

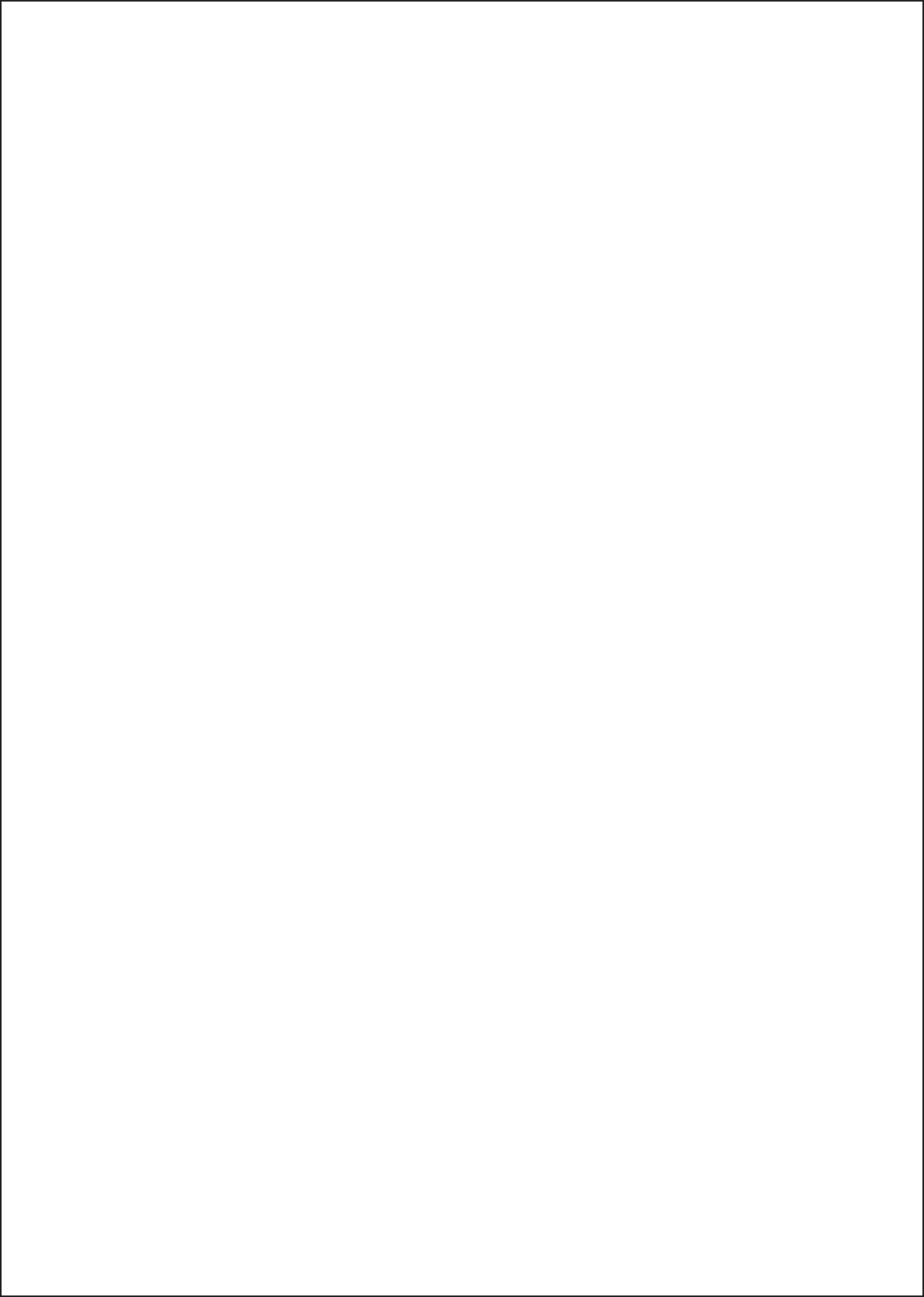


YPC Policy Report

2 February 2014

Sarah Ahmed

Women's Voices in the "New Yemen"



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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CIPE	Center for International and Private Enterprises
EU	European Union
FG	Focus Group
GII	Gender Inequality Index
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GPC	General People’s Congress
HR	Human Resources
IFES	International Foundation for Election Systems
JMP	Joint Meeting Parties
MEPI	Middle East Partnership Initiative
MOPIC	Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation
MP	Member of Parliament
NDI	National Democratic Institute for International Affairs
NED	National Endowment for Democracy
NDC	National Dialogue Conference
PARC	Pan-Arab Research Center
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
USA	United States of America
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WNC	Women’s National Committee
YR	Yemeni Riyal
YWU	Yemeni Women’s Union
YPC	Yemen Polling Center

INSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUND

The Yemen Polling Center (YPC) is an independent non-governmental organization. It was established in 2004 and received its registration certificate No. 147 from the Ministry of Social Affairs & Labor in December 2005. As the first and only polling center in Yemen, YPC prides itself on providing the highest quality in social science research. Furthermore, YPC is the 2010 recipient of the Best Partner in the Middle East and North Africa award from Gallup International. YPC designs and performs opinion polls, surveys, and employs other methods in studies which serve the research needs of national and international institutions, non-profit organizations, corporations, government agencies, and professional associations.

YPC conducts public attitude surveys, focus groups, in-depth interviews, demographic studies, and market research employing both quantitative and qualitative methods for development projects, international organizations and foundations, publications, business groups, banks, and other stakeholders. It was founded by a group of dedicated professional journalists, academics, researchers and volunteers with strong ambitions to bring about progressive change in Yemen informed by social science of the highest international standards. As a member of both the World Association for Public Opinion Research and the American Association for Public Opinion Research, YPC remains committed to excellence in all aspects of social science.

YPC has a dedicated, well-experienced, and qualified team. In addition, the Center cooperates with dozens of experts, consultants and university professors within Yemen and abroad. Out of the more than 2,000 field researchers the Center has examined and trained, YPC has selected about 500 enumerators throughout the country for its field research, fifty per cent of whom are female. Its experience, as well as its personnel and technical resources, allow YPC to conduct surveys of any size throughout all of Yemen's governorates while adhering to the most stringent international standards in data quality and insuring cost effective and timely studies. Since its inception YPC has conducted, and is currently conducting, dozens of qualitative and quantitative research projects on a multitude of issues ranging from satellite television, radio consumption patterns, consumer attitudes, human rights, women's rights, political reform issues, corruption, public health, and other governance related studies. In addition to numerous successfully completed public opinion surveys and research projects, YPC has implemented several economic surveys and qualitative studies, covering all governorates in Yemen. YPC has surveyed more than 100,000 Yemeni citizens through face-to-face interviews.

YPC has wide experience in implementing internationally funded projects. It has cooperated, and thus far conducted, dozens of projects with numerous international institutions including the European Union, Charney Research, the Center for International and Private Enterprises (CIPE), Danicom Media Consultancy Company, Gallup International, the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES), the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), the Pan-Arab Research Center (PARC), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Research Institute (London), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the University of Bonn, the University of Michigan, and the World Bank.

BACKGROUND OF AUTHOR

Sarah Jamal Ahmed is a young Yemeni feminist, blogger, civic activist, and sociologist whose main focus is on gender issues. Currently, she works for the YPC as a gender researcher. She is also a co-founder of the 'Support Yemen - Break the Silence' campaign (www.supportyemen.org), working as a PR coordinator, scriptwriter and spokesperson in #Support Yemen's campaigns. She also worked as a freelance researcher on Yemen and gender issues, and wrote papers, for the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, the Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, and the Yemeni Observatory for Human Rights. She is a United Nations Women certified trainer in clinical sociological treatment of gender-based violence.

