend to them.[10]

Security-related threats have had an impact on women's capacity to participate in public life. As noted in a 2013 Saferworld study,[11] security threats pose a barrier to women's public participation, as they are understood in light of the gender norms that define women as more vulnerable than men. In that sense, it is commonly thought that women ought to be protected from security-related threats, even more so in times of conflict. Women are often subject to family protection mechanisms, consisting of limiting their movements outside the house, which has a direct effect on their ability to occupy public space and influence public life. In that sense, the current conflict in

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10 A recent study published by Oxfam et al. (2016: 25–26) confirms this observation and elaborates on the consequences of such violence: "OCHA also noted a 70% increase of GBV incidents between March and September 2015. These included sexual violence, domestic violence, early marriage and trading sex to meet basic survival needs. Recent data estimates that 52,000 women are likely to suffer from such incidents, and require responsive critical medical care as well as immediate and long-term psychosocial support. The lack of such services, as well as a lack of safe refuges for victims of abuse, compounds the problem, as victims may face stigma and rejection from their families and communities. Cultural norms and stigma related to sexual violence further discourage survivors from reporting such crimes and from seeking necessary medical and psychosocial services."

11 A report published by Saferworld (2013: 16–22) showed the negative effect of security threats on women's participation in public life in Yemen, Egypt, and Libya. The current level of threat in Yemen compared to 2013 therefore suggests that these dynamics may have been reinforced.

Yemen is having an isolating impact on some women, who are seeing their opportunities for public engagement diminished as a result of the threats posed by on-going fighting, proliferation of weapons, the presence of armed groups, and a general sense of lawlessness.

One female undergraduate student in pharmacology from al-Mu'alla explained:

"In the pre-war time, I used to get into the bus even at 9:30 p.m. or 10:00 p.m. to any area in Aden without feeling worried. I had a sense of safety. [...] Nowadays, I never get into the bus at night. I feel worried."

Threats to livelihoods

The deterioration of living conditions was highlighted as a priority issue affecting women in all locations.[12] At the time the FGDs were carried out (November–December 2016), one of the main concerns mentioned in Aden was the suspension of salary payments as a result of the depletion of the Central Bank's reserves and its relocation from Sana'a to Aden in September 2016. This resulted in no government salaries being paid, which particularly affected larger cities like Aden, where many people are on the government payroll and have no secondary source of income.

The non-payment of salaries, combined with a lack of job opportunities, price hikes, and currency depreciation,[13] put many Adeni families in serious financial difficulties. Even those who worked for the private sector were affected, with many businesses shutting down temporarily as a result of the unrest, which cost many men and women their jobs. Participants reported that women have been hit by unemployment particularly hard; many businesses employing women were destroyed or stopped operating. This situation was further compounded by the security vacuum restricting their ability to move freely in the city to get to work, as many families prevent women from going out in order to protect them from the conflict and lawlessness. These dynamics were exacerbated by the rising living costs due to the interruption of basic services such as water and electricity, and the shortages in petrol, propane gas, and food.

The war has also increased economic pressures on families who have lost their male head of household or primary income-earner. Participants reported an increase in the number of female-headed households as a result of the conflict (either due to death or disability). In order to generate income, many women have started home-based businesses such as catering for events and shops, making natural beauty products, and opening in-house beauty salon services.

Because of the agricultural nature of the area, less people are on government payrolls in Ibb compared to those in Aden.[14] Nonetheless, as in Aden, they suffered just as much from price hikes and high housing rents, a drop in income, and a lack of job opportunities. IDP communities in Ibb were again more acutely affected by these threats, having lost their jobs and homes and having to find reasonable accommodation in areas where rental prices have soared due to demand.

The deteriorating economic situation has also made women particularly vulnerable to increased gender-based violence. For example, because living standards have fallen so significantly since the outbreak of the conflict in 2015, some families feel that they have no choice but to force their girls into early marriages, in order to reduce the financial hardship on the family and to minimise the burden of protecting another female

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12 This is in line with findings of the much broader study by Oxfam et al. (2016: 26), according to which 37 per cent of respondents were worried that they might not have enough income to meet basic needs, 31 per cent reported difficulties finding employment, and 16 per cent mentioned the inability to move around safely.

13 According to a recent study (Nasser and Harper, 2017), "the Yemeni rial (YR) lost more than half of its value relative to the United States dollar (USD)" between early 2015 and November 2016; "from November last year until early February 2017 the rial saw a slight gradual depreciation from YR320 to YR330 against the dollar in local market trading". This currency depreciation, which resulted in the increase of the price of wheat and other important foodstuffs, has significantly limited the purchasing power of families. On the decrease of personal income since the beginning of the war, see also Oxfam et al. 2016: 20–24.

