Economic and Social Empowerment of Yemeni Women and their Role in Building Peace

The impact of War.. The role of Women in Building Peace.. Required Interventions

Since the escalation of conflict and war, women in Yemen can said to be the most affected group in the society. These conditions have imposed a new reality on women and re-determined their roles and lifestyles, as they add on to the already existing difficulties and challenges. In addition to the traditional roles played by women, they had to shoulder burdens beyond their capacities in order to maintain economic and social cohesion in the community, including participation efforts to achieve social peace or peace in general. Since the conflict and war broke out, and because of poor living and economic conditions, many Yemenis decided to leave the country in search of better jobs overseas, while many others died directly or indirectly due to the war. All these factors triggered significant changes in the lifestyles of Yemeni women, including new economic and social problems that did not exist in the past, forcing women to go out to the labor market to secure livelihoods, as they had to bear the burden of supporting their families and endure harsh conditions as a result of displacement and struggle for survival.

Although some studies on gender inequality are available in Yemen, as well as how the war has negatively affected women, yet, their focus was narrow in scope or geographically limited. These data are often general in nature – or may be outdated – and are based on limited samples. Besides, policies often neglect the repercussions and difficulties women face because of conflict and war unintentionally. Given the diverse gender dynamics in Yemen shaped by multiple factors, there is a real need to study the impact of conflict and war on women and to enhance their role in building peace and security matters. Therefore, this issue of the YSEU Bulletin seeks to explore the full extent of impacts brought by the ongoing conflict and war, and to raise awareness on these effects on women and their lifestyles. Moreover, the instinctive resilience demonstrated by Yemeni women is worth feeding into policy interventions and recommendations to promote their resilience, address the needs of women directly, and mitigate the impact of conflict and war on them. It also sheds light on the impact and repercussions of war and conflict on women in Yemen both economically and socially. Meanwhile, national mechanisms pertaining to women empowerment, including proposed interventions regarding economic and social empowerment and their role in building peace, shall also be enhanced.

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Empowering women: A process by which women gain power and control over their own lives and acquire the ability to make strategic choices. Women’s empowerment has five main components: 1) Women’s sense of self-worth 2) The right to have and determine choices 3) The right to have access to opportunities and resources 4) The right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home and 5) The ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally1.

At the national level, this definition is subject to certain limits and determinants, as women’s empowerment refers mainly to women’s ability to exercise their economic, social, political and other rights set forth by the Sharia and the Constitution, without derogation or prejudice against them.

Empowering women as a concept is somewhat new in Yemen, and dates back to the 1990s, when governments voiced at the Cairo Conference on Population and Development in 1994 the importance of women empowerment, followed by the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, which also emphasized the need to empower women and remove barriers preventing women participation in the economy so that they can perform their role in the economy and share the formulation of economic policies. Hence, the concept of empowerment is not limited to economy alone, but also includes equal access to resources, training and qualification, expansion of choices, freedom of opinion and expression, and sharing the decision-making. It is worth mentioning that the Cairo Conference on Population and Development as well as the Fourth Beijing Conference on Women triggered some reservations and criticism, mainly with regard to the provisions and texts that do not conform to Sharia and the Yemeni Constitution.

Thus, the economic empowerment of women seeks to improve the status of women and provide services to build human and institutional capacities, and ultimately empowering them economically, politically, socially and culturally, including access and participation in the decision-making.

Accordingly, several national mechanisms were established that would enable the advancement of women, including those affiliated with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor, the Women National Committee, the Yemeni Women Union, the Ministry of Human Rights and other relevant institutions, i.e. civil society organizations working in the area of empowering women. The National Woman Committee was established under a Cabinet Decree No. 97 for 1996 as a governmental body mandated with empowering and promoting the role of women. Later, the Committee began operating under the Higher Council for Women headed by the Prime Minister, to ensure the participation of women in all bodies and entities of the state to translate the outcomes of the Beijing Conference on the Universal Declaration of Women’s Rights and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women2. Likewise, the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference have in the meantime stressed on the political, civil, economic and social rights of women that maintain their dignity and participation through effective political engagement in building the state based on the provisions of the Constitution and related legal texts. In addition, texts tailored specifically to ensure integrated economic and social development of women, including access to healthcare and educational systems, strong commitment to effective women representation in the various bodies, state authorities, as well as elected and appointed councils, by at least 30 per cent.3

As for international conventions related to the empowerment of women, Yemen has ratified many international conventions and treaties, as well as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, mainly the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women approved by the United Nations General Assembly on December 18, 1979. There exist several international conventions to end discrimination against women in all its forms.

Social Reality of Girls and Women amid the War and Conflict Situation

Yemen is passing through a very difficult and catastrophic humanitarian situation, as more than 76 percent of citizens are in need of humanitarian assistance due to the crisis caused by the ongoing conflict and war, which largely influenced the situation of women and girls in Yemen. There are 4.6 million women and 5.5 million girls need assistance in 20214, amid severe gender inequality. Yemen ranks 155th – second from last – in the Global Gender Gap Index for 2021, compared to 115 in 20065, despite the efforts and intensive programs in this respect. The conflict and war have caused the human development situation in Yemen to deteriorate, as the country is classified among countries with the lowest human development index worldwide, ranking 179 out of 189 countries listed by the 2020 Report.6

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1 European Institute for Gender Equality. https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/termv/1102
3 The Rights of Women in the National Document, NDC.
Health Suffering

As the conflict and war continues, however, its indirect deaths get usually higher than direct, with vulnerable groups, mostly women and children, have borne the brunt of it. Conflicts may also cause more deaths among women than men. The war and conflict in Yemen have affected the health status of women, and led to higher rates of morbidity and nutrition. Women of childbearing age, particularly pregnant and lactating women, have limited or no access to reproductive health services, including antenatal care, safe delivery, postnatal care, family planning and emergency obstetric and newborn care.