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REPORT OBJECTIVES

'Women's Voices in the New Yemen' is a project title that raises an important question: Do Yemeni women see a 'new Yemen' for themselves nearly two years into the country's transitional period? Local media outlets have used this expression "new Yemen" intensively in this context, suggesting in one way or another that new opportunities have opened up for various components of Yemeni society as a consequence of the so-called 'Arab Spring'. Women are no exception in this narrative. Ever since the beginning of the 2011 uprisings Yemeni women have been the subject of much debate. Local and international media outlets, as well as reporting organizations, have devoted a considerable amount of time and effort to understand the role that women played in the 2011 uprising, along with how the upheavals affected their lives.¹

Much of the debate surrounding women's rights and women's political participation in Yemen focuses on a handful of women that were able to make a name for themselves as they struggled for political reform. These struggles include the initiative to introduce a 30% quota for women in the executive, judicial, and legislative branches, and outlawing child marriages by introducing a minimum legal age for marriage. Despite international pressure to make reforms in favor of women's rights and political participation, little progress had been made on the part of women's rights activists, as neither the quota, nor the legal age, for marriage have been realized. The project 'Women's Voices in the New Yemen', financed by the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), asks whether the activism of Yemeni women's rights advocates is lacking grass root support and whether this was the reason for the limited progress.

Very little attention is given to the ordinary Yemeni woman; her political and social struggle, her demands or vision for a 'new Yemen' - , little is known about what Yemeni women actually want in terms of their rights. The question arises whether Yemeni women support the issues that women's rights activists advocate for at the national level. The same is true vice versa. Do women's rights activists represent the demands of ordinary Yemeni women? In order to answer these questions, it is crucial to look at Yemeni women from a perspective that is different from the stereotypes that are reproduced in the media and politics. In those settings the expression 'Yemeni woman' is used to describe the demands and visions of women in various, yet specific, social, economic and political backgrounds.

¹ Al-Saqqaf, Nadia (2012): 'Strong voices: Yemeni women's political participation from protest to transition', Friedrich Ebert Stiftung; Begum, Sultana (2012): 'Still waiting for change, making the political transition work for women', Oxfam; Raja, Jamila Ali (2013): 'Yemeni women in transition: Challenges and Opportunities', CDDRL Freeman Spongli Institute for International Studies, Stanford; Shakir, Wameedh, Marsouk, Mia and Haddad, Saleem, (2012): 'Strong Voices, Yemeni women's political participation from protest to transition', Safer World.

METHODOLOGY

In order to achieve the research objectives, it was important to focus on the grassroots women. In this context, grassroots women will be understood as referring to women on the community level, with local concerns, rather than those women active on the elite level with national concerns. Therefore, ten focus group discussions were held in five governorates (Aden, Taiz, Ibb, Al-Hudaida, and Sana'a city), with a group of men and a group of women in each governorate. Every focus group consisted of ten participants who were recruited with the assistance of the Yemeni Federation of Trade Unions and its branches in the five governorates.

In Aden all of the male and female participants were illiterate. The men's group consisted of six fishermen, two construction workers, and two cleaners. The women described themselves as housewives who sometimes worked in the fishing industry or in making fishing equipment.

In Taiz the seven women were employed by private companies and held university degrees. Three of them worked in private factories and had received only a basic education. The men's group included six employees of private companies who held university degrees, three construction workers with a basic education, and one illiterate cleaner.

In Ibb all of the male participants were illiterate. Seven of the male participants were farmers. Three of them were cleaners from a class of people commonly referred to as the Akhdam (marginalized). Similarly, the women's group in Ibb included one illiterate farmer, seven illiterate housewives (among whom three were from the Akhdam), one high school graduate, and one university student.

In Al-Hudaida all of the men were illiterate. The group consisted of four fishermen, two construction workers, and four unemployed men. The women's group included six university graduates, whom were all employed in the public sector, and four house wives with a basic education.

Finally, in Sana'a city the men's group had five university graduates, each employed in the public sector, one illiterate private factory worker, two illiterate construction workers, and two cleaners from the marginalized Akhdam. The women's group included four school teachers, four housewives with a basic education, and two cleaners from the Akhdam.

In addition to these groups, data was gathered through a nationwide survey with a sample size of 1,000 adult Yemeni citizens (over fifteen years old), with 50% men and 50% women. Statistically, 70% came from rural areas while 30% came from urban areas.

POLITICAL CONTEXT: WOMEN IN YEMEN BEFORE THE 'ARAB SPRING' AND THE STRUGGLE FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS

When it comes to gender inequality, Yemen ranks last in all major gender inequality indices such as the UN's Gender Inequality Index (GII) or the Global Gender Gap Index. These results reflect the poor conditions Yemeni women live under in terms of their health, education, opportunities in the job market, and political participation. In 2005 the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MOPIC) published its millennium development goals assessment. It described the reality, and health, of Yemeni women in numbers.² The assessment showed that maternal mortality is the main cause of death (42%) among women who are in the reproductive age category. This circumstance can be partly ascribed to the fact that only 16% of deliveries take place in a health facility, while the remaining births occur in homes. In home setting, only 25% of deliveries had a skilled person in attendance. The use of modern family planning methods which could improve the health situation of women, remains low (13.4%). Unmet contraceptive needs are estimated to be 44%. These conditions and reproductive risks result in a combination of a high frequency of pregnancies and early childbearing due to marriage at a young age.

In 2005, the International Center for Research on Women ranked Yemen fourteenth on a list of twenty worldwide hot spots for child marriage.³ The UNICEF 2006 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey found that nearly 52% of Yemeni girls were married before the age of eighteen. Among them 14% were married before the age of fifteen. Being more prevalent in rural areas, this practice is often connected to factors related to their family's financial situation. In contrast to boys, girls are not seen as potential breadwinners for the family. In addition, the family is not required to take care of their financial needs once they enter into another family through marriage. For these reasons marriages are often arranged at an early age.

This traditional image of women also impacts how girls are educated. Once their marriage is arranged, usually they are taken out of school. While the ratio of girls enrolled in primary education is fairly high (43% - seventy-six girls enroll for every 100 boys), enrollment rates drop for girls in secondary school. For example, by the ninth grade only forty-four girls are enrolled for every 100 boys.⁴ Further, in urban areas the enrollment rates of girls decreased much more gradually, with literacy being generally higher.⁵

Given the strong connection between both the overall living conditions of women and early marriage, the current legislation concerning early marriage remains a major obstacle. The Yemeni Personal Status Law does not declare a minimum age for marriage. This allows a child to legally marry at any age. Though local organizations working towards the outlawing of child marriages exist, like the Yemeni Women's Union (YWU) and the Women's National Committee (WNC), little progress has been made in changing the legislation.

A victory was accomplished when a bill drafted by the WNC was debated by Parliament in 2009. It argued for the minimum legal age of marriage to be eighteen years of age. While a

2 Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (2005), 'Yemen MDGs Needs Assessment Report'.