14 Additionally, Ibb may have been more economically resilient compared to Aden because of its large diaspora, meaning that local residents could fall back on money transactions received from family members living abroad.

member in a conflict-affected setting. In Ibb, some women pointed to a rise in prostitution as an outcome of the deteriorating economic situation.[15]

Threats to physical and mental health and well-being

In both research areas in Aden, participants highlighted exposure to diseases such as dengue fever and cholera, which have increased since the outbreak of conflict, as the accumulation of garbage and damage to sewage systems has led to the spread of pandemics. Exposure to diseases was also a commonly identified threat by IDP groups, particularly those living in small, enclosed, and crowded places where sanitation systems are basic, water is limited, and public toilets are shared between a large group of people.

The threat of diseases was of particular concern in al-Mu'alla, where hospitals had closed down during the conflict due to the intensity of clashes and poorer areas had problems with sewage and sanitation. Lack of effective government services was a problem prior to the conflict; however, participants noted that the situation has worsened exponentially since 2015. Ruqayya al-Zahri, the chair of the Family Centre for Development in Aden, pointed out that the situation, as of late 2016, was much worse than after Aden had been 'liberated' from the Ansar Allah/Saleh forces in July 2015.

Al-Zahri added that healthcare costs have increasingly become a barrier to access: pharmacies in public hospitals used to provide affordable basic medicines. However, medicines are now unavailable in public healthcare services and need to be purchased from private pharmacies, which many people cannot afford. As a result, al-Zahri explained, those who cannot afford private healthcare are often forced to seek alternative medical treatment: "People go to the herbalist and use old herbal medicines, which may or may not be successful. You find that epidemics have spread, diseases have spread."

Participants in Ibb highlighted similar issues around quality and access to healthcare. In both districts in Ibb, men and women expressed fears around the spread of diseases, poor hygiene and sanitation, shortages in medicines, and deteriorating healthcare services as major threats facing them. In al-Dhihar, there were reports of miscarriages as a result of anxiety about airstrikes, and a lack of medical support and maternity care, which could lead to serious health risks for both mothers and infants.

While physical healthcare was commonly listed as a concern, both men and women just as frequently mentioned psychological and mental health as a significant issue facing all communities. In Aden's al-Mansura, psychological problems as a result of anxiety were frequently mentioned, particularly in the higher status female focus groups. People said they regularly experienced symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), such as re-experiencing distressing events through flashbacks, having nightmares, and being short-tempered. Furthermore, parents were anxious about the security and well-being of their children, which was highlighted as a core component of the psychological stress women face in Ibb.

Mental health was often mentioned in both districts in Ibb, where the psychological effects of the war on families, particularly women, have resulted in fear, stress, and anxiety. Women in al-Dhihar (more than in other areas) mentioned domestic violence, and many also referred to an increase in marital disagreements and family problems as a result of financial and conflict-related stress. In an individual interview, Hayat Ibrahim al-Kayna'i, chair of the Yemeni Women's Union in al-Dhihar, explained this phenomenon as:

15 Ibb is also known as a destination for 'tourist marriage' for men coming to Yemen from the Gulf. Families in Ibb marry their daughters to wealthy men believing this is a real marriage. The men come for 1–2 months to get married and have sex and then subsequently divorce the girls.

"In the past, we could hardly imagine that we would receive 95[16] divorces (filed by men and women) in one month. This increased whether at the level of the family, social relationships among relatives, neighbours… This reflects the psychology. People are stressed and, thus, irritable due to the current situation. This psychology affected the relations among the people."

Changing family dynamics regarding relations, interactions, and shifting gender roles also play a part in this, as some participants expressed the view that women were not trusting the head of the household to protect and provide for the family according to past societal norms. Additionally, men felt that they were not as respected by their wives as they had been, and some felt a loss in their position in the household. There is early evidence that the conflict has affected the roles and expectations of women and men in the family, as men perceive having lost their traditional role providing protection to women.

In al-Mu'alla, the psychological effects of the ongoing conflict were mentioned as an issue that affected women more than men, particularly anxiety associated with the fear of losing a family member in the conflict. This is perhaps partly explained by the fact that, traditionally in peace time, women were expected to provide the emotional support for families and communities while men offered physical and financial protection. In times of war, when men are not able to perform their expected role, women find themselves having to take on the role of protecting and providing security. Hence, they are facing a double burden – emotional support as well as physical and financial protection – which is why the possibility of losing the male head of household is a great source of anxiety. Although stress and anxiety have been normalised as the majority of the Yemeni population have experienced years of conflict and uncertainty, there is a growing need for psychological support clinics and funds, as the issue has the potential of having a negative long-lasting effect. Some female-led organisations have already recognised the importance of psychological support needs and have begun to address this through the provision of local services, as demonstrated in the case study in Box 3.

