Women's Public Participation in Yemen by 2030: A Scenario-Building Approach

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Cover photo: Morning assembly of Al-Wehda Girls School in Taiz city on August 24, 2022 // Sana'a Center photo by Ahmed Al-Basha

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Editor's Note: In the original publication of this report, released on January 31, 2024, a comparison was made between Yemen's rankings in the Global Gender Index report for 2006 and 2021. The indexes from 2006 and 2021, however, have varying country coverage, which affects the comparability of the scores. The publication has been amended to reflect only the rankings from 2021.

Executive Summary

The prolonged war in Yemen has had dire consequences for gender equality in the country, as evidenced by the republic's poor performance in the Global Gender Gap Index. In 2021, Yemen was ranked 155th out of 156 countries. The country's overall economic participation and opportunity for women holds a low global standing, positioned at 154th, underscoring the challenges faced by Yemeni women in the workforce amidst the conflict. Educational attainment continues to rank poorly at 152nd. The health indicator, evaluated mainly on the sex ratio and life expectancy at birth, as well as healthy life expectancy, reflects broader gender disparities, ranked at 95th. Political empowerment for women remains extremely limited, with Yemen ranked 154th, highlighting the extensive political marginalization of women.[1] This worrying trend emphasizes the critical need for strategies that prioritize gender equality in Yemen's post-conflict roadmap. Without concerted efforts, Yemen risks cementing this disturbing status quo or backsliding further. Ensuring that Yemeni women aren't sidelined is not just a matter of gender justice, but is foundational to Yemen's broader recovery and development.

In response to these trends, a three-day workshop organized by the Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, titled "The Future of Women in the Public Sphere in Yemen", was held from May 26-28, 2023, in Amman, Jordan. A group of 16 Yemeni participants, including academics, students, artists, journalists, educators, representatives from civil society and women's groups, business professionals, and researchers were invited. The primary goal of the workshop was to gather detailed insights, strategize on existing challenges, and explore opportunities for empowering women in post-conflict Yemen. Participants were encouraged to anticipate challenges, pinpoint areas for crucial intervention, and identify promising strategies to enhance the empowerment of Yemeni women by 2030. The workshop employed scenario-building and the PESTEL analysis framework, which covers political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal dimensions, as its primary methodologies. Divided into groups, participants engaged in a scenario-building exercise to anticipate future challenges and opportunities for Yemeni women's public participation by 2030. Three plausible scenarios were presented by the participants:

Empowerment: In this best-case scenario, Yemen experiences significant advancements in women's rights and empowerment. This scenario is characterized by an inclusive political settlement, deep-rooted societal reforms, and a strengthened legal framework, signifying a progressive and inclusive future for Yemeni women.

Regression: This scenario depicts a non-comprehensive political settlement leading to uncertainty in economic, social, political, and legal life. It predicts increased marginalization of women, strict gender roles, economic setbacks, educational challenges, and a lack of international support.

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[1] "Global Gender Gap Report 2021," World Economic Forum, 2021, https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2021/

Erosion: In this bleak scenario, Yemen becomes a failed state, characterized by political instability, religious extremism, and regression of women's rights. This scenario anticipates the absence of a robust legal framework, exclusion of women from politics, economic downturn, educational decline, and erosion of international support.

Based on the above, a number of recommendations, comprising concrete action in the political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal realms, were put forward, with the aim of enhancing women's public participation by 2030. These emphasize inclusivity and sustainability, and take into account the core principle of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals[a] (SDGs) and the impact of the war on both SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 16 (Just, Peaceful, and Inclusive Societies). The full, detailed recommendations are found at the end of this report.

Economic Recommendations:

To Local and National Authorities

- Expand women's access to financial services
- Support female entrepreneurship
- Support microfinance and business mentorship
- Endorse community/informal saving systems and credit groups
- Promote engagement in technology and information technology (IT) services
- Promote formal employment, while protecting informal workers

To the UN and the International Community

- Tailor economic empowerment initiatives
- Mandate public access to gender-specific data
- Focus on skills development, and IT and digital skills training
- Provide legal support and financial inclusion for women
- Empower women through mentorship and networking
- Support working women across various sectors
- Foster strategic partnerships and collaboration

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[a]The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a set of 17 global objectives established by the United Nations, aim to address key challenges such as poverty, inequality, and environmental sustainability by 2030.

Political and Legal Recommendations:

To Local and National Authorities

- Reform policies that inhibit women's participation in public life
- Strengthen legal mechanisms to protect women from gender-based violence (GBV)
- Encourage and promote women's formal employment
- Set a minimum age of marriage

To the UN and the International Community

- Proactively engage women in political work
- Set conditional participation tied to gender representation
- Avoid pigeonholing women's roles in peacebuilding
- Work toward an inclusive and intersectional peace process

Social Recommendations:

To Local and National Authorities (including Religious Leaders)

- Firmly promote girls' and women's education
- Widely promote gender-sensitive policies
- Engage communities in GBV awareness and reduction
- Work hand in hand with religious leaders to promote women's participation in public life

To the UN and the International Community

- Intensify support for education programmes for girls and women
- Leverage experience in combating social restrictive norms

Technology and Cyber Security Recommendations:

To Local and National Authorities

- Support and incentivize women-led tech startups
- Provide women with wider access to technology

To the UN and the International Community

- Invest in cybersecurity training for women

- Work to prevent and respond to online defamation
- Prioritize technology transfer to mitigate the effects of climate change

Environment and Climate Recommendations:

To Local and National Authorities

- Devise training programs on sustainable practices
- Advocate for women's roles in environmental sustainability projects

To the UN and the International Community:

- Support women working in agriculture
- Provide platforms for experience sharing and cooperation
- Use women's local knowledge and expertise when developing agricultural tools