3 ICRW (2006): 'Child Marriage Around the World'.

4 Ministry of Education (2003): 'MOE statistical yearbook 2003-2004'.

5 84.8% of urban and 68.9% of rural males are literate, compared to only 59.5% of urban and 24.3% of rural females. (Ministry of Education (2003): 'MOE statistical yearbook 2003-2004')

majority of parliamentarians agreed to set the legal age at seventeen, twenty-three Members of Parliament (MPs) rejected the bill on the grounds that it contradicted Islamic principles. The bill was then referred to the Sharia Legislative Committee (SLC) so that they could assess the bill's compatibility with the principles of Sharia. On the 10th of April 2010, the SLC issued a fourteen page report citing religious reasons for not setting a legal age for marriage. The debate over the draft law was not brought up again in Parliament until October 2010.⁶

While the parliamentary debate of the draft law was a victory for the women's rights activists, the debate was rather motivated by political reasons than the interest of women's rights. The draft law was debated at the same time as major reforms were being discussed. The opposition (Joint Meeting Parties - JMP) was threatening to boycott the parliamentary elections if reforms were not agreed to by the ruling party, the General People's Congress (GPC). The debate on marriage was therefore a way for the government to distract the opposition and to provoke differences among its conservative and reformist blocks. Even though the strongest opposition towards the draft law was made on religious grounds, the bill failed because of a general lack of interest among legislators to tackle the issue.

In this regard, the limited participation of women in government is problematic. Female voices among the political elite championing women's rights remain few and largely ineffective. However, some progress in terms of women's political participation has been made within the last thirteen years. In 2001 Waheeba Farea was made the first woman to hold a cabinet post as Minister of State for Human Rights Affairs. Later in 2003 the Ministry of Human Rights was established with Amat Al Alim Al Soswa as its first minister. The ministry remained in the hands of a female minister with Khadija Al Haysami and Huda Al Ban filling the post consecutively. In 2007 Amat Al Razaq Ali Humad was made Minister of Social Affairs. In parliament, only one woman was successful in the 2003 elections. On a local level, thirty-eight women (out of a total of 6741 candidates) were elected to local councils. In the Shura Council, a consultative body whose members are selected by the president, two women are represented.

Despite the number of women in decision making positions slightly increasing since 2000, no significant progress in terms of women's rights can be noted. Neither their status, access to education and health services, or their legal or civil rights have become priorities on the agendas of high level female decision-makers. Particularly, the issue of child marriage is indicative of the poor political influence of women. Since 2000, neither women in high decision-making positions nor other female supporters of the bill were able to push Parliament to approve the respective legislation. One initiative to increase women's political participation was through the introduction of a women's quota for decision-making positions. While various Yemeni women organizations have called for the introduction of such a quota system (since as early as 2006), no success has been achieved on the legislative level.

6 Human Rights Watch (2011): 'How Come You Allow Little Girls to Get Married?'

WOMEN AND THE 'NEW YEMEN'

WOMEN'S ROLE DURING THE 2011 PROTESTS

The strong and active participation of women in the 2011 protests was very evident. Though they were not the dominant force within the protest movement, women had a considerable presence. Their presence in the protests was uninterrupted throughout 2011. They participated in protests from the first rallies (held in the context of the 'Arab Spring' in front of the Tunisian embassy on January 15, 2011) until the signing of the GCC Initiative in November, 2011. Their participation in the protests was dynamic in terms of their numbers and nature. On January 15, 2011, women known for their leftist and liberal views stood next to Tawakkul Karman, a member of the Islamic Islah party and were among the first to chant against the Saleh regime. Tawakkul Karman's arrest on January 22, 2011 led to increased mobilization of protesters against the government and thousands of mostly male protesters accepted Tawakkul Karman, a woman, as a protest leader.

Change Square, the protest camp in Sana'a, served as an example of how women participated in the protests. The cultural, tribal, and political diversity that formed its community did not segregate women. Instead, it welcomed them. Both genders protested alongside each other. Women even stayed overnight at the square. The nature of women's participation at the square changed once the issue was addressed critically in public however. After former President Ali Abdullah Saleh mentioned in a speech (April 2011) that women should not be protesting together with men, arguing on religious and moral grounds in an attempt to delegitimize the anti-government protests, the situation changed for women. As a consequence of the debate, on the 16th of April female activists were beaten on the square after they had refused to organize segregated marches.

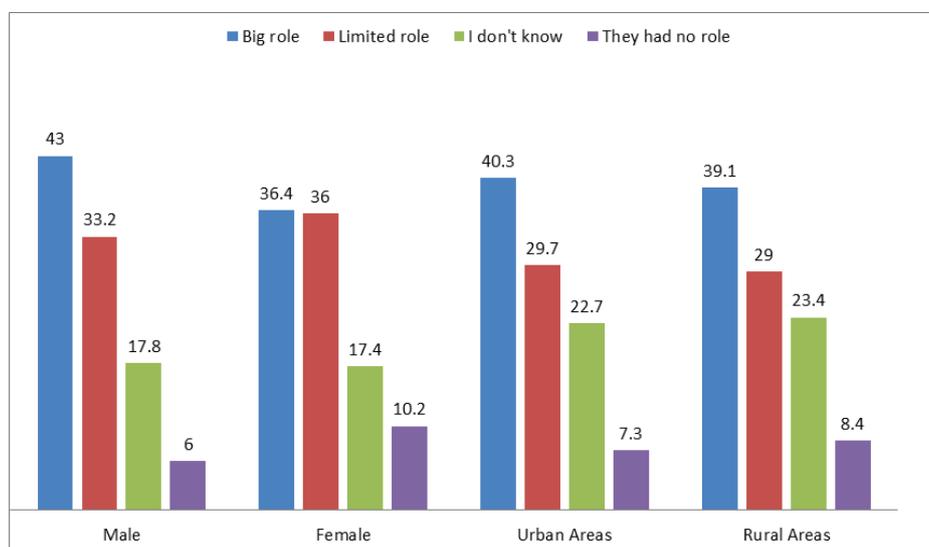
As the dominance of the Islah Party (which represented many Muslim Brotherhood members) grew at the square, general segregation was introduced with the construction of a permanent fence. It ensured the physical separation of women from men. As a result, the normalization of men and women's mutual participation in the protests gradually vanished. Sadly, sexual harassment at the protests began to increase in May, 2011. This, combined with the increase of armed violence around the square in September 2011, discouraged women from participating in the protests. As a result, women's participation in the protests was largely limited to the Friday demonstrations which were organized by the Islah Party.

As women appeared in large numbers on Sittien Highway in Sana'a, where the Friday prayer was being held on a weekly basis, the changed nature of women's participation once again revealed the Islah Party's ability to mobilize women for protests. However, the party discouraged political activism from individual females, who contradicted the party's normative framework. While women of different social and political backgrounds participated in the protests the Islah Party continued to hold the monopoly of women's mobilization and dominated the discourse on women's participation.

When looking at the Yemeni population as a whole, there is not a clear consensus about what role women played during the 2011 protests. When asked in a survey, 3% of men and 36.4% of women stated that women had a big role in the 2011 uprising. In contrast, 33.2% of men and

36% of women answered that women had only a limited role. It should be noted that women tend to see their role in the protests as less relevant than men.

Graph 1: Did women have a role in the 2011 uprisings?