As expected, IDP women faced a greater sense of concern over their physical and mental health and well-being. For internally displaced families, the poor living conditions resulting from a lack of resources, combined with high costs of living, price hikes, the unavailability of basic services, and the end to some of the food and medical assistance they had been receiving from international NGOs, were a source of ongoing stress. A female teacher displaced from Ta'iz, now living in Dhu al-Sufal, drew attention to the psychological impacts of the conflict:

"Our psychological condition has changed upside down. We have never had a sense of stability. As the war is taking longer, we have become uncertain about when it would be possible to return home. We were displaced in the early days of the war and we lost our jobs. Those who were employed with the government have been without a salary for several months while those who were employed with the private sector have lost their jobs. How can they provide for their displaced families? We don't know whether things will get worse or better in the days to come, which is why we are extremely anxious."

16   The respondent highlighted the figure of "95 divorce cases in one month", but it was not possible to verify this number.

Box 3: Case study. Psychological support efforts in Aden

Although the local response in Aden has tended to focus on immediate and basic humanitarian needs, the Aden-based Wogood organisation recognised the need for psychosocial support services and has worked to coordinate with local mental health practitioners to provide voluntary psychological support to women and men affected by the war. The psychological support project was implemented in two phases. The first phase was implemented immediately after the withdrawal of the Ansar Allah/Saleh forces from Aden. During this period, the response was focused on addressing the immediate post-war trauma people were facing, as many had experienced intense levels of violence, lost loved ones, fled their homes, or had their houses destroyed by the conflict. The second phase of the project took place a few months after the conflict, and sought to address lingering issues. During this period, the number of people seeking consultation sessions doubled. War trauma, PTSD, fear of landmines, and proliferation of weapons compounded the psychological needs of the Adeni population. The organisation provided a total of 275 45-minute individual support sessions for 143 men/boys and 132 women/girls. Six group sessions were also conducted, working with women and men separately.
In addition, the project also succeeded in impacting hard-to-reach beneficiaries, such as those with disability issues or security concerns, through field visits. The psychological support enabled people to recreate daily routines and a semblance of normality after experiencing trauma because of the conflict. They were able to go back to work or re-engage in social activities that they used to enjoy before the war.

"Wogood has done the work we can do with zero funding, however, more work needs to be done on the issue as what we did was not enough, and I urge donors to provide funding for such projects to help us improve our services as they are crucial to the community healing and peace", said Maha Awadh, Chair, Wogood.

Concerns about the safety and security of children

When asked about the impact of the war on children, respondents cited similar risks to those faced by adults, including the inability to meet basic needs, general security concerns, as well as the lack of access to – or poor quality of – healthcare services. In addition, in both Ibb and Aden, respondents cited access to education as an issue facing children and young people (those with greater education and income were more likely to highlight access to education as a concern). Regular disruption and interruption of education is common due to the security situation. Also, in Aden, some participants noted that access to education for girls was restricted following the 'liberation' of the city from the Ansar Allah/Saleh forces, as some Islamist groups in the city tried to shut down and restrict the operation of some schools.

The spread of drugs and the threat of young people – especially boys – being exposed to drugs was highlighted as a concern in both districts in Aden, but particularly in al-Mu'alla. Although not new, participants noticed an increase in the number of drug users in the city since the outbreak of the conflict. According to analysis workshop participants, drugs prevalent in Aden are *qat*, hashish, *shamma* (chewed like tobacco and said to make you relaxed and high) as well as hallucination pills. Within Aden, al-Mansura was known as the source of many of these drugs until "the extremists put an end to this".[17] Drugs were not mentioned as an issue in Ibb, but workshop participants pointed out that cannabis is sometimes grown as a cash crop in the governorate.

In Ibb, both male and female FGD participants voiced concerns about the exposure of children to violence and extremist ideologies. "Children have been influenced by the conflict; they play with gun-shaped toys and behave like fighters in the battlefield", said one female participant in an FGD in al-Dhihar. A male participant from an FGD in Dhu al-Sufal responded that the "current security situation makes us extremely concerned about our children. We fear they may fall victim to the ongoing armed conflict or join any of the parties to the conflict. In both cases, they would be victims". Moreover, another female participant from an FGD in Dhu al-Sufal said:

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[17] It is unclear the degree to which this is fact or simply a perception, as no statistics are available that measure whether drugs availability in Aden has increased or decreased with the advent of extremist groups.

"A majority of the women are more worried about their children being recruited by any of the warring parties, particularly after they heard that many children had gone to fight. When children go to school, their mothers go anxious fearing they may be taken from school or on their way home and sent to the battlefield to fight."