The Yemen Humanitarian Needs Overview document shows that the destruction or closure of health facilities and shortage in medical staff, particularly females, has spiraled the suffering of nearly 9.9 million women and girls in accessing basic health services, being the most impacted population groups. Vulnerable groups include female-headed HHs, pregnant and lactating women, as well as the poorest families, children under five, the elderly, people with disabilities, people with chronic or serious illnesses, and survivors of gender-based violence. Moreover, nearly 5 million women are in need of health assistance.

Poor coverage of health services in Yemen, lack of specialized staff, lack of essential medical supplies and a lack of female doctors affect maternal health. The country has the highest maternal mortality ratio in the Arab region and has been placed among the "high alert" countries for maternal mortality in the Fragile Countries Index, where one woman die every two hours during childbirth for almost completely preventable causes. Meanwhile, 10 mothers died every day from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth complications during the past four years, as the maternal mortality ratio index increased significantly from 148 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2013 to 235 deaths per 100,000 in 2017, and to over 500 deaths between 2019 and 2020.

With nearly 49% of health facilities damaged, the suffering of women in Yemen is increasing, as there are 5 million women and girls of childbearing age, and 1.7 million pregnant and lactating women have limited or no access to reproductive health services, including prenatal care, safe delivery, postnatal care and emergency obstetric care. Furthermore, 73% of all IDPs in Yemen totally 4 million are women and children, while about 30% of IDP families are currently supported by women, compared to 9% before the escalation of the war in 2015.

Decreased Health Services for Women Due to Covid-19 Pandemic

The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated and overwhelmed the already strained health system in Yemen. Roughly, 15 per cent of the functioning health system has been re-purposed for COVID-19, which has contributed to reducing overall health coverage by 20 to 30 per cent. Fewer patients are seeking healthcare partly due to fear of COVID-19, related stigma and constrained access.

Data indicate that projected health needs for women in 2021 increased by 11.9 per cent compared with 2020 levels. COVID-19 pandemic and limited funding in 2020 resulted in a significant decrease in mother and child health services, reproductive health services, daily medical consultations, vaccination services, and services for people with disabilities. Priority health needs are maintaining and enhancing support to primary, secondary and tertiary care, including trauma care, emergency referral of women, mother and child health based on the Minimum Service Package.

Support to programs that work to prevent, detect, investigate, and respond to disease outbreaks, increased immunization coverage and management of non-communicable diseases is needed. Access to safe pregnancy and delivery care requires special focus, particularly due to defunding which reduced reproductive health services.

Nutritional situation and food crisis

Current nutrition data shows that about 1.2 million pregnant and lactating women suffer the lack of services to treat or prevent acute malnutrition, with women and girls are disproportionately affected. The prevalence rate of anemia among PLWs stands at 71%. Besides, leaving the family home to get food may prevent women from taking care of their children and cause the nutritional status of both mothers and their children to deteriorate. This risk is particularly high among female-headed households who may not receive any other support. Six governorates have acute malnutrition rates that exceed the 15 per cent of WHO emergency threshold: Hodeidah, Lahj, Taiz, Hajjah, Aden and Abyan. These governorates include 83 districts that account for nearly half (46 per cent) of acute malnutrition

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1 UNDP, UNDP-YEM War Impact on SDGs 2019.
2 https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Final%20-%20Yemen%20_Oct%202020%20_Ac%2020_V2%20_final.pdf
3 UNFPA, Yemen Humanitarian Response, February 2021.
5 UNFPA, the Situation of Yemen’s Population Report 2020.
caseload and about 16 per cent of acute malnutrition cases live in 49 frontline districts. The risk of acute malnutrition increases among women living in difficult conditions, during displacement and hot spots, and they may lack access to life-saving nutrition services.\(^{13}\)

The 2020 Yemen Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) analysis identified several contributing factors to acute malnutrition, especially among women. These include a deterioration in food insecurity situation, reduced access to WASH and health services, poor infant and young feeding practices by PLWs, a high prevalence of co-morbidities (malaria, diarrhea, and respiratory infections), ongoing war and economic shocks that have affected food intake. These factors have been compounded by the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on food supply and health coverage.\(^{14}\)

**Mental Health Disorders among Women**

The impact of nearly seven years of conflict and persistent humanitarian needs have taken a heavy toll on the mental health of women and girls in Yemen. An estimated 1 in 5 people suffer from mental health disorders\(^{15}\), as mental healthcare services remain scarce in Yemen and that the proportion of psychiatrists per population is insufficient. Mental illness is highly stigmatized in Yemen and that makes the situation of women with mental health disorders even worse.\(^{16}\)

In addition, many Yemeni women have also experienced psychological shocks that are difficult to recover from as a result of fear, terror and threats that they experience with every shelling of neighborhoods, armed attacks on homes or the encirclement of villages and neighborhoods in search of wanted persons or opponents of one of the parties, as well as receiving news of the death or abduction of their children, husbands or fathers who are on the frontlines or those who move from one governorate to another in search of livelihoods.\(^{17}\)

A major challenge in meeting mental health needs in Yemen is that of the limited number of psychiatrists. In 2011, there were only 44 psychiatrists in the country and four specialized hospitals (Aden, Sana’a, Hodeidah and Taiz). A local NGO ran a mental health hotline and reported that the number of callers who have attempted suicide nearly doubled in 2019, and that 92% of the callers were Women.\(^{18}\) Scaling up mental health activities and services to women in high-risk areas, active war zones and IDP sites constitutes an urgent need, together with establishing prevention and response mechanisms at the community level.