Nevertheless, the participation of women in the protests increased the visibility of Yemeni women on a global scale. The awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011 to Tawakkul Karman was one of the most significant achievements. In addition to that, women both participated in protests and began discussing politics at gatherings and public conferences. The politicization of women in the 2011 protests, and the changed public perception of a women's role in political participation, gave many a hope that the 'Arab Spring' could prove to be an opportunity to make real progress in areas related to women's rights. When the GCC Initiative was signed both male and female protesters no longer had an influence on the political development of the country. At this point negotiations were taken to the levels of the already existing official and traditional political powers. Since then, any hope for an improvement of women's rights in Yemen rested on the delegates of the National Dialogue Conference (NDC), which was mandated by the GCC Initiative to resolve political, economic, and social issues on the basis of dialogue between various social groups.

Women during the Transitional Period

After the popular uprising of 2011 shook the political and social stability of the country, a transitional deal was brokered by the GCC, with the support of the UN, USA and EU.. The GCC Initiative was signed on November 23, 2011 by former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, the GPC, and the oppositional alliance, the JPM. It mandated the formation of a unity government, early presidential elections, and the holding of the NDC. The purpose of the NDC was to implement a mechanism where conflicts between various social groups could be resolved, and a national consensus could be built. The unity government was formed in December 2011, and was composed equally of the GPC and the JMP. Regrettably, only three out of the thirty-four ministers were women, with two of the three having held ministerial posts previous to the 2011 uprising. The remaining woman, Houria Mashour, was appointed as Minister of Human Rights, a position which has been in the hands of a woman since the ministry's establishment. Hence,

in the aftermath of the 2011 protests, and in terms of their participation in the transitional government, women did not make any significant inroads.

Given that the NDC presented an opportunity to shape a new constitution, the participation of women in the conference was significant for the women's rights struggle. Because of the importance given to the NDC, the configuration of the conference was crucial to all social groups that wanted to preserve or expand their rights in the 'new Yemen'. In the months leading up to the NDC, the composition of the delegates was debated. Various political and social groups competed intensely for representation. From the signing of the GCC Initiative, until the beginning of the NDC on March 18, 2013, the representation of women in the conference underwent heavy debate in both local and international forums. UN Special Envoy to Yemen, Jamal Bin Omar summarized the overall debate well when he said, 'Different Yemeni political powers have disagreed on everything. The only thing they agreed on was excluding women.'⁷

With little enthusiasm on the part of the political parties to include women in the national dialogue, the path to participation and representation of women in the NDC was not smooth. However, as the preparations for the NDC began, the international countries that sponsored the GCC Initiative exerted pressure on both the political parties and the government to include women in the conference. As a result, the Technical Committee for the National Dialogue announced on December 12, 2012 that out of the 565 delegates of the NDC, 30% would be women.⁸ In addition, the women's issue as such would be represented by a group of 40 women.

Criteria for the selection of NDC delegates

First, general criteria valid for all non-partisan (Independent) participants: All participants of the NDC must hold Yemeni citizenship, have full legal capacity, and a high degree of responsibility and commitment to human rights and international human rights laws. Additionally, they must have no record of violations of human rights, crimes against humanity, or violations of international law and international human rights law. Moreover, they must not be subject to any sanction imposed by the UN Security Council.

Second, specific criteria: Female participants should be non-partisan, should be active in women and community issues, and be a member of an active organization or an established participant in public events.

Despite both the difficult circumstances and opposition faced from conservative politicians, women succeeded in being represented in all nine NDC working groups. However, women faced a setback when the Conciliation Committee (a body mandated with the tasks of resolving conflicts among working groups, coordinating NDC working group outputs, and following up on the implementation of the NDC's resolutions) did not adhere to the 30% quota. Instead, they granted women 25%. Given the importance of the Conciliation Committee, a number of female members protested during the conference in an attempt to gain their full 30% representation in the body.

⁷ Mareb Press (2012), translated by the author.

⁸ National Dialogue Conference Technical Committee Final Report (2012) available online at http://www.hiwar-watani.org/uploads/1/5/2/3/15238886/final_report_to_the_pres.ndc.pdf

PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF THE NDC IN REGARD TO WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Since the NDC began in March 2013, a number of reports and recommendations have been made which are to serve as a basis for the constitution to be drafted after the conclusion of the conference. The recommendations that touched specific women's issues came among the rest of the recommendations. This was a reflection of the efforts of women delegates to include women's recommendations on the same level of importance as other recommendations rather than in the shape of a distinct women's rights file. According to the implementation mechanism of the GCC Initiative the results of the NDC were to inform the drafting process of a new constitution. It became clear that the working groups were trying to prepare the ground for a more just constitution that granted equal citizenship to women while at the same time protecting them from violence. Other recommendations touch upon education, mother and child health care, the personal status law, gender based violence, economic rights, and the 30% quota for women's political participation. Furthermore, the technical committee clarified that the NDC should discuss the contents of Article 15 of the Personal Status Law. Yet, this law which merely prohibits sexual intercourse until girls reach puberty does not define a minimum age for marriage.

A major obstacle to women's effective participation in the NDC was their failure to define their goals and find a common ground to bridge the various political ideologies. 'Women's impact is still individualistic in the NDC, each woman is strong on her own, but we failed to form a collective pressuring force' says Belqis Al-Lahabi, vice chairperson of the Southern Issue Team. She adds, 'Every time there is an effort to have a meeting among women representatives in the NDC so that they can discuss their issues and priorities as women, only 20% show up. In addition, the parties see that the biggest favor they did us was the 30% quota of representation, which was one of the checklist points that parties had to fulfill in order to move on with the conference.' This statement summarizes the state of women's rights advocacy in the NDC. Women managed to win leadership positions in working groups because it was a condition set by the international community. Yet, women's affiliation with political parties made it difficult for them to both find common ground and establish a strong women's rights lobby in the NDC.

NDC RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING WOMEN

Citizenship:

- Fulfilling rights must be based on equality between males and females; therefore, the term 'citizen' covers both males and females.
- Equality between men and women in human dignity and guaranteeing women an independent civil and financial disclosure.
- The state guarantee women all civil and political rights and is obligated to empower women to allow them to practice all equal citizenship rights.
- All citizens are equal before the law and all types of discrimination based on sex, race, language, color, ethnicity, occupation, social status, economic status, faith, sect, ideology, opinion or disability is criminalized.

Education:

- Free education is a right for every citizen and must be guaranteed by the state.
- The state guaranteed care for women and youth.
- The state is committed to providing proper motivations and environment to guarantee girls' education.

Mother and Child Healthcare:

- The state is obligated to design effective policies for mother and child healthcare.
- The state must guarantee every mother care and societal support.
- In addition to implementing a system to refer critical cases to hospitals, the state is obligated to build special health units for reproductive health in all directorates in governorates where equipment, conditions and specialized medical staff are needed.
- The state guarantees protection for mother and child healthcare. The state provides free healthcare services especially in rural and remote areas.

Personal Status:

- The state guarantees divorced women the right to housing in cases where children are in her custody.
- An Arab man married to a Yemeni woman gains Yemeni nationality after 5 years of marriage. A non-Arab man married to a Yemeni woman gains Yemeni nationality after ten years, while in all cases their children gain Yemeni nationality at birth.

Gender-Based Violence:

- Equality between men and women in relinquishing *diyya*⁹ and blood money as well as considering it a constitutional principle.
- The state takes responsibility, in practice and legislation, to protect specific individuals or groups such as the marginalized including women, children, and persons with special

⁹ *diyya*: financial compensation paid to the heirs of a victim.

needs from discrimination.