Similarly, a participant in an FGD in al-Mansura voiced his concern about the exposure children in Aden had both to drugs and extremist groups:

"Some families turn a blind eye to their children being late for home. There is a need for NGOs to play a role in the education and protection of children. We need to spend thousands of riyals on children at this age through educational NGOs rather than allow them an opportunity to join extremist groups or drug traffickers, particularly as the surroundings play a role in how a child behaves. The other thing is that poverty is [to be] blamed for juvenile delinquency. Because fathers don't have money to provide for their children, their kids tend to join extremist groups or drug traffickers. Nowadays, wherever you go, you find beggars who complain of being unable to provide for their children. Even in mosques, you see beggars."

Finally, participants in both Ibb and Aden explained how already vulnerable children are now increasingly susceptible to exploitation and abuse, particularly for economic reasons. Participants in al-Mansura spoke of a case where individuals had employed child beggars to beg on their behalf.

3

Women's contributions to peace

WHILE WOMEN HAVE SUFFERED throughout the most recent conflict in Yemen, they are also agents for change. This report seeks to highlight the ways women contributed to peace and security during the conflict. During the course of the research, it quickly became clear that perceptions of women's participation, as well as activities undertaken by women, differed considerably from one governorate to another. Therefore, this section looks at women's participation in Aden and in Ibb separately.

Aden

In Aden, women played an active role during the 2015 war against the Ansar Allah/Saleh forces. The people of Aden were largely united against what they saw as 'the Northern invasion'. Because the war was considered by local residents as the fight against an oppressive force attacking the city from outside, women's war effort contributions were considered by focus group participants in both districts of Aden as making their communities safer and more peaceful. According to participants in FGDs in al-Mansura and al-Mu'alla, women played active roles in supporting the war effort by preparing and delivering food and water to the battlefield, by nursing wounded fighters and civilians, by fundraising to support the wounded, and by encouraging their children to join the armed struggle to defend their city.

In some cases, women took up a more active role in the conflict through smuggling arms to resistance forces, manning checkpoints (primarily to help search women and cars), and in some rare cases taking up arms themselves. A participant in an FGD in al-Mu'alla, for example, recalled the story of a woman who took up arms during the war:

"A woman from al-Tawahi district has been fighting since the war began. When the Huthis first entered the district, she had to flee to al-Burayqa district. Her son was killed from missile shrapnel wound to his head in al-Mansura district. Now, his mother is c arrying a gun."

A woman from al-Mansura added:

"I saw a woman firing at the resistance groups [fighting against the Ansar Allah/Saleh forces]. *When her son discovered that, he threatened his mother saying he would take her to the resistance-controlled prison. He asked her: 'Why do you fire at the members of the resistance?' She replied: 'I earn USD 100 for every artillery round I fire. With this money, I can feed you and your brothers.' He then said 'Let's all rather die than fire at people. The way you behave will have a negative impact on the morale of the resistance groups.'"*

While it is not possible to verify these stories, they are an indication that women in Aden have – at least in a small number of cases – taken up arms during the conflict. This is not a new phenomenon, as Adeni women are known to have fought against British occupation in the 1960s.

Women have also been active in coordinating relief and humanitarian efforts in Aden. Examples highlighted by participants include mapping IDPs and war-affected households (especially in al-Mansura) and the distribution of relief assistance to vulnerable cases (including IDPs). While listing all local, national, and international organisations involved in relief activities is beyond the scope of this paper, some of the more frequently mentioned groups were: 'For Aden' and 'Aden Rescue', both of which are still active in humanitarian relief (mentioned particularly in al-Mansura); Wogood for Human Security, which is active in human rights and development areas (mentioned particularly in al-Mu'alla); the national Yemeni Women's Union; several regional organisations, such as the UAE Red Crescent Society; and international organisations, such as the UNICEF, *Médecins Sans Frontières*, and the International Committee of the Red Cross. Apart from these organisations, focus group participants also mentioned the support received from family members, individual female and male activists, as well as from business owners who financially assisted certain initiatives.

Such efforts were not without their challenges. Participants reported a number of obstacles to their participation, including lack of support from the community, controls at checkpoints, and threats or restrictions imposed by certain groups or conservative Islamists, who worked to limit the public participation of women. Khadija Salim bin Burayk, chair of the Raseel Foundation for Development and Media in al-Mu'alla, recounted some problems she faced in implementing activities in the city:

"Last year, we had the problem of how a group of young men and women could go to schools to provide psychological support and entertainment for children through songs, dances, sketches, and plays. The goal of these activities was to show ways to promote peace, stay safe, and reject violence. However, some extremist groups were obstructing our work. They denied us entry to one of al-Mu'alla parks, namely Qataban Park. A problem occurred between the youth and the extremists, because they did not allow Raseel group to enter the park to provide psychological support and entertainment to the children. Moreover, they broke into our office, broke the door down, and entered the office."