15. UNFPA, Yemen Humanitarian Response, op. cit.
18. Marta Colburn, the Life Phases of A Yemeni Woman, Sana’a Center for Strategic Studies, April 10, 2021, p 45.
Among other issues facing Yemeni women and can be considered a source of disorders and health problems is the phenomenon of early marriage, which represents a means of protection from host communities and to reduce financial burdens. Health and economic problems, as well as incomplete education associated with child marriage play a major role in the emergence of gender-based violence (GBV) in the country. This remains key concern being a negative coping mechanism that is normalized by societies.

A study by UNFPA\textsuperscript{19} to explore the impact of current humanitarian conditions on child marriage showed that 1 in 5 displaced girls between aged 10 and 19 being married, compared to 1 in 8 girls in the host communities, where the average age of marriage is 16 years. Married girls experienced maternal health problems, where an estimated 1 in 10 married girls losing their baby during childbirth, and that available health services, especially reproductive health, are largely insufficient.

The continuation of conflict and war has led to a spike in the rates of child marriage, as families seek to benefit from the dowry to face the difficulties brought by the war and protect their daughters against harassment and destitution. Numerous studies and research confirm that child marriage rates have escalated to an estimated 66 percent\textsuperscript{20}, and that over 65 per cent of girls marry before they reach 18 years, compared to 50% before the war.\textsuperscript{21}

This means that the ongoing conflict and war has led to a rise in the phenomenon of child marriage driven by poverty and social insecurity\textsuperscript{22}. According to United Nations data, 32 percent of women aged 20 to 24 across Yemen got married for the first time, or have been married, at the age 18 or younger\textsuperscript{23}. Child marriage in volatile and humanitarian contexts has multiple negative consequences for girls and women, most notably; it undermines their health, including sexual and reproductive health and rights - increased risk of sexual and gender-based violence, and consequently higher mortality rates among mothers and children under five.

**Education**

The conflict and war in Yemen has had a significant negative impact on education. The number of children in need of education assistance annually has increased from 1.1 million in 2014\textsuperscript{24} to 5.5 million in 2020\textsuperscript{25}, and up to 5.6 million children (52% of them girls) in 2021\textsuperscript{26}. Constrained access to education by boy and girl school-aged children was significantly disrupted due to the negative effects of the current situation on education, the sharp deterioration in the economic situation and hiking displacement rates. Girl students are more likely to miss education due to safety concerns, shortage in female teachers and lack of WASH facilities.

Estimates for February 2021 show over two million school-age girls and boys are out of school. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, approximately 47 per cent of girls were out of school compared to 53 per cent of boys. Financial insecurity within the family prevents children from enrolling in schools and causes children to drop out and move into child labour, especially girls\textsuperscript{27}. There exists a well-established culture where families prioritize boys’ education over girls’, let alone the non-conducive environment that is not gender-sensitive, and the distance to the nearest school.

Denying girls their right to education remains a worrisome issue amid ineffective urgent measures to tackle this. Relevant percentages and numbers portend the mammoth difficulties to provide inclusive education and reduce the gender gap, especially in education, which is one of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals Agenda. According to the GSNI 2020 report, bias against women in education reaches 45.3 per cent.\textsuperscript{28}

The conflict, damaged education infrastructure, continued disruption of education across the country and the fragmentation of education systems have had a profound impact on the learning and overall cognitive and emotional development of nearly all 10.1 million school-age boys and girls in Yemen. The situation has been aggravated by COVID-19, as schools were temporarily closed from mid-March 2020 affecting the learning of

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\textsuperscript{20} World Bank Group, Yemen-Country-Engagement-Note-for-the-Period-FY20-FY21, April 11, 2019.

\textsuperscript{21} Child Marriage In Humanitarian Contexts, Published in August 2020.

\textsuperscript{22} "Girls Not Brides" is a global partnership of more than 1400 civil society organizations from over 100 countries, committed to ending child marriage and ensuring girls can reach their full potential. It is a limited partnership and a charity registered in England.

\textsuperscript{23} Hodedah: Urban Profiling, op. cit, P 24.


\textsuperscript{25} OCHA, Yemen Humanitarian Needs Overview 2015, December 2014.

\textsuperscript{26} OCHA, Yemen Humanitarian Needs Overview 2015, December 2014.

\textsuperscript{27} OCHA, Yemen Humanitarian Needs Overview 2015, December 2014.

\textsuperscript{28} MoPIC, Yemen Socio Economic Update, Issue 52.
nearly 5.8 million students, many of whom are at risk of not returning to school due to the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic, especially girls.\(^{29}\)

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Yemen (UNOCHA) estimates that over 171,600 teachers in 206 districts (20% of them females, i.e. 34.5 thousand female teachers in 11 governorates) were affected by the conflict and are not receiving salaries. This has negatively affected the quality of education provided to nearly 3.6 million girls and boys in these areas.\(^{30}\)

Thus, focus should be placed on assistance support to maintain basic education services, particularly in areas where schools have been damaged, closed or have been unable to function fully due to other constraints associated with conflict and war. Serious steps shall also be taken to reinstate education system, to serve mainly and directly displaced and most vulnerable girls in many priority areas in Yemen. Girls’ enrollment shall also be enhanced through a set of activities, including: refurbishment of schools, building additional classrooms, as well as building or rehabilitating toilets. In addition to providing additional new seats or repairing damaged ones, as well as providing school supplies and basic educational aides, such as textbooks and kits for students and teachers. Moreover, attention should be paid to strengthening the competencies of education staff, including teachers, in the area of education in emergencies, as well as proper training of male and female teachers on psychosocial support, conflict sensitivity, inclusion and risk prevention.