- All types of forced labor, slavery, slave trade, and human trafficking of women, men, and children are criminalized.
- A national policy promoting a positive image for women and youth must be implemented alongside constitutional texts in order to spread a gender-based, discrimination-free culture.
- The state guarantees women all civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, and commits to empower women through practicing all equal citizenship rights. The state takes responsibility in ending discrimination against women and protecting them from all forms of violence and inhumane practices by issuing required legislation.

Economic Rights:

- The state guarantees rural women's participation in development through implementing developmental planning on all levels in addition to easy access to information, counseling, and services. Also, the state must guarantee training and formal education that may help eradicate illiteracy among women and help them gain economic opportunities, insurance, agricultural loans, and appropriate technology.
- The state is committed to providing women with services that facilitate their fulfillment of both professional and family duties at the same time.
- Women have a significant role in economic and social development. The state takes responsibility in helping them have investment opportunities and implement economic development projects either individually or through specialized organizations in addition to the private sector.

Political Participation:

- The state is committed to women's representation of no less than 30% so that they are eligible to effectively participate in all state institutions and authorities as well as elected and assigned councils.
- The state guarantees care and development for women and youth in all spiritual, moral, cultural, scientific, physical, psychological, social and economic aspects, as well as effective political empowerment.

Independence of Special Entities:

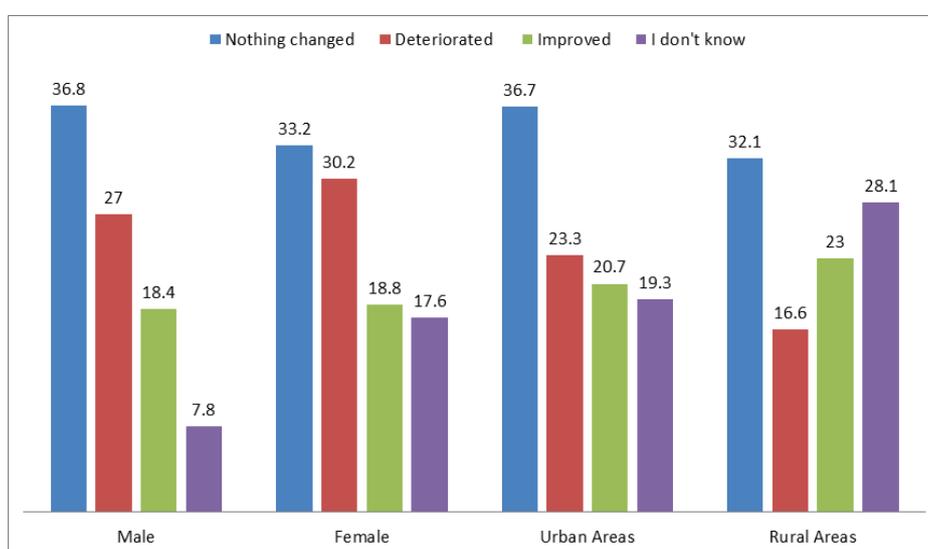
- The National Committee of Women is an independent entity which participates in designing and correcting public policies in a way that guarantees the betterment of women's statuses and their role in development and protecting their rights without any discrimination.

GRASSROOT WOMEN: DEMANDS AND VISIONS OF THE ORDINARY YEMENI WOMAN FOR A 'NEW YEMEN'

Women in Yemen after the 'Arab Spring'

When asked whether the status of women had improved after the 2011 uprisings, only 18.4% of men and 18.8% of women said that they felt an improvement. Most of the respondents reported that there were no changes. These survey findings supported the statements made in the focus groups.

Graph 2: Has the situation for women improved since the 2011 protests?



All focus group participants agreed that the rapidly deteriorating security situation after the 2011 protests negatively affected women the most. However, the examples provided by the participants clearly showed that the lack of security effected the entire population, both women and men. The examples given included shootings, random assassinations, the spread of arms, bandits on roads leading out of the cities, an increase of sexual harassment and robberies during blackouts, the absence of police protection in cities such as Al-Hudaida and Aden, and a general increase in common crime. While many focus group participants noted that the security conditions effected the entire population, it became clear that it was an extra burden for women because of the conservative nature of Yemeni society. Many women agreed on this point. They shared personal stories about how male and female relatives discouraged them from going to work, school, or other simple social activities because of security concerns.

Focus group participants stated that women who previously had been affiliated with a political party witnessed significant improvements after the 2011 uprising. For example, some managed to start their own organizations, while others who became prominent in the media now have a place where political decision making occurs. In contrast, in Aden and Ibb women said that the 2011 protests effected their lives negatively. They led to a series of subsequent crises' which in turn increased their poverty and impacting their lives severely. In Taiz and Al-Hudaida

women found that besides freedom of expression nothing has changed for women in Yemen. In Al-Hudaida specifically, women expressed that their efforts were in vain, and observed that the only significant achievement made was that women now represented 30% of the NDC. Additionally, they added that they were pessimistic about the future. The politicians who failed to solve women's problems were still in power.

Among participants in Taiz and Sana'a city, there was a more enthusiastic tone. They viewed the positive political improvements for women to be a direct result of the massive participation of women in the 2011 uprisings. However, men in Taiz expressed their fear of the empowerment of women and its effects on their submission to family rules. They mentioned that women could now fight for their own rights at home. This was viewed positively by men only if it helps women gain a better education and become financially independent. But it has the potential to turn women away from their families. Women in Sana'a City emphasized that men began imposing restrictions on their wives and female relatives in order to prevent them from becoming like the female political activists who frequently appear on TV. They stated that men feared that more freedom for women would cause them to rebel against traditional social customs. In Aden, men stated that the protests would not have been successful if it was not for the participation of women. They added that the protests allowed women to discover how brave and capable they were for the first time.

There was a general understanding among focus group participants that the wellbeing of women impacts the overall wellbeing of a community. Most of the men who shared this opinion believed there was a connection between women's status and their ability to financially support a family. In Aden the men stated that if women's employment and health conditions were to be compromised, their productivity and efficiency at work would deteriorate, thus negatively affecting the wellbeing of the family. They therefore implied that women could better support their families financially if their living conditions were better. Additionally, from their perspective, women aspire to advance in positions in their places of work. This is the reason why they believe that women are hard-working and have a high level of integrity, adding that their work is more transparent and efficient than that of an average man. They stated that it is important to both improve women's status and encourage them to work, as this will lead to what they described as a more healthy society.

In Taiz, men strongly agreed with the men from Aden. The women described in detail the kind of effect the status of women can have on their communities. They believed that the most important role of women would be to support her family financially. To them, women's labor is the best way to raise a family's income. In Sana'a City, men and women pointed out that the status of women is a reflection of the general state of the society. They stated that everything the country experiences affects women, emphasizing that their well-being cannot be separated from that of men's. The focus group participants pointed out that both women and men suffer from the political and economic situation in the country. In Ibb and Al-Hudaida women described how their living conditions were very poor and that this could not have anything but a negative effect on their communities. However, men from the same governorates thought that the only way a woman could have a negative impact on the community would be if she did not fulfill her family duties and care for her husband. He is the one who is responsible for providing for the family.