Introduction

Globally, women's participation in the public sphere has been shown to foster development, strengthen democracy, and promote inclusive policymaking, driving economic growth and societal advancement.[3] Many case studies link women's active engagement in economic, political, and civic spheres to improved household income and transformative household dynamics.[4] Yemen, however, continues to face some of the biggest setbacks worldwide in the field of gender equality, many of which are deeply rooted in long-standing biases, a patriarchal societal structure, a discriminatory legal system, and ingrained economic disparities.[5] The ongoing conflict has only exacerbated these issues, leading to a sharp decline in gender equality. This is reflected in Yemen's ranking on the Global Gender Gap Index, where it occupies one of the lowest ranks, at 155th out of 156 countries in 2021.[6] A study conducted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Yemen[7] suggests that if the conflict persists, Yemen's development is projected to regress by nearly 40 years by 2030, severely undermining prior gains in gender equality.[8]

In response to the above, a three-day workshop, titled "The Future of Women in the Public Sphere in Yemen", was held in Amman, Jordan, from May 26-28, 2023. Its primary objective was to gather insights and strategize on the existing challenges faced by women in Yemen while exploring potential opportunities for their empowerment in a post-conflict society. Sixteen Yemeni participants[9] from diverse professional backgrounds and hailing from different governorates were brought together to engage in scenario-building exercises underpinned by the PESTEL[10] analysis framework. Three distinct scenarios were envisaged by workshop participants for women's public participation by 2030, providing a framework for comprehensive thinking and strategic planning for active engagement by women in Yemen's future. Against this backdrop, this workshop report gives a brief overview of the shifting roles of women in Yemen, particularly in the past decade, before describing the three scenarios drawn up by the participants and the methodology used to develop them. To conclude, it offers strategic and detailed recommendations for increasing women's public participation in Yemen by 2030.

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[3] Patricia Justino, Ivan Cardona, Rebecca Mitchell, and Catherine Müller, "Quantifying the Impact of Women's Participation in Post-Conflict Economic Recovery," HICN Working Paper 131, Households in Conflict Network, 2012, https://ideas.repec.org/p/hic/wpaper/131.html

[4] Ibid.

[5] "Yemen: One of the Worst Places in the World to Be a Woman," Amnesty International, December 2019, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2019/12/yemen-one-of-the-worst-places-in-the-world-to-be-a-woman/

[6] "Global Gender Gap Report 2021," World Economic Forum, 2021, https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2021/

[7] Taylor Hanna, David K. Bohl, and Jonathan D. Moyer, "Assessing the Impact of War in Yemen: Pathways to Recovery," ReliefWeb, 2021, https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/assessing-impact-war-yemen-pathways-recovery

[8] "Women's Economic Empowerment," OECD, 2023, https://www.oecd.org/development/womens-economic-empowerment.htm

[9] Participants comprised academics, students, artists, journalists, educators, representatives from civil society and women's groups, business professionals, and researchers. The blend of perspectives from different professional and geographical backgrounds enriched the discussions, offering a comprehensive range of insights and experiences.

[10] PESTEL stands for political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal dimensions.

Yemeni Women's Rights and Roles Since 2011

Yemen's 2011 uprisings, and the ousting of President Ali Abdullah Saleh, marked a pivotal moment in the lives of women. Historically, women's role in Yemen has consistently been intertwined with the country's socio-political legacies. Two contrasting political systems saw one state (the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, aka South Yemen) leaning towards more progressive reforms, promoting women's rights in education, employment, and politics,[11] while the other (the Yemen Arab Republic, aka North Yemen) held a more conservative stance on women's roles, rooted in tribal traditions. By the 1990s, with the unification of North and South into the Republic of Yemen, a new constitution was introduced, championing a parliamentary democracy but curtailing women's rights.[12] Both the progressive 1974 family code of the South and the conservative 1978 code of the North were annulled. A new, conservative personal status law was introduced, endorsing regressive views on issues such as minimum marriage ages and polygamy, and cementing gender inequalities in familial contexts.[13]

Stark gender disparities are also reflected in women's participation in the labor force. Reliable data on women's labor force participation remains scant and inconsistent, and its collection often presents methodological challenges. By and large, however, women are predominantly found working in agriculture, which accounted for about 86 percent of all female workers in 2014.[14] In contrast, more formal employment sectors, such as manufacturing and education, represented only about 4 percent of female employment.[15]

Women played an instrumental role in the 2011 Yemeni uprising, from leading public rallies to documenting the unrest.[16] In 2013, at the National Dialogue Conference (NDC), under the auspices of the GCC agreement, women were accorded a 30 percent quota of all NDC delegations, ultimately filling approximately 29 percent of the seats.[17] Women also leveraged international platforms to advocate for their rights.

[11] Susanne Dahlgren, "Revisiting the Issue of Women's Rights in Southern Yemen," Arabian Humanities, March 30, 2013, http://journals.openedition.org/cy/2039, DOI : https://doi.org/10.4000/cy.2039

[12] Rim Mugahed, "Absent from the Negotiation Table and Shunned from Public Life: Yemeni Women at a Crossroads," Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, September 4, 2023, https://sanaacenter.org/publications/main-publications/20761

[13] Margot Badran, "Unifying Women: Feminist Pasts and Presents in Yemen," Gender & History, 10 (3), 498–518, 1998, doi:10.1111/1468-0424.00115

[14] "Labour Force Survey 2013-2014," International Labour Organization, October 26, 2015, https://www.ilo.org/beirut/publications/WCMS_419016/lang--en/index.htm

[15] Ibid.