**Internal Displacement**

Women and girls within the age group 18 – 60 years represent the bulk of IDPs, and are disproportionately and acutely affected by displacement triggered from the war. An estimated 70 per cent of the over 4 million IDPs in Yemen are women and children, while women now head approximately 30 per cent of the displaced households, compared to 9 per cent before the escalation of the conflict in 2015.\(^{31}\)

There are over 1,500 spontaneous, unplanned camps and require support to meet their basic needs. Approximately 93 per cent of the sites host pregnant and lactating women, 84% host female-headed households.\(^{32}\) Displaced women are the most vulnerable group and most in need of urgent interventions. The locations, population size and characteristics of these sites change over time and according to war conditions. Currently, these sites are mostly in Hajjah (35 per cent of IDPs live in camp-like settings), Hodeidah (19 per cent), Ma’rib (15 per cent), Al Jawf (7 per cent) and Taiz (5 per cent). Data show that 76 per cent lack formal tenancy agreements, which can lead to secondary displacement and eviction threats, which can compromise living conditions. Some 32 per cent of sites are at risk of flooding. About 48 per cent of people in IDP hosting sites are within 5 kilometers of the areas of active hostilities. Sites also lack services. Data show that over 50 per cent of sites are not reached by the humanitarian actors, and 93 per cent of the camp-like settings across the country lack basic services such as food distributions, protection services, WASH, and education, of which 83 per cent face critical service gaps.\(^{33}\)

The displaced women bear a double burden, especially those without a breadwinner, as they have to look after their children in a very difficult context, including loss of livelihoods and income, spread of epidemics and access difficulty to water and food, as well as adequate shelter. Data show that 93 per cent of sites lack adequate


\(^{31}\) UNFPA, Yemen Humanitarian Response, op.cit.

\(^{32}\) Yemen Humanitarian Needs Overview, Humanitarian Programs Planning Cycle, February 2021, p 59, p 118.

\(^{33}\) Yemen Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021, February 2021, op. cit. Since such figures are constantly changing, they should be considered as indicative.
shelter maintenance and assistance, 89 per cent lack adequate health services, 91 per cent lack adequate WASH services, and 82 per cent lack adequate food distributions.34 As the number of displaced women and girls increases, so does the need for protection. With limited shelter options and eroded formal and informal protection mechanisms, displaced women and girls tend to suffer most from lack of privacy, threats to safety, and limited access to basic services, especially in overcrowded collective sites. Displaced women and girls from marginalized groups or those with disabilities struggle the most to access services35. Displaced women face greater difficulties securing livelihoods for themselves and their families, including exposure to many health and psychological risks and even violence and exploitation, all of which are compelling and unfavorable conditions for women to be able to improve their standard of living.

### The War and Conflict and Its economic Impact on Women

Continued conflict, war and economic deterioration makes women at greater risk and vulnerability, as Yemen remains the world’s largest humanitarian and aid operation. The repercussions of the escalating war and economic downfall have had multi-faceted effects on women and have left millions of women at risk of poverty, hunger and disease.

The economic downturn has brought the average per capita GNP down from $1,191 in 2014 to $867 in 2020 (at the official exchange rate of 250 YER/US Dollar), and from $1,191 in 2014 to $362 in 2020 (at the parallel exchange rate of 600 YER/US Dollar)36. The drop in average per capita income (per capita share of GNP), estimated at 69.6% of its value in dollars in 2020 compared to 2014, and the depreciation of the local currency against foreign currencies by 180.4% of its value during the same period37, poses extra economic pressures on women and their struggle to provide for their families, and often have little or no experience with income-generating activities, making rehabilitative and developmental skills around income-generating activities targeting women and girls an urgent need to be met. An estimated 40 percent of households have lost their primary income source (with women more severely affected than men)38.

The conflict and war have pushed more population below the national poverty line, i.e. from 48.6% in 2014 to 78.8% in 2019. If the current deteriorating situation persists, poverty rates are expected to rise further. The poverty rate among female-headed households spiked to about 72.0%, at the rural level, compared to 58.2% among men-headed HHs. At the urban level, the poverty rate among female-headed HHs stands at 20.1%39. The situation in 2020 shows how gloomy the picture was. A UNDP study in 2019 has warned that Yemen will become the poorest country in the world by 2022 if the fighting continues; where 79% of the population will live below the poverty line.40

Nationally, female-headed households reached 416.8 thousand families, i.e. 11.4% of total households in the Republic, while the number of rural female-headed HHs nears 274.3 thousand families, i.e. 11.1% of all families in the rural areas. Meanwhile, female-headed HHs in urban areas are about 142.4 thousand families, i.e. 12.1% of all urban families41. A recent report has revealed that about 50,000 married women lost their military and civilian husbands during five years of war. This indicates that there are 50,000 families without breadwinners, making their way to the unknown, and they live in catastrophic humanitarian situations42. In other words, women in Yemen support nearly half a million households. Actual number may be much higher.

During the period 2014 through 2019, the death toll among men and boys in Yemen reached 82%. With such high number of deaths among men, most households are now supported by females, 21% of them under the age of 18. These upsetting results makes women and their children in Yemen vulnerable to poverty and exploitation as

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34 Yemen Humanitarian Needs Overview, op. cit.
37 CSO, op. cit.
41 UNFPA and CSO, Statistical Profile of Women and Men in Yemen 2018, p 185.
the conflict and war wears on. Poverty-stricken communities also suffer a lack of adequate housing, clean water and healthy food.43

Women in IDP sites suffer most from poverty, as about 30% of displaced families are headed by women, as was previously mentioned. This expansion in poverty among women, food insecurity, and disease constitutes a dire structural deficit that will affect human capital development in the long term. Poverty is a major obstacle for female-headed HHs, since they cannot pay for sending their children to school, in addition to health challenges that these families face, including malnutrition, undermines the mental abilities of children. The Human Capital Index shows that a child born in Yemen today will be 37 percent as productive when she grows up as she could be, if he/she completed her/his education and achieved full health.44

The significant escalation of violence and security concerns resulting from the ongoing war have further limited women’s already limited opportunities to access economic activities, as their mobility and participation in the public sphere have been further restricted.