Generally, the 2011 protests have not brought improvement to the living conditions of women in Yemen. The most significant effect of the upheaval is an increase in freedom of expression which enables women to express themselves politically. While the deteriorated security situation poses the greatest challenge for women, prevalent family values obstruct women from taking up a more active political role. While men agreed that the situation of women has improved, they did so only to the extent that it would enable women to better provide for their families. They continue to view political activism by women in a negative light. For that reason women depend on women's rights activists to speak for them at the national level.

Popular Perceptions of Women's Rights Activists, Female Delegates of the NDC and Workers' Organizations

None of the focus groups were able to name a single women's rights advocate. In Taiz, men mentioned Bushra Al-Maqtari and Tawakkul Karman, but added that they did not know whether Al-Maqtari and Karman were women's rights advocates or that they had only heard about them through the media and their participation in demonstrations. In Ibb, Taiz and Aden, women said that they knew nothing about women's rights and that they did not know anything about the priorities of women's rights advocates. Women in Sana'a City said that the priorities of women's rights advocates are of a political nature. To them, their advocacy serves certain political interests while women's rights are used as a means to an end. In Al-Hudaida, women said that female activists working in the field of human rights merely adopt the priorities of the political parties they are affiliated with.

Men in Taiz believed that the priorities of groups advocating for women's rights primarily reflected a Western agenda which in essence would dismantle the family institution. This is the reason why they do not approve of women's rights activists. In both Sana'a City and Aden, men agreed that the most important priorities of women's rights groups should be education and health.

Women in most groups agreed that women's rights advocates concentrate on improving women's living conditions and providing food and health services. However, in Al-Hudaida women stated that these priorities were not on the agendas of women's rights advocates and that they are only interested in women's political participation. All in all, the attitudes toward women's rights advocates fluctuated between the impressions that some activists genuinely engage so as to improve women's lives while others only promote women's rights out of self-interest.

Similar to the respondent's knowledge of women's rights advocates, none of the groups were able to name a single female participant in the NDC. In Aden and Ibb many participants mentioned that they could not afford a television and for that reason could not follow the NDC. Instead they mostly hear about it on the radio. In Sana'a, Al-Hudaida and Taiz, women said they know little about women in the NDC, thinking that only educated women are represented in the conference. In Ibb, women said that poor and marginalized women (i.e. the Akhdam) are not participating in the NDC.

Most focus group participants lacked basic knowledge about the NDC, which reflects itself in the way they rated the significance of women's participation. In addition, participants in Sana'a made strong comments relating women in the NDC with the interests of political parties. In Ibb, women expressed their desire to speak to female representatives of the NDC,

but mentioned that they have never had the chance to share their problems and concerns with their representatives. Speaking to female representatives (women who were able to bridge the gap between them and the government) was seen by the participants as a potentially positive step.

Given that the participants were working women and men, they were also asked about their perceptions of workers organizations, specifically cooperatives, syndicates and unions. Most women in the groups had never heard of cooperatives. Some men who worked in the 1960's and 1970's mentioned that unions have not had a significant role in Yemen since the late 1970's. In Aden and Ibb women had no idea what a syndicate or a union was able to provide to its members. In Taiz women said that unions can help in instances when one works for the private sector, but added that unions do not have any significant role when it comes to women. In Aden, men knew about unions and syndicates but said that they never thought of resorting to an organization that demands and protects the rights of fishermen. In Al-Hudaida, women described union leaders as politicized. According to them, women in union leadership serve only the interests of their party rather than the interests of women in Yemen. Moreover, they believe that due to their remoteness from the decision-making process, women's departments in unions are more likely to be corrupt. In Sana'a City, women said that unions are an option for educated women only and that they do not even know how to reach the unions. However, the men stated that unions are the only way to help women gain more rights in both the political realm and the job market.

In general, the gap between grassroots women and women's rights advocates on the elite level was clear throughout all the discussions. Most of the criticism against women's rights advocates was that they benefitted personally from their engagement in the 2011 protests. Moreover, it was apparent that the role of parties in politics is not seen as positive in general, especially when it comes to improving women's status. Consequently, there is a clear lack of faith in women's rights advocates that belong to specific political parties. This shows that the political elite face many challenges in reaching, and building trust among, potential supporters on the grassroots level.

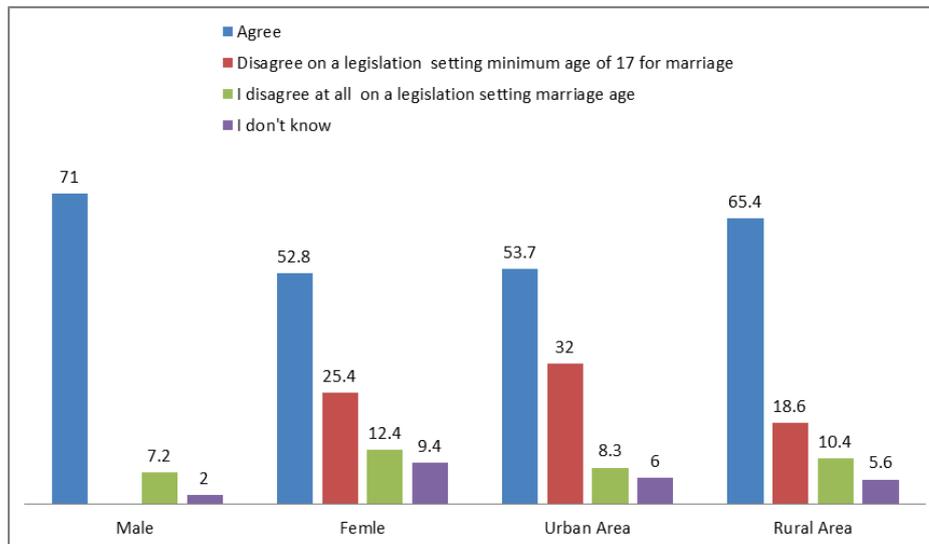
POPULAR SUPPORT FOR ISSUES AT NATIONAL LEVEL

Given the gap between women's rights activists and women on the grassroots level, the question about whether ordinary Yemenis support the women's rights issues debated at the national level arises; and if so, to what degree do they support it?

Child Marriage

According to the survey, 71% of men supported legislation setting the minimum age of seventeen for marriage. Only 52.8% of the women surveyed agreed. Such numbers can be seen as a disappointment for activists who are trying to mobilize women's support for an end to child marriage in Yemen. Despite the religious discourse that was heavily used against supporters of the legislation, it is the accelerating deterioration of the socioeconomic status of the vast majority of Yemenis which remains a significant drive behind the high percentage of women who oppose legislation banning child marriage. Yemeni women are still deprived of financial independence. This creates an environment where hopes for a better education, and access to basic services are linked with marriage, thus creating an ideal climate for the religious discourse directed towards women. The narrative is that a legislation outlawing child marriages harms women and prevents them from a better life, which marriage could provide.

Graph 3: Do you agree with a legislation setting a legal marriage age?