Women activists also reported experiencing intimidation and threats from parties in conflict owing to the peacebuilding work they do. The case study of working with child soldiers, outlined in Box 4, sheds light on the complex political environment many women must navigate in pursuit of peace.

Box 4. Case study: Reintegrating child soldiers in Aden

"I was doing my routine check on prisons to document the human rights status of prisoners, and when I saw the number of children in the prisons I decided to do something about it", explains Warda bin Sumayt, co-founder and Head of Prisoners Relief Initiative in Aden.

But Warda did not have much training on how to deal with child soldiers, nor did her organisation have funding to do so. Still, they worked with what little resources they had to develop a project targeting child prisoners between the ages of 10 and 17. In doing so, they faced a number of challenges from the 'Popular Resistance' in Aden, members of the community, and also by prison guards themselves. For instance, the children were considered 'criminals' who had attacked and killed people in Aden, and the Prisoners Relief Initiative had to work hard to present the children as 'victims' in need of support and rehabilitation.

Once they were able to negotiate access, the team spent time with the children, earning their respect and trust, and soon began to offer educational sessions on concepts such as diversity, social cohesion, and acceptance. They also organised drawing sessions to help the children express their feelings and process the trauma they had experienced.

The team received several threats from armed groups in Aden as a result of this work. Some accused them of being Ansar Allah supporters and of trying to advance the Ansar Allah agenda. Nonetheless, the group continued working and managed to organise their efforts with the 'Popular Resistance' to ensure that the children were not included in any prisoner exchange lists. As a result, many of these children were safely returned to their families.

> Such examples of local peacebuilding initiatives led by women are evidence that there is much that can be done even with limited resources and training, and that often women face resistance and threats in the work they do.

Despite these obstacles, focus group participants generally considered Adenis to be open to women's participation in civil society activities, and pointed out several opportunities through which women could contribute positively to their communities. Participants highlighted that women could play an important role in promoting school enrolment, and raising awareness about various security threats, including the risks of drugs and bearing arms. Participants also highlighted the importance of including youth in these campaigns, in order to engage young people.

Beyond awareness-raising and relief efforts, some participants in Aden discussed the important role women could play in security provision. For example, Karim Abd al-Majid, chair of the al-Mu'alla local council, highlighted how women should be more involved in Aden's security forces:

"Women can do many things, including policing jobs, in al-Mu'alla. They can create a woman's police division within the district's police department, and resolve all women-related issues."

When asked what kind of support women would require in their activism, focus group participants emphasised a number of relevant issues. Primarily, they felt there was a need for support from families and the wider community for women establishing their own organisations, as well as financial and other material support from the government, businesses, and other organisations for the implementation of projects and campaigns.

Despite the Internet in Aden being, in the words of a participant, "as slow as a turtle", many respondents pointed to the role social media could play in enhancing women's participation. Platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook were mentioned more often than traditional media (radio and TV) as a source for sharing news, opportunities, or socialising. When asked how the media could contribute to addressing the security concerns of people in this area, particularly those of women, children, and minority groups, the editor-in-chief of the *Aden al-Ghad* newspaper, Ali Haydarah, explained the role the paper has played in raising awareness about security issues:

"I am talking to you as a journalist… personally speaking, we worked on a number of issues that threaten the security and stability of the area. We worked on a number of press reports. We met many survivors. We conducted a survey measuring the success of security institutions. We went to the muhammasheen[18] *area, and met a number of female victims of violence as well as children whose rights had been violated. The media had a great and positive role in this issue. We will go on… we will exert ourselves so that we have a supportive role in promoting security in our area, especially when it comes to issues related to women."*

As well as these communication avenues, participants also pointed out the importance of school meetings and symposiums, and the magnifying effects of awareness-raising activities, such as lectures at mosques or the distribution of brochures and advertisements.

It is worth noting that in both districts in Aden, some of the women who were among the more educated and higher-income cohort of respondents said they felt that in some ways the war had empowered women, making them stronger, more resilient, and more self-reliant than before. "After the war", said a woman in the FGD that brought together civil society activists and media representatives in al-Mansura, "women have become stronger and more able to have a presence in politics. They have contributed

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18 *Muhammasheen* refers to a marginalised community in Yemen, whose members face different types of discrimination. Historically, this discrimination is a result of widespread perceptions that they are descended from servants and that their ancestors have come from Africa, and that they are therefore not 'real Yemenis'.

significantly to the mapping survey of affected households; they have played key roles in hospitals and in the street". Echoing this, a female civil society activist from al-Mu'alla observed: "I have realised that women have been outperforming men. Nowadays, women have been strongly present in many sectors including education, medical care and factories."