Research indicates that the proportion of women in the labor force affected by the war is higher than men. Since 2015, male employment has declined by 11 per cent, while female employment has fallen by 28 per cent. Women-owned businesses were harder hit than male-owned ones, although in actual terms far fewer were affected as they accounted for just 4 per cent of all businesses prior to the conflict. While 26 percent of businesses in the trade, services and industrial sectors had closed by 2015, this rate rose to 42 percent among female-owned businesses, usually due to physical damage, as well as loss of capital, and shortages of electricity and fuel. Female business owners found it more difficult than their male counterparts to access dollar bank accounts.45

The aggravated humanitarian faced by women due to the conflict and the war created extra life difficulties for them, and increased in the number of female breadwinners by three times than it was before the war, amid scarce resources and hiking prices of food commodities, and a sharp decline in agricultural output, in which women make up for about 80% of its workforce. Additional burdens shouldered by the family, and women in particular, include caring of an increased number of war-driven disabled children and husbands, as well as a lack of support and programs allocated to this most vulnerable group. Nearly 86% of the services provided to this group were suspended. Furthermore, women suffer psychological damage due to loss of their husbands, fathers and children in the battles. Many women were increasingly forced to accept income-generating jobs that were not socially acceptable for in the past, including begging on a large scale. Studies show that this is a positive sign that may lead to a change in society’s attitudes towards women’s work, but also warns against women’s exposure to violence, especially among the poorest, displaced and immigrant women.46

Economic Empowerment and Livelihoods of Yemeni Women during the War

Expanding women’s economic opportunities is important because it is crucial to women’s empowerment in general, including social justice, in line with the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the 17 SDGs, particularly SGD (5) which calls to “ Give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control of land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws” and SDG (8) which calls to “Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all”.47 National and international resolutions, including UN resolutions, are important to clarify the role of women in the economy, as they recognize that women’s economic empowerment creates long-term social benefits. Evidence proven that women tend to reinvest up to 90% of their income on their families, and that women’s economic empowerment in the post-war period is fundamental to ensuring continued peace and stability.48

Yemeni women have availed themselves of available mechanisms and opportunities to empower them economically which are implemented by a number of local and international organizations, including cash for work, livelihoods support and SMEs through existing national mechanisms: SMEPS, and PW, in addition to few projects implemented through the Yemeni Women Union.

43 World Bank Group, Yemen-Country-Engagement-Note-for-the-Period-FY20-FY21, April 11, 2019. Munir Ben Weber, How the War in Yemen Impacts Women Economically? Q Post, October 25, 2019. https://www.gemweb.org/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AB%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B2-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%81%D9%8A


46 UN Women, Arab States, Women’s Economic Empowerment. https://arabstates.unwomen.org/ar/what-we-do/economic-empowerment

47 https://www.un.org/sgae/ar/statements_speeches/

48 https://www.un.org/sgae/ar/statements_speeches/
Key projects supporting women’s economic empowerment and livelihoods during the war:

Although some mechanisms to empower women economically exist, however, they are generally limited and unable to provide family security for many women given the growing burdens driven by the current situation since the beginning of the conflict and war. Key mechanisms include microfinance programs implemented by a number of national institutions with support by donors, mainly SFD through the Small and Micro Enterprise Development Unit, Al-Amal Microfinance Bank and Al-Kuraimi Islamic Microfinance Bank, all of which support home-based small business for women, including sewing, incense and perfumes and some other simple businesses. As of end of April 2020, there were just 89,208 active borrowers from MFIs, of which 10 to 34 per cent only are women49, as shown in Table (1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Total # of Active Borrowers</th>
<th>% of Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Al-Amal Microfinance Bank</td>
<td>35,031</td>
<td>%34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Microfinance Foundation</td>
<td>12,577</td>
<td>%25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Namaa Microfinance Foundation</td>
<td>6,640</td>
<td>%23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Kuraimi Islamic Microfinance Bank</td>
<td>6,325</td>
<td>%10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (1): % of Women Borrowers to Total MFIs Active Borrowers as of April 2020


The Social Fund for Development (SFD) is one of key national institutions that work to advance women’s empowerment in activities and interventions it implements, and by no less than 30% of total beneficiaries. SFD has provided a host of short and long-term training and qualification courses, as well as temporary jobs and support for women businesses, as shown in Table (2). It also targets pregnant and lactating women through cash assistance and health education, with the objective of alleviating poverty and improving their living, health and psychological conditions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program/Project</th>
<th>Type of Intervention</th>
<th># of Beneficiary Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Training and Organizational Support program</td>
<td>Life Skills Training Program to help women establish income-generating projects through training on certain skills such as sewing, embroidery, bee-keeping and dairy products.</td>
<td>23,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provide temporary jobs for university graduates below 35 years to work as facilitators and development advocates in their areas.</td>
<td>2,059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMEPS</td>
<td>Protection and empowerment of women during crises</td>
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<td>19 projects to support continuity of the businessmen sector</td>
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<td>Financial and non-financial inclusion project in the integrated intervention areas – Grassroots Economic development</td>
<td>589</td>
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<td>Livestock business continuity support project</td>
<td>2,899</td>
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<td>Education Unit</td>
<td>Provide temporary jobs to women as education facilitators</td>
<td>1660</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Provide temporary jobs for young males and females/ Cash for education services</td>
<td>2,181</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health and Social Protection Unit</td>
<td>Provide temporary jobs to women as community educators</td>
<td>7,501</td>
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<td>Funding MF institutions, programs and banks</td>
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<td>Support project for SME owners affected by the war</td>
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<td>Saving groups projects, VSS, training and awareness raising on saving for female beneficiaries</td>
<td>2000</td>
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<td>Transfers guarantee program</td>
<td>481</td>
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<td>Participation in the literacy and professional knowledge program to alleviate poverty</td>
<td>376</td>
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<tr>
<td>Labor-intensive program</td>
<td>Provide temporary jobs as part of the Cash for Work Program, which involves women in its activities and projects.</td>
<td>73,015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (2): Total Female Beneficiaries from Women Empowerment Projects Implemented by SFD and PWP