[16] Tom Finn, "Saleh is gone, but Yemen women's struggle goes on," Reuters, April 11, 2012, https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-yemen-politics-women-idUKBRE83A0RQ20120411

[17] "Women in Peace & Transition Processes, Yemen (2011–2015)". Case Study Series. Geneva: Inclusive Peace and Transition Initiative, The Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, April 2018, https://www.inclusivepeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/case-study-women-yemen-2011-2015-en.pdf

But in the aftermath of these tumultuous events, the once-united protest movement relegated women to the sidelines, as demonstrated by their poor representation in Yemen's subsequent government, which featured only three women out of 35 ministers.[18] Reflecting on the societal changes after the revolution, Faizah al-Shami, a Yemeni poet and activist, insightfully remarked, "Society embraced us at first. We were there to bulk up the numbers […] now that Saleh has left, they expect us to do the same: leave the streets, renounce our freedoms, and return home."[19]

After almost a decade of war, women's roles have regressed and their rights have been curtailed substantially. The hegemony of warring factions in peace talks has kept women on the sidelines.[20] To date, women have had little to no representation in the most crucial peace negotiations that have taken place, an approach that stands in stark contradiction with the UN's Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, specifically UNSCR 1325, which urges all parties to include women in peacebuilding initiatives.[21] This exclusion intensifies existing challenges surrounding women's rights, leading to increased gender-based violence and the reinforcement of traditional gender norms.[22]

In the aftermath of the conflict, a discernible shift in policies affecting women's rights has become apparent across various territories.[23] Despite differences, authorities on opposite sides of the conflict appear united in marginalizing women,[24] while capitalizing on traditional societal norms surrounding women's honor to restrict their participation in both education and the public domain. In doing so, they leverage religious conservatism[25] to further solidify traditional gender roles, relegating women primarily to the domestic sphere and reinforcing patriarchal norms. The imposition of stricter dress codes and mobility restrictions, especially in Houthi-controlled areas, are limiting women's participation in public spheres.[26] Other oppressive measures, such as the male guardianship (*mahram*) system and the inability to travel alone, further restrict women's freedom, affecting legal, economic, social, and political dimensions of daily life.[27]

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[18] There are no women in Yemen's current government.

[19] Tom Finn, "Saleh is gone, but Yemen women's struggle goes on," Reuters, April 11, 2012, https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-yemen-politics-women-idUKBRE83A0RQ20120411

[20] Dr. Maryam Alkubati, Huda Jafar, and Esham Al-Eryani "Grassroots Voices: Women and Everyday Peacebuilding in Yemen," Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, April 28, 2023,https://sanaacenter.org/files/Grassroots_Voices-Women_and_Everyday_Peacebuilding_in_Yemen_en.pdf

[21] Dr. Maryam Alkubati , "Women's Voices in Yemen's Peace Process: Priorities, Recommendations, and Mechanisms for Effective Inclusion," Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, February 22, 2022, https://sanaacenter.org/files/Womens_Voices_in_Yemens_Peace_Process_Priorities_Recommendations_and_Mechanisms_for_Effective_Inclusion_en.pdf

[22] Sawsan Al-Refai,"How Humanitarian and Peace Frameworks Fail to Respond Systematically to Gender-Based Violence in Yemen," Yemen Policy Center, December 2022, https://www.yemenpolicy.org/how-humanitarian-and-peace-frameworks-fail-to-respond-systemically-to-gender-based-violence-in-yemen

[23] Ibid.

[24] Afrah Nasser, "Realignment of Yemen's Identity Politics," Al Jazeera, August 26, 2015, https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2015/8/26/realignment-of-yemens-identity-politics

[25] Ibid.

[26] "Yemen Women's Economic Empowerment in the Yemeni Context," ACAPS, June 6, 2023, https://www.acaps.org/fileadmin/Data_Product/Main_media/20230606_acaps_thematic_report_yemen_womens_economic_empowerment_in_the_yemeni_context.pdf

[27] Redha Qarhash, "Returning Home: An Arduous Journey to a Changed Yemen," Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, April 2023, https://sanaacenter.org/the-yemen-review/april-2023/20184

A woman and her child pass by a destroyed building due to war in Al-Jahmaliya neighborhood, Salah district, Taizz on December 12, 2022 // Sana'a Center photo by Ahmed Al Basha

Employment opportunities presented by the conflict,[28] especially in the aid sector, where women had found employment in roles such as distributing humanitarian aid and managing gender-based violence projects, have now been curtailed. Activists and humanitarian workers are frequently targeted, further sidelining them from crucial roles. These mobility constraints not only hinder economic empowerment but also contribute to gender-based violence.[29]

[28] With the war and its accompanying dire economic conditions, some women have entered previously inaccessible professions, such as waitressing and retail. While the conflict has created new opportunities for some women, it has also led to negative coping strategies, including debt and, in extreme cases, begging and prostitution. Furthermore, the conflict has led to a shift in gender roles. As women seek employment outside their homes due to financial necessity, but are constrained due to security concerns and restrictive legislation, they have been pushed into low-paid, informal physical work, such as house cleaning and collecting firewood. See: Dr. Fawziah Al-Ammar and Hannah Patchett, "The Repercussions of War on Women in the Yemeni Workforce," Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, July 23, 2019, https://sanaacenter.org/publications/main-publications/7721

[29] Sawsan Al-Refai, "How Humanitarian and Peace Frameworks Fail to Respond Systematically to Gender-Based Violence in Yemen," Yemen Policy Center, December 2022, https://www.yemenpolicy.org/how-humanitarian-and-peace-frameworks-fail-to-respond-systemically-to-gender-based-violence-in-yemen

Workshop Methodology Overview: Scenario Building

The Transformative Scenario Process (TSP), developed by Adam Kahane, represents a significant evolution in scenario-building.[30] Originally emerging from military and corporate strategy contexts, scenario building has traditionally been used to anticipate trends and adapt strategies. TSP shifts this paradigm towards addressing complex social issues, focusing on transformation and systemic change. This approach engages a diverse range of stakeholders in constructing and exploring potential future scenarios, making it a powerful tool for social change and conflict resolution (see Annex A). While less prevalent in gender and women's studies, the application of scenario building in this field may have substantial benefits. It allows participants to envision a variety of potential developments and outcomes informed by current socio-political and economic trends and provides a framework for comprehensive thinking and strategic planning.