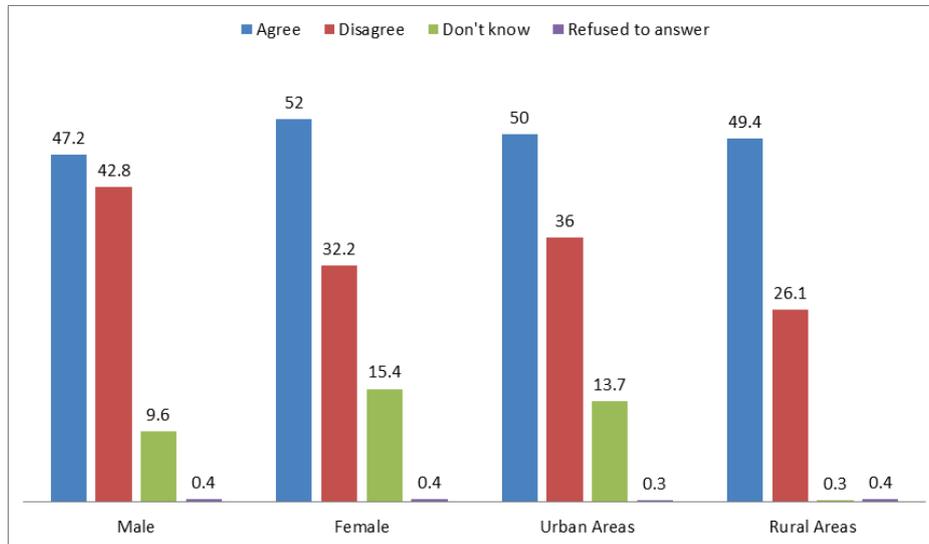


Political Participation

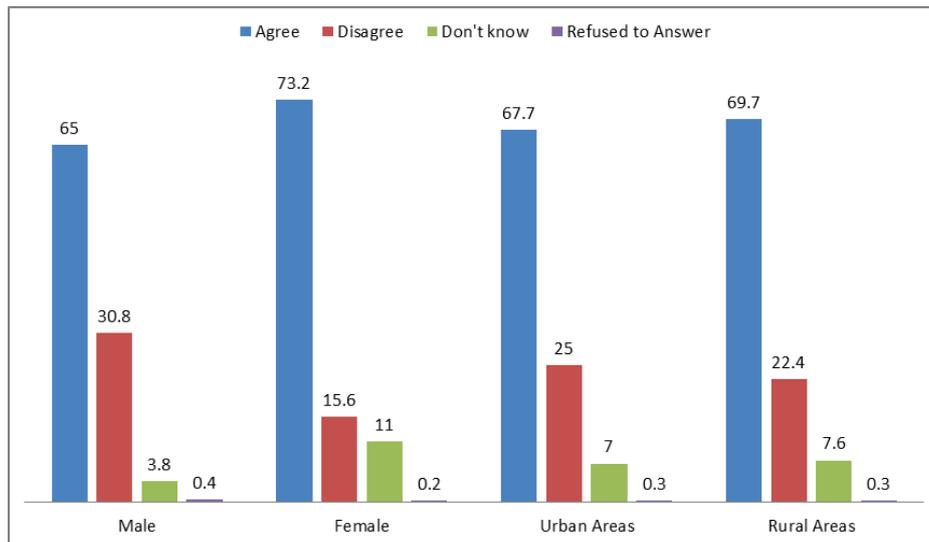
Another issue debated at the national level is the 30% quota. Among those surveyed, 42.2% of men and 52% of women approved a quota of at least 30% for women in parliament and government. These numbers may reflect the people's doubt on a woman's ability to run for elections. In addition, the image of the Yemeni Parliament as being tribal has taken shape for twenty years. This is due in part to the fact that since 1994 Parliament Speakers have largely been tribal figures. In addition, many MPs come from tribal and/or conservative backgrounds. Women are seen as not being able to live up to the demands of such a masculine workplace.

However, when asked if they agree with having a female official in the state regardless of her position 65% of men and 73.2% of women said yes.

Graph 4: Do you agree with a 30% quota for women in parliament and government?



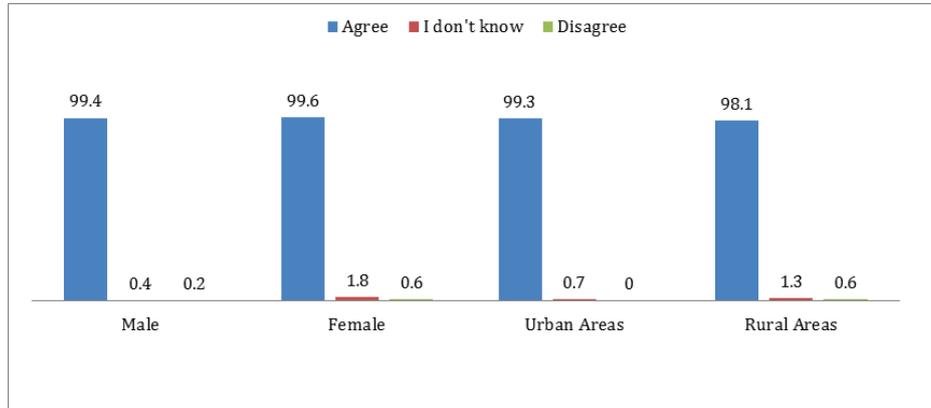
Graph 5: Do you agree with having a female official in the state regardless of her position?



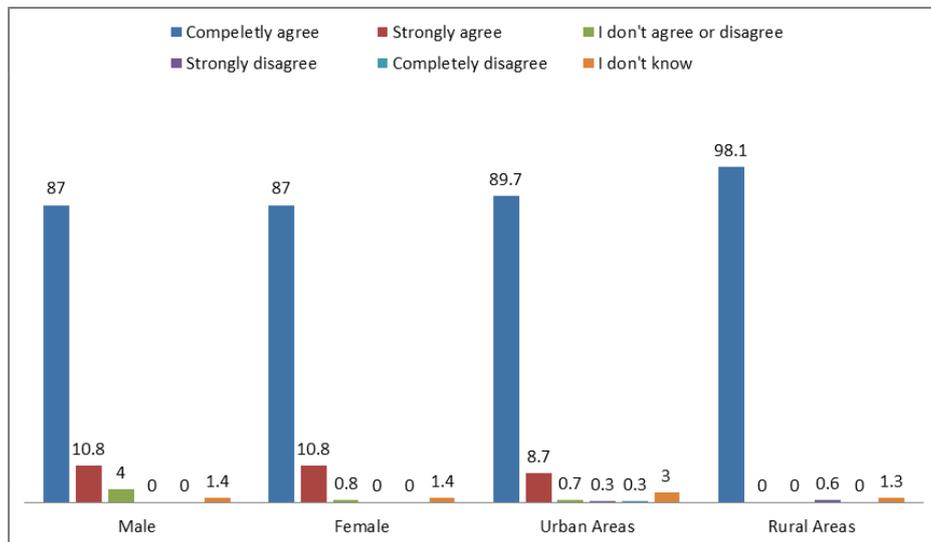
Health and Education

Both women and men overwhelmingly supported a call for the government to focus more on girl’s health and education. When comparing the popular support for increased government attention in these two particular fields with the degree of popular support for other women’s issues debated at the national level, such as the 30% quota, it is clear that the Yemeni population is demanding social services that result in tangible changes in the lives of women.

Graph 6: To what extent do you agree with the state increasing its focus on health services provided to women?



Graph 7: To what extent do you agree with the state increasing its focus on girls education?



GRASSROOTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE COUNTRY'S CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS ON WOMEN

When asked to give the five most urgent priorities to improve women's status, all groups chose security as the number one priority for women. They explained that if a woman cannot go to work, school, or a hospital safely, then she would not have a chance to improve her living conditions. Ranking second after security was food provision, especially for young girls and pregnant women. Free health services and an increased presence of female medical teams in rural and remote areas were expressed as a third priority.