The Public Works Project (PWP) has a particular focus on women's economic empowerment and livelihoods as part of its projects and activities, mainly the Emergency Response Project to the Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen funded by the World Bank through the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). PWP managed to provide

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job opportunities for hundreds of women as researchers, engineers and consultants, as well as workers in construction activities with contractors in the field, such as cooking for workers or cleaning and even ponding concrete surface with water. A total of 73,015 women have benefitted from the labor-intensive program so far. The US$ 400 million Yemen Emergency Crisis Response Project (YECRP) works to reduce some of the socioeconomic barriers facing women. It has helped nearly 40,000 women become equal partners in addressing the urgent needs of their communities. They have been involved in nearly 3,700 projects. Nearly 800 of these projects generated work and much-needed cash for over 63,000 women to enable them to meet their basic needs. YECRP has also trained and employed more than 3,600 young women to help hundreds of thousands of mothers and children in need by providing educational services. YECRP is supporting 3,200 women-owned and operated businesses. Many were on the verge of collapse, having weathered the repercussions of war and economic shocks since 2015.

Women are a major force for job creation, family security and social cohesion. Given that the fact most projects include women’s empowerment mechanisms and programs, yet, it is still very limited compared to their vulnerability, poverty and deteriorated economic conditions.

Cash for Nutrition Program

In 2015, the Yemen Social Fund for Development (SFD) worked on a Cash for Nutrition program that has since been folded into the Emergency Crisis Response Project. Targeting pregnant women and women with children under the age of five, the project gives them money to buy food and educates them about child nutrition. It has been able to reach more than 165,000 pregnant and lactating women (PLWs) and 175,000 children so far. To make a difference in Yemen, the projects employs women with high school education or above as community health educators. Nearly 4,000 health educators have been trained to teach communities about nutrition and screen them for malnutrition.

Emergency Cash Transfers Project

The ECT component implemented by UNICEF under the Emergency Crisis Response Project funded by the World Bank is a tool to support vulnerable groups affected by the conflict, including women, and delivers emergency safety net support for the poor and female-headed households. It targets 1.5 million HHs, of which 40 per cent are women. UNICEF applies a set of measures to remove cultural constraints in some governorates that make it difficult for many women to go to sites to collect their benefits, which leads to many of them assigning someone else to collect, which in turns can create an opportunity for fraud, and/or collective payment. These measures include: 1) Strengthening direct communication with female beneficiaries, by establishing female networks to facilitate the dissemination of information about project to females, as a way to overcome the barriers to physical participation of females in the community meetings organized by the project and 2) Engage women in the disbursement process as part of assisting women in collecting their cash transfers, and ensuring their economic empowerment.

IV Promoting the Role of Yemeni Women in the Peacebuilding Process

Although many measures have been taken at the national and international levels to promote the role of women in the various aspects of life, and during conflicts and wars, including through a number of UN resolutions and national initiatives, mainly the Beijing Platform for Action, which emphasized the need to enhance women’s representation in elected bodies and parliaments, change gender stereotypes and address gender-based discrimination.

Frame 1: UNSC Resolution (1325)

The UNSC Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, adopted on 31 October 2000, was the first Security Council resolution that specifically recognized the effects of conflict, especially sexual and gender-based violence, on women and girls. This resolution falls within specific frameworks, and provides a useful framework that can improve policies and develop programs on gender issues, peace, security and development. More importantly, the UNSCR 1325 provides a platform for civil society to demand that their governments hold legal accountability, general and political awareness about sexual violence in conflicts. SCR 1325 is an 18-point document focusing on four interrelated issues:- Women’s participation at all levels of decision-making and peace processes.- Gender training in peacekeeping operations.- Protection of the rights of women and girls.- Gender mainstreaming in reporting and implementation systems in the United Nations.

Source: A study on the Impact of War on the Participation of Women In civil Society Organization and Peacebuilding 2017, AWAM Foundation in partnership with Oxfam and YLIOF.
International Resolutions and How they Promote Women’s Role in Building Peace

The Millennium Declaration in 2000, endorsed by the UN Member States as a set of general development goals that societies must achieve by 2015 emphasized the need to empower women and to reduce gender gap, as envisioned by SDGs, mainly SDG (5): Gender equality. This Goal seeks to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, ensure the right of women to access healthcare and education services and full participation in the political and economic spheres[^54]. Efforts at the regional and global levels include strengthening the role of women in matters of peace and security. In response to these efforts, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution # 1325 on “Women, Peace and Security[^55], on October 31, 2000. In 2014, UN Women established a presence in Yemen. UN Women works with its partners to eliminate discrimination against women and girls, empower women and promote equality between women and men as partners and beneficiaries of development, human rights, humanitarian action and peace and security activities[^56].