With this in mind, a three-day scenario-building workshop was held concerning women's public engagement in Yemen's future landscape. Its primary objective was to gather insight and strategize on the current challenges faced by women in Yemen while exploring potential opportunities for their empowerment in a post-conflict setting. Sixteen Yemeni participants, from diverse professional backgrounds and hailing from different governorates — Ibb, Sana'a, and Aden, along with members of the diaspora — were brought together to engage in scenario-building exercises. The attendees comprised academics, students, artists, journalists, educators, representatives from civil society and women's groups, business professionals, and researchers. By creating a space for diverse voices, and utilizing a proven scenario-building methodology, the workshop laid the groundwork for developing impactful pathways to enhance the roles of women in Yemen by 2030.

Participants formed teams to outline potential trajectories for Yemeni women by 2030, simulating different scenarios ranging from the status quo to an empowerment recovery path. A PESTEL analysis was used to examine political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal factors, providing a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing Yemeni women. From these discussions, three scenarios were formulated. The section below details the three scenarios, providing frameworks for comprehensive thinking and strategic planning concerning women's public engagement in Yemen's future landscape.

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[30] "Transformative Scenarios Process: How stories of the future help to transform conflict in the present," Berghof Foundation, Aug 1, 2018, https://berghof-foundation.org/library/transformative-scenarios-process-how-stories-of-the-future-help-to-transform-conflict-in-the-present

Limitations

Yemen's ongoing conflict makes detailed policy prescriptions challenging, and due to limited data access and instability, this report doesn't provide exact forecasts of women's public participation. Instead, it is intended to stimulate productive conversation, offering a scenario-based framework to encourage critical thinking and holistic planning for women's active engagement in Yemen's future.

Three Scenarios for Women's Participation by 2030

Scenario 1: Empowerment

In the first scenario, participants envisioned advancements in women's rights and empowerment, rooted in deep societal reforms and an empowered legal framework.[31] This best-case scenario involves an inclusive political settlement that brings sustainable peace and stability. It is built on diverse stakeholder contributions, addressing women's needs and fostering nationwide stability, security, and justice. Although the likelihood of this scenario was deemed low by participants, considering recent trends, the following scenario charts the building blocks that would contribute to women's empowerment:

- **Inclusive Political Climate:** A constitution, informed by national dialogue, integrates inclusive representation of all Yemeni factions, ensuring long-term peace and stability. Discriminatory laws against women are abolished and the weaponization of 'honor' issues is criminalized. The settlement leads to the restoration of political parties and the enhancement of political plurality. Parties commit to effectively implementing their declarations and programs, emphasizing a 30 percent quota for women, who secure substantive representation in decision-making roles. Women from all parts of Yemen have an opportunity to be represented in decision-making roles. Parties establish internal committees to enforce laws and regulations concerning women's roles, resulting in healthy competition among parties to accentuate women's roles. Executive institutions undergo transformation, with the aim of substantially supporting women's participation.

- **Economic Resurgence and Women's Empowerment:** Women are set to become pivotal players in Yemen's economic landscape. Legal frameworks provide clear and equitable regulations, ensuring women in the labor market are protected. With the bolstering of international partnerships, a conducive environment for women's entrepreneurship takes shape. There is a particular focus on empowering women affected by war and those heading households, ensuring they have the necessary resources and avenues for active contribution. Previously male-dominated sectors experience a surge of female professionals, attributed to the rise in women's participation in the labor market and education. Further macroeconomic efforts focus on unifying the central bank, fortifying the national currency, and addressing economic imbalances.

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[31] "Yemen Gender Justice & The Law," UNDP, 2018, https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/arabstates/Yemen-Country-Assessment---English.pdf

- **Quality Education and Social Well-Being:** Education is a cornerstone of Yemen's renaissance, with mandatory education for girls to elevate educational attainment. The educational system undergoes qualitative improvements aligned with UN sustainable development goals and international agreements. Initiatives, both local and international, address gender inequalities, ensuring quality education for girls. Vocational colleges are introduced to enhance women's professional pursuits, along with a comprehensive curriculum overhaul emphasizing peace, equality, and critical thinking. These changes help combat societal issues, like early marriage, and boost women's participation in public life. Efforts to create a safe investment climate and ensure educational access further enhance female education, driving their participation in economic development and fostering financial autonomy.

- **Robust Legal Framework:** A strong, evolving legal framework criminalizes incitement against women and addresses gender-based violence (GBV). It provides an environment conducive for investment, marked by transparency and clear regulations, spurring economic rehabilitation and opportunities for women to join the growing labor force. The legal framework firmly advocates for women's rights, both within professional contexts and the broader public sphere, penalizing discrimination. Offenders face severe consequences. Simultaneously, a foundation is laid for a mechanism dedicated to addressing wartime injustices. Central to this initiative are the testimonies of victims.

- **Revitalized Civil Society:** Women-led organizations, with national and international support, become central to policy-making. Grassroots movements and female-centric platforms emerge as crucial channels for advocating change, pushing Yemen towards a more inclusive and egalitarian future.

- **Societal Transformation:** Traditional norms are challenged through awareness campaigns and legal and educational reforms. The dialogue around patriarchal values intensifies, with increased debates on gender roles, tradition, and religion. Legal reforms, combined with this newfound social awareness, contribute to addressing some forms of gender-based violence.

- **Active International Support:** Global actors extend further support. Collaborative projects between international organizations and Yemeni bodies prioritize women's rights, ensuring their empowerment is central to Yemen's rebuilding.

Scenario 2: Regression

In the second scenario, the participants envision Yemen facing an uncertain political settlement along with the collapse of state institutions. Women struggle to maintain their rights and public presence. Without robust global support for women's rights and inclusive participation, peace initiatives risk further marginalizing women, hindering their path to empowerment and equality.

- **Uncertain Political Landscapes:** Yemen's political situation is precarious, lacking international guarantees and facing a looming military threat. Women's future is uncertain as they experience increased marginalization due to exclusionary practices by conflicting powers and reduced funding for women's health and well-being. An exclusive peace settlement and weakened UN influence jeopardize women's rights, and authorities use religious ideologies to endorse strict gender roles, limiting women's participation in education and public life.

