



Supporting
Arab Women
at the Table

GRASSROOTS VOICES

Women and Everyday Peacebuilding in Yemen



YEMEN

- ① What are Yemeni women's and men's definitions of peace?
- ② How do Yemeni women and men view women's role as peacebuilders?
- ③ How do women build peace in their communities?
- ④ What are the challenges facing Yemeni women in peacebuilding and how can they be addressed?



CONTEXT

In Yemen, an almost decade-long war, coupled with a feminist, civil, and democratic experience that is yet unripe, and a strong patriarchal social system, have made it exceptionally hard for women to engage in public life. These factors, among others, have led Yemen to have one of the worst gender gap indexes in the world, as reflected in the complete absence of women from parliament, government, and the ongoing peace negotiations.



GEOGRAPHICAL SCOPE

Four governorates — Sana'a, Ibb, Aden, and Hadramawt — were chosen based on their population density and for political balance: two areas are Houthi-controlled, and two are under the internationally recognized government.



METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative approach, drawing on findings from focus group discussions (FGDs) and semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted between January and March 2022. These involved 128 Yemeni participants, both women and men, representing diverse age groups, geographical areas, and socio-economic backgrounds. Twenty (20) semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with officials — including decision-makers, general managers, and political leaders — as well as community leaders such as imams and religious actors.

Takeaways on Women's Role in Peacebuilding in Yemen

- Despite the many challenges, Yemeni women play a pivotal role in peacebuilding, both within private spheres like homes, schools, and mosques, and in public spaces. Their day-to-day activities and practices are integral to fostering peace and social cohesion.
- Challenges faced by women: Women who are publicly active in peacebuilding face significant social stigma, with perceptions influenced by both genders. Also, terms like 'peace' and 'peacebuilding' are viewed sceptically by many, with some viewing them as Western concepts.
- Yemenis' definitions of peace: Across different regions, Yemenis mainly define peace in terms of security, stability, freedom of mobility and speech, basic needs, coexistence in line with Islamic faith, and dignity. There are some regional variations that should be considered as well.

PRODUCED BY

This report was produced by the Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies - an independent think-tank that seeks to foster change through knowledge production with a focus on Yemen and the surrounding region. The Center's publications and programs, offered in both Arabic and English, cover political, social, economic, and security-related developments, aiming to impact policy locally, regionally, and internationally.

Policy Recommendations



Prioritise Human Security in Peacebuilding

Emphasis on addressing the root causes of conflict, specifically in rural areas where the needs are most acute. This includes improving food security, health-care, infrastructure, and pro-

viding education and vocational training. The goal is to uplift rural areas, specifically alleviating burdens on rural women through improved farming technology and access to water.



Empower Grassroots Women and Recognize Their Role

Recognize and integrate the everyday peacebuilding practices of grassroots women. This includes understanding the unique challenges they face, such as societal power dynamics. Their

voices, especially diverse voices from different backgrounds and regions, should be central to the peace process. Local projects that promote peace in women-centric spaces should be supported.



Engage and Collaborate with Local Leaders and Influencers

Engage with religious, tribal, and community leaders to ensure the peacebuilding initiatives are culturally sensitive and effective.

This entails adapting the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda to the Yemeni cultural and religious context, leveraging the influence of religious leaders to promote peace narratives, and protecting activists and peacebuilders through the enforcement of relevant laws.

“Exploring what war, peace, or inclusion mean to Yemenis, or specifically to Yemeni women requires Yemeni women to build a language from lived experiences — to tell our stories and produce our knowledge, without regard to criticisms that lived stories lack objectivity.”

“We know Yemeni society is a conservative one, and what it means is strictness in women’s affairs. This restricts women from going out of the house, expressing their opinions, and raising their voice [...] these are traditions and customs that have been attached to religion and have become misunderstood as part of Islam.”