Ibb

In Ibb, the role of women during the conflict was seen differently than in Aden, and also differed greatly between urban al-Dhihar and the more rural Dhu al-Sufal. First, one key difference between Aden and Ibb was in terms of timing: for many in Aden, the war was talked of as a thing of the past, and participants regularly referred to a 'before', 'during', and 'after' the war. By contrast, Ibb's geographical proximity to Ta'iz, a conflict hotspot, has meant that the conflict in Ibb is still seen to be ongoing. Second, unlike in Aden, where the community was largely united against a common 'enemy', in Ibb the community is divided between different parties to the conflict, each seeking to recruit local fighters for the battle in Ta'iz.

Participants noted that *shaykhs* and other local leaders (who are all men) played a positive role in maintaining peace in Ibb, and there was no mention of women being directly involved in fighting. In the more rural Dhu al-Sufal, mentions of women's role in the conflict focused mainly on their support of their husbands and families, 'pacifying family members' (discouraging them from joining the war), delivering humanitarian relief assistance, and assisting (the management of) IDPs in camps. Some women also mentioned that they had taken part in training and awareness-raising programmes targeted at promoting security in the country.

In the more urban al-Dhihar, in addition to providing informal healthcare and food for the fighters (affiliation unclear), women were also said to be politically active in supporting political leaders of different affiliations by participating in street protests and on social media. Perhaps due to the higher level of education in al-Dhihar compared to Dhu al-Sufal, women in the former were considered to play a stronger political role than in the latter. A male participant of an FGD in al-Dhihar explained:

"Some of the educated women affiliated with certain political groups encouraged their children and husbands to go to the battlefield or to help restore public security. I know of many cases of women affiliated with a political party who motivated their children or husbands to go to the battlefield and fight."

What was most often mentioned in both districts in Ibb was the important role women played within their own families and communities. For example, the social support and guidance women provided to the family was said to have both discouraged others from joining warring factions, and also provided much needed psychological support. The role women played in consolidating community support and developing community cohesion was seen by both men and women as integral to creating a sense of safety and social unity.

In their efforts to provide assistance to their communities, women received support from local, national, regional, and international organisations, all of which were active in Ibb in significant numbers, given the large number of IDPs present in the governorate as well as the relatively stable security situation there. Compared to Aden, there was a perception that local actors were much more supportive of women in their work, and respondents highlighted the supportive role played by community leaders, expatriates in the diaspora, the private sector, philanthropists, the local councils, schools, the imams of mosques, and other members of the local community.

At the same time, it is important to note that there are also greater restrictions to women's public participation in Ibb. Poor living conditions were cited as an obstacle, as many women have been focused on ensuring the survival of their families. For some, the idea of promoting women's participation was seen as a 'luxury' that in the current

climate was less of a priority compared to the need to ensure living conditions, security, and health. In the more rural Dhu al-Sufal, moreover, insufficient training and capacity was highlighted as a barrier that prevents women's activism in peacebuilding.

In Dhu al-Sufal, a particular focus was placed on security provision as a precondition for women's participation: in other words, so long as the context remained insecure, the ability to promote women's public participation would be limited. A topic that was also raised in both districts was the conservative norms and traditions prevalent in Ibb. This was only worsened by the war, as insecurity meant even greater opposition to women leaving the home.[19] Families in both districts restricted the free movement of women and girls out of fear for their safety. However, some political actors also played a role: for example, civil society activists in an FGD in al-Dhihar mentioned how Ansar Allah also obstructed women's public participation. According to one participant:

"If we try to do charity work for the community, some persons in the de facto authority, create obstacles for us. They ask 'Why do you do this? Why do you come out? Why are you an activist?' Those behaving that way are the individuals who have recently joined the Ansar Allah group. They don't hesitate to criticise us for whatever we do."

Another person added:

"As women, we used to do our job more freely and openly. Now, amid a lack of functional formal authorities that can help women, there are numerous obstacles standing in our way. If we went to those in the de facto authority, they would say: 'You are not allowed to appear in public before men'. They are opposed to women playing a role in public life. According to them, the woman's role is restricted to cooking and housework. They marginalise women; they deny their role in the community."