- **Societal Challenges:** Traditional norms tighten, imposing stricter restrictions on women. Requirements, like the need for women to have a male guardian for travel, further limit women's public participation, leading to increased incidents of gender-based violence, cyber harassment, and targeted hostility. Economic setbacks, particularly in key sectors like hydrocarbon exports, curtail women's opportunities. The male guardianship system in Houthi-controlled regions restricts women's freedom in the public sphere. Changes in gender roles leave many women unprepared for economic challenges, and without protective mechanisms, vulnerable to exploitation and gender-based violence.

- **Education Decline:** Yemen's educational sector faces challenges as gender segregation in schools increases, compromising the quality of education for girls and limiting their future prospects. Early and coerced marriages of young girls are on the rise due to societal shifts and financial difficulties, diverting women from education and restricting their involvement in public life.

- **Inadequate International Support:** Efforts by the international community to protect women's rights remain inadequate. Female activists are often labelled by the warring parties as pushing for foreign agendas, subjecting them to harassment and gender-based violence. Despite UN appeals, the lack of effective mechanisms to pressure elites reinforces male-dominated power structures.

- **Resilience in Adversity:** Yemeni women remain resilient in the face of adversity, leveraging technological advancements to create platforms for advocacy and resistance. Women-driven campaigns continue to advocate for broader rights and work towards reshaping Yemen's societal norms.

Scenario 3: Erosion

In this third scenario, participants envision Yemeni women facing dire challenges in the post-war landscape, with the nation on the brink of collapse. Deep-rooted societal biases and a weak legal framework contribute to a significant decline in women's rights and empowerment. Yemen's fragile state is marred by ongoing turmoil, political upheaval, and rising religious extremism. The unstable political climate threatens fundamental human rights, particularly for women, further excluding them from politics.

- **Non-Existent Political Framework:** The constitution ratified by the National Dialogue Conference becomes obsolete. Shadowy, informal governance, bereft of transparency and heavily biased, dominates, and political entities champion extremist ideologies that silence women. A political vacuum ensues, with dominant factions in each region perpetuating further schisms among Yemenis.

- **Erosion of International Influence:** International actors, including neighboring nations, find their influence over local decisions and human rights severely curtailed. Self-serving agendas prevail. Collaboration between international bodies and Yemeni entities predominantly serve the agendas of male elites, further pushing women to the margins.

- **Societal Regression:** With limited awareness regarding the significance of women's participation in public domains, and rigid adherence to societal norms, the period sees intensified campaigns against women. This is achieved through the politicization of religion and societal customs, as well as a rise in cyber-harassment targeting women. A resurgence of traditional norms bolsters patriarchal values, emphasizing traditional gender roles. This resurgence, combined with the absence of legal reform and inadequate protective frameworks, leads to an increase in women's susceptibility to gender-based violence due to entrenched patriarchal perspectives.

- **Economic Downturn and Women's Disempowerment:** Women face economic limitations, encountering discrimination and constrained opportunities. Inadequate protective measures heighten their vulnerability to GBV, with women often blamed for such incidents. Entrepreneurial prospects for women are limited due to an unfavorable economic climate. Empowerment initiatives, particularly for women, are scarce. A generation of Yemeni girls grows up without targeted support, as dominant actors systematically eliminate such programs.

- **Educational Decline:** Heightened restrictions on female education lead to a sharp decline in girls' access to quality education. This increases the risk of early or forced marriages due to financial strains and limited prospects, ultimately limiting women's public participation.

- **Legal Deterioration:** Yemen's legal system deteriorates, impacting women's rights. Issues like sexual violence, political aggression, and cyberbullying rise without effective legal penalties. Perpetrators often escape consequences, especially in cases involving women. Wartime injustices lack proper redress mechanisms, leaving women vulnerable, and unconstitutional courts further weaken the rule of law.

- **Civil Society Silenced:** Women-led organizations confront a surge in threats and shutdowns. Underground women's organizations and networks proliferate, functioning as beacons of hope in an otherwise repressive landscape. These organizations harness technologies to establish covert networks and platforms locally and globally, advocating for their rights and championing the transformation of Yemen's societal norms.

Conclusion

Yemen faces a critical juncture when it comes to the future of its women. Without intervention, development could regress almost four decades by 2030, threatening gender equality efforts. Prioritizing gender equality in post-conflict Yemen, in alignment with the SDGs, could lead to a US$12.5 billion GDP boost. Empowering women in the public sphere necessitates comprehensive policies and actions that address the multifaceted challenges faced by Yemeni women. Ensuring their active participation is vital for Yemen's progress and sustainable peace.[32] Achieving the SDGs, especially those relating to the intersection of Gender Equality (SDG 5) and Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions (SDG 16), demands targeted interventions, consistent policy advocacy, and collaborative efforts. It also demands an intersectional approach that addresses layered discrimination, including factors such as socioeconomic status, geography, and ethnicity.

For some women, including among the *Muhamasheen*,[33] the barriers to labor force participation are twofold – not only do they face gender-based limitations, but they also grapple with systemic prejudices associated with their community's historical standing. Women who head households, often due to conflict-related reasons, also find themselves in a dual role, as caregivers and primary breadwinners. Their labor participation, though essential, is fraught with heightened challenges. Then there are women with disabilities who, alongside gendered barriers, face mobility and service constraints magnified by conflict-related devastation.

For a comprehensive path forward, Yemeni policy makers and international organizations must recognize these disparities. As Yemen envisions its future, it's crucial to ensure equitable growth sensitive to the varied experiences of its diverse population. To cultivate an inclusive labor market, Yemen's strategies should bridge the gender divide and actively support women, including the most marginalized. Recognizing the potential and strength of all its women – from urban entrepreneurs to rural agricultural laborers – is the only way Yemen can stride towards an inclusive and prosperous future. With this in mind, the following recommendations, underpinned by the PESTEL analytical framework, present policy makers with concrete actions necessary for fuller participation of women by 2030 that lead Yemen towards a more inclusive future.