Involving Women in Building Peace

Women in Yemen face a plethora of challenges and difficulties caused by the conflict and war, which impacted every aspect of their lives, including poor involvement in politics. This has translated in higher bias rate against women in politics, which recorded 79%, according to the GSNI Report for 2020[^57]. Yet, there are still continuous efforts to find space for women’s representation and participation in the peacebuilding process at different levels led by multiple entities, initiatives and women’s organizations involved in peacebuilding and social peace, mainly the following:

1. **Yemeni Women’s Pact for Peace and Security (TAWAFAQ)**

   The Yemeni Women Pact for Peace and Security was established by the United Nations Women’s Office in Yemen. It is a “voluntary gathering of a wide array of women whose main objective is to end the conflict, war and violence, rebuild peace and bring life back to normal in Yemen, amplify the voice of Yemeni women, and explore ways to involve women and push for them to fill decision-making positions at all formal and social levels.”[^58]

2. **Partnership for Peace Initiative**

   The Partnership for Peace Initiative was established in June 2015. It is a voluntary initiative by a group of women leaders who believe in a culture of peace and security, and that there must be a parallel and supportive communal path to the official path with key role in promoting peace at the community and grass-roots level. Also, to assume the role of mediator between the grassroots and official leaderships and vice versa.[^59]

3. **The Group of Nine**

   It was launched in 2019 under support by the UN Women. It includes nine networks led by women and youth, and over one thousand young actors, women’s expertise and competencies in different governorates and the diaspora as members, as partners advocating for peace-making and pushing the political agenda towards negotiation and a peaceful solution, and to end the conflict and war in Yemen. It comprises the following entities: the Yemeni Women Pact for Peace and Security, Peace Partners Alliance, Southern Women for Peace, Feminist Peace Voices, Feminist Summit, Peace Makers, Women Network for Yemen, Youth Consultative Council, and Awareness Youth Platform.[^60]

Empowering Yemeni Women and the Potential Impact on Peacebuilding and Communal Peace

The role of women in providing for their families is becoming increasingly important. This is not limited to contributing to economic development, but, it has much to do with ensuring the minimum standards of decent living for poor families, whose number keep rising day by day amid continued conflict and war. Women are central

[^54]: YSEU, 2020, Issue 55, MoPIC.
[^55]: AWAM Foundation in partnership with Oxfam and YLDF, the Impact of War on the Participation of Women In civil Society Organization and Peacebuilding.
[^56]: Arab States, UN Women, Yemen [https://arabstates.unwomen.org/ar/countries/yemen](https://arabstates.unwomen.org/ar/countries/yemen)
[^57]: YSEU, 2020, Issue 52, MoPIC.
[^58]: The 2nd Annual Report on Women’s Political Representation in the Arab Region 2018, Chapter One: The Status of Yemeni Women amid Armed Conflict, the Forum for Women in Politics, the Arab Region.
[^59]: Women in Politics Forum, the Arab Region. op. cit.
[^60]: The Group of Nine Alliance: The Group’s Presentation to the 3rd Feminist Summit 2020.
to social stability and social cohesion. And any interventions targeting women would have a positive impact on the society as a whole. Policies and interventions to advance women’s economic empowerment are of paramount importance and have wide scale positive effects on all members of society, most importantly the following:

- There is a correlation between women’s economic empowerment and building peace, which stems from the important role of women in influencing their family members, especially children. In the early stages of the child’s life, the role of women is mainly centered around providing psychological and financial security, and in a manner that contributes to providing a favorable environment for raising a generation free from social animosities that compromise peace building. This can be obviated by shifting focus to improving the economic situation of women and raising their awareness of matters related to peacebuilding.

- In most areas with active conflict, women play a pivotal role during the reconstruction process. This role was restated in the Declaration issued by the UN Peacebuilding Commission on women’s economic empowerment on September 26, 2013. The statement recognized the vital role of women in peacebuilding and emphasized the critical role of economic empowerment as part of economic recovery policies. The declaration underlined the need to incorporate economic empowerment as component in all UN initiatives and programs on post-conflict economic recovery.

- Women’s economic empowerment has become imperative to alleviate the human suffering of women, especially in the light of unprecedented deterioration in the economic and humanitarian conditions in Yemen and rising poverty levels. Women have all the potential needed to effect development at the family and the society alike. Several successful experiences have shown the extent to which women were able to contribute effectively to advancing the economy. Therefore, integrating women into economic activities becomes far more important at times of war and conflict, with their implications on economic decline and loss of incomes, in order to enhance peace and security building.

V Priority Policies and Interventions to Shore up Resilience among Yemeni Women

Strengthening women’s role and empowering in all social and economic spheres, including building peace, a set of supportive priority policies and interventions have to be introduced to enhance women’s resilience during the ongoing conflict and war and the associated impact on the repercussions. In addition, a set of interventions need to be there to not only leverage women’s economic participation within their societies, but also in matters related to social peace and peacebuilding at the national level:

Interventions targeting women’s economic empowerment

1. Support interventions targeting women who have lost their income sources, had their salaries suspended, or lost their breadwinners during the war, to restore their ability to earn income, whether they are still in IDP sites, returned home following a period of displacement, or still living in the affected areas, including through commercial and service businesses accompanied by skills training to ensure continuity and growth of these businesses, as a sustainable source of income, for the post-war era. Medium and long term interventions in the area of education and training are also important to qualify women to enter the labor market, and to serve as providers of humanitarian support as a practice of the training and empowerment they had acquired.

2. Conduct a quantitative and qualitative field studies and research to monitor material and human losses incurred by women, in order to analyze the impact of the war on them, understand the situation of Yemeni women, and assess their needs, as well as how the war has impacted them currently and in the future. This would be useful to better target female-headed households and to design future operations.