When asked about the opportunities women have at their disposal to promote peace, the responses of the focus group participants were limited compared to their peers in Aden. Respondents in Ibb mainly focused on humanitarian relief and less on issues of peace and security. Among the few issues that were mentioned were suggestions for women to take part in peacebuilding initiatives (to promote 'social unity'), to provide psychological support, and to 'raise awareness'. The Deputy Director of the Bureau of Criminal Investigation in Ibb, Ahmad Ali Dahman, was asked about the opportunities that women can take advantage of, and he explained:

"[T]here are many opportunities for women if there is the will on her part to take the initiative and work. People would cooperate with her, such as the Yemen Women's Union, who are always keeping in touch with us. They ask me personally about the cases. If there are juvenile cases, they follow up with me… if there are cases of harassment, rape, etc. they contact us. I mean if the woman is willing to contact the security entities [there is much she can do]."

When asked what kind of support women would require to strengthen their participation in contributing to and leading local peacebuilding processes, respondents in both districts pointed to the necessity of receiving direct financial and material support to implement any projects or awareness-raising campaigns as well as (and much more often than in Aden) training and capacity-building measures on both technical and thematic issues (e.g. advocacy training and influencing).

Interestingly, compared to Aden, respondents did not mention social media as the primary channel of communication through which they could enhance the role of women in their communities. Rather, respondents in both al-Dhihar and Dhu al-Sufal predominantly suggested that real-life interactions through meetings, symposiums, lectures, public gatherings, or training workshops were more effective in promoting women's activism. Social media and traditional media were suggested as secondary ways of promoting women's activism.

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19 In the data analysis workshop, participants pointed out that Ibb is a rural governorate where people get up early and go to bed early. Even in the urban areas, "there are few people and even fewer women out on the streets after six o'clock".

4

Conclusions and recommendations

THIS RESEARCH HAS SHOWN THE WAYS IN WHICH WOMEN in Aden and Ibb have been affected by the conflict, highlighting nationwide phenomena as well as localised experiences of the conflict. It provides information on the roles that women are playing, engaging in war efforts or striving to mitigate the devastating impacts of the conflict and build peace. In turn, an understanding of women's experiences of the conflict and their roles in society provides a strong basis for identifying opportunities for women to play an active part in peacebuilding in Yemen, and defining ways for national and international actors to support on-going efforts.

The conclusions presented in this section are to be understood in the context of a country fragmented by conflict, with no unified national government. As such, the civilian population suffers from a governance vacuum in many areas of the country, compounded by economic crisis, with Yemenis coming together at the community level to fill in the gaps or adapt to absent – or at best dysfunctional – government services in the areas of security, healthcare, sanitation, and education, to cite only a few. The role of local authorities is ever more important in governance, security, and service provision, though lack of revenue and capacity means they face huge challenges to respond to the population's needs. The analysis presented therefore accounts for this reality, where decisions are primarily made at the local level, even more so than before the conflict.

Gender norms and conflict

A significant research finding concerns the distance between expectations and realities of women's role in society. Women are not passive spectators of the conflict unfolding in Yemen but are actively involved: from contributing to the war effort and combat, to protecting their families, to leading humanitarian relief efforts, or reducing tensions and promoting cohesion within their communities. Regardless of whether women's efforts are promoting or attenuating conflict, they are playing a significant role, alongside men, in shaping their country's trajectory. However, the reality of women's roles in the current Yemen context does not reflect expectations about women's roles, which usually see them confined to the domestic space,[20] or as primarily humanitarian in the public sphere. From those women – especially in Aden – who reported having extended their role in their community, we can see one of the unexpected ways in

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20 For more information on the roles attributed to women in Yemen, see Heinze's literature review published by Saferworld (2016).

which wartime affects gender roles and may open up opportunities for longer term gender norm changes.

In order to provide appropriate support to peacebuilding and conflict mitigation efforts in Yemen, intervening actors need to understand the roles that women are playing in reality, as well as the diversity of these roles. Indeed, women's roles are as varied as their perspectives towards the conflict, and while some women will be active in preventing young men joining the fighting, others will mobilise fighters and encourage men to enlist. Gender analysis of conflict dynamics is essential to underpin effective peacebuilding and conflict mitigation interventions.

Responding to the threats posed to women

This research has documented some of the specific security threats that pose challenges to women's involvement in public life. It has shed light on the growth of conservative notions around women's participation, and the threats posed by armed groups to activists and civil society groups in general (such as Khadija's experience in Aden). While many women are willing to face those threats, the creation of a safer and more constructive environment is essential for widening women's participation in conflict transformation and peacebuilding. Local and national authorities should promote and protect women's participation in the public sphere. Any peacebuilding and stabilisation interventions need to be designed to take into account a thorough understanding of the threats to women participants specifically.