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[32] "Regional Report: Attainment of Sustainable Development Goals in Conflict-affected Countries in the Arab Region," United Nations Development Programme, United Nations, July 6, 2023, https://www.un.org/humansecurity/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/FINAL-2-pager_LAS-Report_EN_updated-8-July-2021.pdf

[33] The *Muhamasheen* are a demographic group of Yemenis with black skin, who occupy low-paying or low-skilled occupations like Janitors, etc. They face social discrimination at various levels, especially women.

Policy Recommendations for Women's Inclusion

The following recommendations are the result of the workshop participants' discussions and efforts. They rely on the PESTEL analytical framework, considering the political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal empowerment of women as critical factors for national progress.

Economic Recommendations:

To National Authorities

- **Expand Women's access to financial services:**
  - Encourage institutions like the National Foundation for Micro Financing and Al-Amal Microfinance Bank to develop and offer financial products and services specifically designed for women. These could include low-interest loans, start-up capital for women entrepreneurs, and savings products that cater to women's financial habits and needs.
  - Target women - especially women-led households, women from low-income households, women in rural areas women, and women with disabilities - for financial inclusion initiatives.
  - Develop mobile banking solutions to increase accessibility for women in remote areas, including those with disabilities.
  - Engage local community leaders and groups in promoting and facilitating women's access to credit and financial services.

- **Support Female Entrepreneurship:**
  - Create government-supported programs that provide microfinance, low-interest loans, grants, or subsidies specifically for women entrepreneurs, with manageable repayment schedules.
  - Include mentorship and financial literacy programs as part of loan packages.
  - Strengthen and support women's business associations, which can provide networking opportunities, mentorship, and advocacy for women entrepreneurs.
  - Develop targeted credit programs for women in various sectors, including agriculture, retail, and services, providing them with the capital needed to start or expand their businesses.
  - Enhance existing skill sets through advanced financial literacy, business management, and marketing training. Integrate digital marketing and online sales to expand market reach.

- **Support Microfinance and Business Mentorship:**
  - Encourage the integration of women at all levels within the microfinance sector, from leadership roles to customer service representatives, to ensure that the services are more attuned to the needs of female clients.
  - Ensure that microfinance institutions provide not only financial resources but also comprehensive training and mentorship in business development, market analysis, and digital literacy.
  - Address barriers that restrict women's access to financial resources, like the requirement for a male guardian to be present for financial transactions.

- **Promote Community/Informal Saving Systems and Credit Groups:**
  - Create and support community savings groups to enhance women's financial literacy and provide easier access to credit, thereby fostering a supportive network and community solidarity.
  - Formalize and support traditional informal savings systems like "jimaya" and "haqba." Provide these groups with legal recognition and support, such as financial management training and oversight, to increase their security and effectiveness.

- **Promote Engagement in Technology and Information Technology (IT) Services:**
  - Promote women's participation in the growing fields of technology, IT services, digital marketing, and e-commerce, opening new pathways for their economic engagement and contribution.
  - Provide online learning opportunities for women with mobility challenges.

- **Promote Formal Employment while Protecting Informal Workers**
  - Encourage formal jobs for women. Incentivize private businesses to hire women through tax breaks or subsidies.
  - Implement policies to safeguard women in informal work. Establish legal frameworks offering protection and benefits to informal workers.

To International Organizations and Aid Donors

- **Tailor Economic Empowerment Initiatives:**
  - Design economic empowerment programs considering Yemen's unique cultural and social dynamics.
  - Ensure sustained investment in women's economic empowerment programs, emphasizing long-term impact and adaptability.

- **Mandate Public Access to Gender-Specific Data:**
  - Mandate local authorities in Yemen to publicly release statistical data, particularly gender-disaggregated data, to enable comprehensive analysis of the socio-economic impact of the war on women.
  - Ensure that projects are developed based on reliable, updated field studies and data that highlight the specific needs and priorities of Yemeni women at the grassroots level.

- **Focus on Skills Development, IT, and Digital Skills Training:**
  - Create vocational and technical education programs specifically catering to Yemeni women's economic needs.
  - Develop comprehensive training projects for women in IT, digital literacy, and digital market intelligence.
  - Prioritize initiatives that provide remote and flexible work options to accommodate women facing mobility restrictions and women with disabilities.

- **Provide Legal Support and Financial Inclusion for Women:**
  - Collaborate with national authorities and CSOs to offer legal support services to women navigating financial agreements and transactions, ensuring their rights and interests are protected.
  - Actively pursue the establishment and support of financial programs and services dedicated to women's economic needs.

- **Empower Women through Mentorship and Networking:**
  - Build and sustain mentorship platforms for women entrepreneurs, focusing on skill-sharing and professional growth.
  - Create specialized programs for women in rural areas and marginalized communities, ensuring broader inclusion.
  - Allocate resources for women-led educational initiatives like schools, preschools, and daycare centers, particularly those catering to the needs of working mothers in urban areas.

- **Support Working Women:**
  - Develop and fund projects in sustainable farming, food processing, and distribution with a focus on women's participation. These programs should aim to enhance food security and leverage women's knowledge of local agricultural practices.
  - Invest in preserving Yemen's cultural heritage by supporting women in the production of traditional crafts, textiles, and artisanal goods. Assistance could include training, marketing support, and access to global markets.
  - Fund and support programs that train women as community health workers, nurses, midwives, and health educators, focusing on capacity building in remote and conflict-affected areas.

- **Foster Strategic Partnerships and Collaboration:**
  - Facilitate partnerships between local organizations and international bodies to ensure the effective implementation of these initiatives. Emphasize community-driven approaches and tailor programs to the specific needs and contexts of different regions in Yemen.
  - Implement public awareness campaigns to challenge stereotypes about women's work roles in collaboration with local organizations and national authorities.

Political and Legal Recommendations

To National Authorities

- **Reform Policies that Inhibit Women's Participation in Public Life:**
  - Enshrine the commitment of the government and state institutions to international agreements, UN resolutions, and laws for women's representation.
  - Repeal policies and directives that impede women's movements and implement mechanisms to monitor and criminalize campaigns of defamation that target women.
  - Criminalize incitement of and participation in campaigns against women.
  - Increase women's quotas in local authority positions by 10 percent over the next three years.