3. Provide technical support to poor women others in need of support and assistance, including training and qualification, to help them get out of poverty. Considering the growing number of poor women and female-headed HHs suffering poor living conditions due to continued war and the escalation of conflict, a more sustainable interventions shall be geared up, including:
   - Provision of support to women-run and operated small businesses that generate modest income, or those who rely on social benefits.
   - Support the empowerment of rural women through integrated interventions with long-impact, including awareness-raising on the importance of education, vocational training, sound hygiene practices, as well as human rights and societal issues. The impact of such interventions would be felt later in the future because they will eradicate the root causes of poverty, while at the same time develop a new generation
of rural women with sound knowledge, culture, skills and health, and eventually find more rewarding and income-generating jobs.

- Support livelihood and income generating activities to produce highly nutritional food, with a focus on rural women.
- Support and encourage initiatives traditionally applied to increase women’s professional participation, such as entrepreneurship, better access to microfinance or promote home-based businesses, and relate their products to the markets.

4. Further study is needed to ascertain the extent of conflict-driven changes to the women’s workforce, and to quantify new dynamics in women’s labor force participation in different governorates and among different demographics and education levels. For example, interventions to boost women’s labor force participation must be guided by further study to improve understanding of the factors hindering women’s entry to the labor market. This must include consultations with Yemeni women and men from all demographics and parts of Yemen. Quota systems could be an effective way to ensure that women play an active role in recovery and reconstruction efforts.\(^{61}\)

5. Carry out qualitative studies in rural areas of Yemen and explore the impact of the war and conflict on rural women in order to capture the changing gender role. The lack of information and data regarding vulnerabilities and needs, as well as nuisances of the political, economic and social settings surrounding women make it difficult for concerned organizations to plan, intervene with activities and programs that can effectively contribute to women’s empowerment, including all the support needed, to amplify their voices and make sure they are heard.\(^{62}\)

Interventions targeting social aspects to enhance women’s access to health, nutrition and education services

**health and nutrition:**

1) Strengthen the existing integrated response to ensure women and girls have access to healthcare, by hiring more female health workers, as well as through training to women from vulnerable communities as midwives, and provision of reproductive health services. Besides, full support needs to be geared up to ensure women and girls can access to the right and full health information.

2) Support health facilities to facilitate women’s access to reproductive health services, including prenatal care, safe delivery, postnatal care, and integrated mother and child health care, including facilitating the transportation process since most women lack the resources needed to reach out to these centers.

3) Support mobile teams to deliver an integrated package of health and nutritional services to the hard-to-reach and displaced women, including Vitamin “A” and iron supplements to PLWs and children.

4) Implement an integrated sectoral package of interventions (including WASH, education, health and proper feeding practices for women) in areas hardest hit by malnutrition.

5) Prioritize the provision of nutritional supplements to pregnant and lactating mothers of children aged 6-24 months.

6) Re-operate the closed health centers to treat women and provide primary health care to those suffering from malnutrition.

7) Provide the essential medicines and medical supplies to health units and centers as well as hospitals.

8) Renovate, refurbish and equip the non-functioning health facilities.

9) Support maternal health services, prevent non-communicable diseases and care for mental health problems, including PSS in high priority areas.

**Education:**

1) Establish temporary classrooms for displaced girls and women to enable them continue their education, and provide learning options such as flexible study hours and catch-up classes, in addition to more flexible options for enrolment and exams.

2) Support for the provision of school furniture, textbooks and facilitates conducting national exams.

3) Scale up the scheme to contract high school graduates as teachers in rural areas to ensure girls’ education in those areas.

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\(^{61}\) Fawziah Al-Ammar and Hannah Pratchett, the Repercussions of War on Women in the Yemeni Workforce, Sana’a Center for Strategic Studies, July 2019.

\(^{62}\) AWAM Foundation in partnership with Oxfam and YLDF, the Impact of War on the Participation of Women In civil Society Organization and Peacebuilding.
4) Renovate and equip minor damage sustained by schools through small grants.
5) Rent buildings or allocate alternative learning spaces as a temporary replacement to damaged schools, and provide them with school desks, blackboards and other supplies.
6) Support “food for education programs” to encourage girls continue their education.
7) Provide PSS support programs and instill the culture of dialogue and peace building.

Interventions to strengthen women’s role in building peace

1) Formulate and implement gender-sensitive policies that promote women’s pivotal and important role in peacebuilding efforts in Yemen now and during the post conflict period, as provided for in relevant UN resolutions and national initiatives, to shape a society that is receptive to women full participation in all governorates without exception, including in workforce.
2) Promote participation in the peace building plan by women from all governorates and in all committees and bodies to be set up during the transitional period.
3) Introduce conflict resolution community initiatives involving women or led by them, in order to relate them with peacebuilding efforts.
4) On-going training to qualify women in the area of peace building, and how to practice that in their societies.
5) Raise awareness on peace programs among society members and different age groups that need to be advocated for by male and female activists.
6) Get the most out of the positive phenomena produced by the conflict and war, including women’s participation in the workforce and greater involvement in decision-making at the household and community levels, as well as economic, social and political empowerment, by building on success stories well-known to the community as well as lessons and experiences developed locally and in other countries. In addition, organizations or activists with a history of success stories in this regard shall be supported and adequately funded, including technical and moral support, that would broaden the scope of women’s influence.

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63 Mechanisms of Women Participation in the Peace Process in Yemen, a paper submitted to the parliament, Eman Shayef and Suha Basherin.
64 AWAM Foundation in partnership with Oxfam and YLDF, The Impact of War on the Participation of Women In civil Society Organization and Peacebuilding.
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<td>UNDP, UNDP-YEM War Impact on SDGs 2019.</td>
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