Another obstacle to women's participation is the notion of female vulnerability in times of insecurity, which leads to increased restrictions on women's movement by their families. While high levels of insecurity have a humanitarian impact on all Yemenis, and women face specific threats from gender-based violence, gendered interpretations of risk and vulnerability within the family also create constraints for women. Many of the security concerns raised by women, such as banditry, murder, theft, abduction, and harassment, are public security issues which require a policing and criminal justice response. This points to the priority of addressing public security, in particular in Aden and other governorates where new security institutions have been set up. Effective and accountable policing is essential to address these security concerns, and efforts to enhance the standards of security provision should take into account roles for women in the police force, as mentioned by Adeni research participants.

Additionally, the threats posed to children by the on-going violence and the psychological impact of the conflict on people were among the concerns most strongly expressed by research participants. This suggests a need for a greater child protection response and support to existing local initiatives, ranging from preventing exposure to unexploded ordinance, education initiatives (including the reopening of schools and encouraging re-enrolment in schools), and preventing child enlistment in armed groups. Psychological trauma response must also be supported, including through capacity-building, funding, and international exchange programmes offered to local Yemeni organisations.

Supporting women's peacebuilding efforts

Research participants identified specific ways in which women's peacebuilding can be supported by local and national authorities as well as the international community. In particular, local women-led initiatives need direct financial and institutional support. The scale-up of humanitarian activity after the escalation of conflict in 2015 led to a decrease in funding for Yemeni civil society organisations and NGOs[21], and many Yemeni organisations are struggling to sustain themselves with limited funding

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21 Yemeni NGOs interviewed in the context of USAID's 2014/15 CSO sustainability index for the Middle East and North Africa reported this decrease in funding. https://www.usaid.gov/middle-east-civil-society

opportunities while facing a multitude of challenges. Women-led initiatives usually require only small amounts of funding; donors should therefore redesign the mechanisms for making funds available in order to suit the needs of those smaller entities. Capacity-building in technical and practical subjects should also be offered; areas that are relevant include psychosocial support, child protection, conflict transformation, local governance, and DDR.

At the same time, this support must not overlook the important role women play in the community, particularly in rural areas where civil society activity is less common. For example, women in rural Dhu al-Sufal have – through their focus on their families, neighbourhoods, and their assistance to IDPs – made important contributions to peace and security. A narrow focus on conflict resolution or mediation efforts threatens to overlook such achievements. Instead, it is necessary to embrace a broad understanding of peacebuilding in order to strengthen organic efforts. These include the everyday contributions of women within families and communities, which may seem ordinary but are in fact vital for social cohesion. The possibilities of supporting women's conflict mitigation and peacebuilding strategies are thus as pluralistic as the strategies themselves, and should be built on and strengthened.

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Partner profiles

CARPO – Center for Applied Research in Partnership with the Orient

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

www.carpo-bonn.org

Yemen Polling Center (YPC)

The Yemen Polling Center (YPC) is an independent research centre, which was established in 2004 as the first polling centre in Yemen. With its 500 enumerators distributed in all of Yemen's governorates, the centre has extensive experience in conducting participatory research and data collection. It has conducted research on behalf of institutions including NDI, the World Bank and the United Nations, performing opinion polls, surveys, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, programme monitoring and evaluation as well as media research. Since its establishment, YPC has conducted 150,000 interviews in all areas of Yemen.

www.yemenpolling.org

National Foundation for Development and Humanitarian Response (NFDHR)

NFDHR is a Yemeni NGO that was established in 2012 to enhance the development and stability of local communities through awareness raising and increasing access to basic services. Enjoying strong connections with activists and CSOs both in Sana'a and across Yemen, NFDHR also works on building the capacity of Yemeni people, especially women and youth to be able to participate in making decisions that lead to peaceful society and sustainable development. Since the beginning of the conflict in March 2015, NFDHR has focused its work to respond to the growing humanitarian crisis in Yemen. The organisation has strong capacity and a dedicated team to work on relief, health, sanitation, food security and gender issues.

Wogood Foundation for Human Security

Wogood is a Yemeni NGO that aims at promoting development and human security, and increasing women and youth's engagement in society. The organisation was established in Aden in 2012 has been conducting important work to raise awareness of human security and to lobby local authorities to consider it in its policies and processes. Wogood has also been building good networks with activists and CSOs and building the capacities of youth and women initiatives and media outlets to promote the roles of women and youth.

Saferworld is an independent international organisation working to prevent violent conflict and build safer lives. We work with local people affected by conflict to improve their safety and sense of security, and conduct wider research and analysis. We use this evidence and learning to improve local, national and international policies and practices that can help build lasting peace. Our priority is people – we believe in a world where everyone can lead peaceful, fulfilling lives, free from fear and insecurity.

We are a not-for-profit organisation with programmes in nearly 20 countries and territories across Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Europe.

COVER PHOTO: Young women working at a farm in Hodaidah. © SAMI SHAMSAN

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