- **Strengthen Legal Mechanisms that Protect Women from GBV:**
  - Strengthen legal mechanisms that ensure women's rights to inheritance, addressing the discrimination that denies women their legal entitlements.
  - Develop and enforce comprehensive workplace policies and legal frameworks that explicitly prohibit all forms of GBV. This includes clear definitions, reporting procedures, and consequences for GBV in the workplace.
  - Implement mandatory GBV training and awareness programs for both employers and employees. This also includes training on how to report incidents and support survivors.
  - Establish accessible support systems within workplaces, such as confidential counseling services, legal assistance, and resources for GBV survivors.
  - Create effective monitoring systems to ensure compliance with GBV policies and hold workplaces accountable. Regular audits and reviews of workplace practices and environments should be conducted to maintain a safe space for all employees.

- **Mandate and Promote Women's Formal Employment:**
  - Encourage private sector employment for women through tax incentives or subsidies.
  - Implement policies that encourage women's participation in the workforce. This includes ensuring equal pay, providing maternity leave, and preventing workplace discrimination.
  - Implement policies to protect women in informal work and establish legal frameworks for their benefits.
  - Advocate for policy reforms to ease women's access to credit and financial services.

- **Set a Minimum Age of Marriage:**
  - Enact and enforce legislation that sets the minimum age for marriage to at least 16 for both girls and boys. This helps in safeguarding girls from early and forced marriages, allowing them to complete their education and mature physically and mentally before marriage.
  - Strengthen legal frameworks to protect young girls and women from domestic violence, sexual harassment, and other forms of abuse.
  - Establish support services such as shelters, legal aid, and counseling for young women who are victims of early marriage, violence, or discrimination.

To the UN Envoy and International Community

- **Proactively Engage Women in Political Work:**
  - Collaborate with Saudi Arabia and regional actors to actively involve and represent women in political activities.
  - Support women's voices in Yemen's peace process through international agreements such as UNSCR 1325 and other agreements that Yemen has ratified.
  - Ensure the inclusion of women in ceasefire negotiations, agreements, and subsequent follow-up and monitoring committees.

- **Tie Participation to Gender Representation:**
  - Encourage international donors involved in peacebuilding efforts to link participation in these activities and projects with the requirement of adequate gender representation in the involved parties. This conditionality could ensure that women's perspectives are integral to the peacebuilding process.
  - Hold parties accountable for representing their members. Inquire about internal practices and ensure they maintain connections to the communities they represent.

- o Articulate clear expectations for the participation of women in party institutions, ensuring opportunities for women in Track I peace processes.
- **Avoid Pigeonholing Women's Roles in Peacebuilding:**
  - o Create structured opportunities for women to contribute to a wide array of issues within peacebuilding dialogues, beyond gender-focused topics.
  - o Facilitate platforms where women can express their views on various intersecting factors, like economic development, political stability, and social justice, reflecting a comprehensive and intersectional approach to their diverse roles and stakes in the peace process.
- **Work Towards an Inclusive and Intersectional Peace Process:**
  - o End monopolization of the peace agenda by the warring parties. Adopt an approach sensitive to the broader population's needs, especially focusing on women and civil society.
  - o Ensure women's consistent participation in all peace tracks and meetings held by the OSESGY, maintaining the 30 percent quota for women's representation negotiated at Yemen's NDC.
  - o Make the selection process for women's networks involved in the peace process public, ensuring inclusivity, transparency, and diverse geographical representation.

Social Recommendations

To National Authorities (including Religious Leaders)

- **Enhance Educational Opportunities:**
  - o Increase access to education and vocational training for women, with a focus on entrepreneurial and management skills.
  - o Provide subsidized or free transportation services for rural communities, ensuring easier access to schools.
  - o Promote girls' participation in education, particularly in rural areas.
- **Promote Gender-Sensitive Policies:**
  - o Implement policies that challenge restrictive gender norms and promote women's participation in the workforce
  - o Repeal regulations that restrict women's public participation, including mobility restrictions.
  - o Monitor and criminalize defamatory campaigns against women and penalize entities that promote them..

- **Engage Communities in GBV Reduction:**
  - Promote community-based programs to reduce gender-based violence and increase societal support for women's rights and participation in public life.
  - Engage with community leaders, advocacy groups, and other stakeholders to foster broader understanding and support against GBV.

- **Work Hand-in-Hand with Religious Leaders to Promote Women in Public Life:**
  - Provide counternarratives and interpretations of Islamic texts that underline respect and compassion, highlight women's important role in society (both at home and in the public sphere), and denounce violence against women.
  - Raise awareness about the benefits of girls' education and address cultural norms hindering attendance.

To International and Civil Society Actors:

- **Intensify Support for Education for Girls and Women:**
  - Invest in infrastructure to improve access to schools in remote regions.
  - Engage with communities to raise awareness about the benefits of girls' education.

- **Leverage Experience in Combating Restrictive Norms:**
  - Implement policies to combat gender-based social norms that limit women's economic activities, such as public awareness campaigns that challenge stereotypes about women's work roles.
  - Share successful experiences in combating declining social norms.
  - Adopt gender-sensitive approaches.

Technology and Cyber Security Recommendations

To Local and National Authorities

- **Support Women-Led Tech Startups:**
  - Develop tailored platforms or tools specifically designed to support women-led startups.
  - Advance digital infrastructure in a manner that specifically benefits female entrepreneurs, with a focus on regions with lower tech access.

- **Widen Technological Access for Women:**
  - Invest in programs providing women, especially in rural and conflict-affected areas, with access to technology and digital literacy training.
  - Facilitate women's access to online marketplaces and e-commerce platforms.

To International and Local NGOs

- **Provide Cybersecurity Training for Women:**
  - Offer specialized cybersecurity training programs for women, with an emphasis on threat recognition and effective countermeasures.
  - Develop tools and best practices for online security tailored for women activists and human rights defenders, focusing on encrypted communication and personal safety.

- **Rapidly Respond to Online Defamation:**
  - Help set up mechanisms to rapidly respond to online defamation targeting women, providing support and resources for legal and psychological aid.

- **Prioritize Technology Transfer to Mitigate the Effects of Climate Change:**
  - Support technology transfer initiatives that specifically benefit women in climate change mitigation efforts, such as renewable energy technologies suitable for home or community use.

Environment and Climate Recommendations

To Local and National Authorities

- **Devise Training Programs on Sustainable Practices:**
  - Launch women-centric training programs on sustainable fishing and agriculture, ensuring these are accessible to women in remote and conflict-affected areas.
  - Ensure women's equal access to essential resources, training, and markets for their produce, with an emphasis on sustainable practices.

- **Advocate for Women's Role in Environmental Sustainability:**
  - Actively encourage and facilitate women's involvement in environmental sustainability projects, including representation in sectors like agriculture, technology, and green business.
  - Develop policies and programs that support women in transitioning to green businesses and sustainable agricultural practices.

To International Organizations and NGOs:

- **Support Women in Agriculture:**
  - Involve local communities in creating specific solutions for women in agriculture, focusing on conflict-resilient agricultural practices.
  - Prioritize funding and support for environmental initiatives addressing challenges faced by women, such as water scarcity and land degradation.

- **Provide Platforms for Experience Sharing and Cooperation:**
  - Create platforms for women to share their experiences in agriculture and form cooperatives for collective marketing and purchasing power.
  - Conduct studies and gather data on the specific challenges faced by women in fishing and agriculture, using this information to tailor aid and support programs.

- **Use Women's Local Knowledge in Developing Agricultural Tools:**
  - Collaborate with Yemeni women to develop tools and technologies for fishing and agriculture that are suitable for use in conflict zones and resource-limited settings.

Appendix A. Key Aspects of TSP Adaptation

The following steps were taken to adapt the TSP approach for the workshop on "The Future of Women in the Public Sphere in Yemen."

1. **Convening a Diverse Group:**

   - In line with TSP's inclusivity principle, the workshop gathered a varied group of Yemeni women leaders, activists, and stakeholders from multiple sectors. This ensured a wide spectrum of perspectives on the challenges and roles of women in Yemen.

2. **Building a Safe and Open Environment:**

   - A conducive environment for open dialogue was crucial, considering the sensitivity of discussing women's rights in Yemen. The setting allowed participants to freely share experiences and envision future scenarios without societal constraints.

3. **Identifying Key Concerns and Forces:**

   - The participants identified core issues affecting Yemeni women and the driving forces in society, politics, and culture that could shape women's future public participation.

4. **Developing Scenarios through Collaborative Storytelling:**

   - Using TSP's inductive approach, participants crafted narratives exploring various potential futures for Yemeni women, taking into account diverse social, political, and cultural dynamics.

5. **Action Planning and Dissemination:**

   - The concluding phase focused on transforming these scenarios into actionable strategies and initiatives, translating theoretical concepts into practical interventions and policy recommendations.

6. **Applying Global TSP Lessons:**

   - TSP applications were utilized in South Africa's Mont Fleur Scenarios and Colombia's Peace Process.[34] These examples provided valuable lessons on using scenario-building as an exercise in complex, conflict-affected environments.

7. **Emphasis on Systemic Change:**

   - The workshop's goal extended beyond understanding the future to actively shaping it. It aimed to empower participants to envision and work towards a future where women's public participation is both normalized and valued.

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[34] "Regional Report: Attainment of Sustainable Development Goals in Conflict-affected Countries in the Arab Region," United Nations Development Programme, United Nations, July 6, 2023, https://www.un.org/humansecurity/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/FINAL-2-pager_LAS-Report_EN_updated-8-July-2021.pdf

Appendix B. Workshop Agenda and Scope

Amman, May 2023 ,28-26

Day 1:

The workshop began with opening remarks by Osamah al-Rawhani, Co-Executive Director for Policy and Partnerships at the Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies. Rim Mugahed, a researcher with the Sana'a Center and coordinator of the SAWT project (Supporting Women at the Arab Table), introduced the SAWT program and its goals. The day comprised two main sessions. The first, led by Bilqees al-Lahbi from the Sana'a Center, outlined the workshop preparation process and objectives. Participants then shared their experiences and challenges faced by women in their respective fields. The second session, initiated by Yasmeen al-Eryani, Co-Executive Director for Knowledge Production, focused on the scenario-building methodology and its significance in future forecasting and envisioning. Participants then discussed key trends and forces shaping women's presence in the public sphere in Yemen.

Day 2:

The day started with a summary of the previous day's work, transitioning to discussions on various issues like the role of organizations in addressing gender-based violence, women's struggles for a better future, societal responses to restrictions on women, and the future of Yemeni women in the public judiciary. Participants engaged in extensive discussions on the impact of the current situation on women and past experiences in the public judiciary. The afternoon session involved identifying current PESTEL factors and envisioning different scenarios for women. The day concluded with each working group presenting and discussing their recommendations.

Day 3:

The final day focused on finalizing recommendations and demands addressed to key actors based on the PESTEL and scenario-building exercise. Meetings were also held with representatives of diplomatic missions to Yemen, the European Union Mission to Yemen, the British Council, and representatives of the UN Special Envoy to Yemen.

Dr. Maryam Alkubati holds a Ph.D. in Social Sciences focused on Gender and Politics from the University of Tsukuba, Japan, where she was a recipient of the Japanese government MEXT scholarship. Dr. Alkubati has collaborated with NGOs, research institutes, and educational institutions like JICA Ogata Sadako Research Institute for Peace and Development (Japan), the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies (Qatar), Radboud University (the Netherlands), and the Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies (Yemen) as a researcher and gender specialist. Her research has mainly focused on women's political participation, women's role in peacebuilding, and sexual and gender-based violence in the Arab and MENA region.

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