Other priorities, such as the need to provide villages with water, electricity, sanitation and solving the problem of power cuts, vary from one group to another. In Ibb and Aden women demanded literacy programs and training opportunities. In Sana'a City, men and women felt that supporting women's political participation could be a key solution to many problems. They felt that they need to both be in the political arena and be their own representatives in government.

Security:

Security was the number one concern expressed by all focus groups. They considered the security situation as the most important indicator of the overall state of the country. All groups described the security situation in Yemen after 2011 as the worst to date. Both men and women in Aden, Taiz, and Al-Hudaida shared stories illustrating the lack of security where they live. The most common example was armed groups in civilian clothes. They perceive this to be the highest security threat. They explained that such armed groups blocked roads and sometimes demanded money from drivers at gunpoint. Focus group participants in Aden described how shops were forced to close on days when the southern secessionist movement (Al-Hirak) called for civil disobedience.

In Ibb, groups complained about the increasing crime rate. They all agreed that the Akhdam are the least likely to find protection, compensation, or punishment for perpetrators within the legal system. In short, they are highly discriminated against. Men and women from Ibb and Sana'a who belong to the Akhdam community expressed that women from this particular social group suffer the most from rape and sexual abuse. They stated that women from this social class are subjected to higher incidences of this because of two reasons. Firstly, many of Akhdami women are forced to work late hours in the night (e.g. cleaning streets.. Secondly, because of their identity as Akhdam, they are widely seen to be inferior and less honorable women.

I spent one hour on the street holding my husband as he bled to death after he was shot in the head. Everybody knows the killer, but nobody will help an Akhdam when they are attacked. The police serve tribesmen, not us. *Elham; A housewife from Ibb*

Women who work as midwives in Al-Hudaida, Ibb, and Sana'a City stated that the security situation has negatively affected them. They explained that the constant power cuts, combined with armed conflicts, make it impossible for them to go to houses where they had been called to provide health services. In addition, they emphasized that most of their income derives from cases occur late at night. Similarly, men in Taiz and Sana'a stated that the security situation affects women negatively. This impacts the overall state of the family since women become unable to care for their families as they would if the situation was more stable.

Nutrition:

The consumption of food varies from one city to another according to means and types of production that affect the quality and quantity of food. In that vein, the one common point that all five focus groups agreed on was that women suffer more than men from the lack of food. All groups agreed that men are more capable of finding ways to have meals outside the house. Social conventions allow them to leave the house and share food with friends or co-workers. On the other hand, women have to manage with whatever is provided at home, which in most cases does not exceed one meal a day.

Most of the time I have to manage with one meal a day for me and my six children. My husband leaves and goes to eat with his friends when we run out of food. I cannot leave the house and eat with others. It is shameful for a woman to do so. *Hana'a; A housewife from Aden.*

Men and women in Aden and Al-Hudaida who were mostly fishermen and fisherwomen complained about the difficulties they face in accessing food during non-fishing seasons. In addition, participants from all five governorates mentioned that the only meat they consume comes from the charitable donations that are given to them by others during Eid holidays. In Ibb, marginalized women spoke about how they have to beg for food because their husband's income is not sufficient to provide daily meals for the family. They also stated that it is more appropriate for women to beg than for men.

In Sana'a City, women focused on how men prioritize buying qat over the family's main necessities. Women from all five governorates complained about food insufficiency during pregnancy and after giving birth, ascribing the circumstance to the deterioration of the country's economy. All focus groups, except for the one from Ibb, added that a lack of agricultural policy (predominantly in the widespread use of pesticides on vegetables) as a problem.

Health:

All of the focus groups listed medical errors as their number one concern regarding health, arguing that the public health sector is not monitored and therefore does not meet the standards of good health care and private medical care remains unaffordable. In addition, private health facilities make medical errors and cannot always be trusted.

Women coming from remote areas in Aden, Ibb, and Al-Hudaida complained about the shortage of clinics in their areas. Furthermore, the distance that they have to travel to access dispensaries make them difficult to access. Participants expressed how villages lack basic

vaccines for women and children, while a family's financial status might prevent them from having access to necessary vaccines that are more available in the cities. Moreover, women from each of the represented governorates brought up the topic of charity clinics selling contraceptives even though they were given to the organizations with the mandate to distribute them without charge.

In Taiz, men described how women's hospitalization is not always a priority for male relatives. Some of the reasons for this were the cost of health services, the distance to medical facilities, and the widespread use of traditional medicine such as the use of herbs and other home remedies. In Sana'a City, women added that social customs prevent women from complaining about health problems. If she did, her complaint could result in her husband marrying another woman. This forces women to seek medical treatment only once they have reached a critical stage.

Men from Ibb pointed out when the only medical staff at a health facility are men, male relatives of a woman do not want to take women there, especially during pregnancies.

In Aden, men expressed grief while sharing stories of their wives having miscarriages and other complications during pregnancies because they were not able to afford medicine or visits to the hospital.

My wife has all sorts of health problems due to all the housework, repeated pregnancies, and malnutrition. I wake up to her crying every night and all I can do is to sit and cry with her. *Atta, A fisherman from Aden*

Education:

Women in Aden, all of whom were illiterate, expressed that they have the desire to go to school, but that the cost of education prevented them from registering. They also added that schools are often distant, making it difficult to attend since male relatives were hesitant to allow girls to attend. This issue was also raised up by men from Aden and Taiz.

In Sana'a City, women elaborated on the quality of education arguing that the books were insufficient, classrooms were overcrowded (sometimes there were over 120 students in a class), and teachers were corrupt. They said they took bribes and allowed students to cheat on exams.

In Al-Hudaida the women complained about the country's economic status. They stated that the parents who cannot afford to pay the costs associated with educating their children tend to force their girls to drop out early so that the boys can remain enrolled. They believe that an education benefits a boys more since he will eventually become a provider in the family. In contrast, the girl will eventually get married. She can then depend on her husband.

In Ibb women mentioned the need for vocational education, especially in rural areas. The production of handicrafts such as hats and breadbaskets does not provide a sufficient income when compared to the working hours invested in their production. Furthermore, both men and women in Ibb that belong to the marginalized group of the Akhdam mentioned that racism on the part of teachers and classmates is a reason why their children drop out of school.

All of the men from the focus group in Aden agreed that if their wives were educated they could have helped their children with schoolwork and may have been able to help their families with regard to their financial situation. They believe that had if they were given adequate access to education, they would qualify for better job opportunities. All but one man from the group highlighted said that they would not mind marrying a woman with a higher level of education than their own. Most men in Taiz, except for two (the oldest among the participants) strongly disagreed with this point, emphasizing that they would support a daughter to pursue the highest level of education. They believed that a wife should be educated to a degree that would allow her to both support her children in their studies and get a simple job. She should not, however, dedicate her life to studying.

Men tend to marry girls from the village in order to shape them the way they want from a young age. Sami, An accountant from Taiz.

Transportations and Roads:

The issue that was complained about the most in regard to transportation was the rise of prices due to the attacks on key oil pipelines and electricity facilities during 2011. These attacks caused severe fuel shortages and electricity outages. During this time gas and oil was predominantly accessible through the black market. The prices were double the fixed prices. This resulted in a rise of public and private transportation costs.

In Aden participants had the same complaint. Women saw this as an obstacle to their freedom of mobility, especially when trying to seek healthcare since most hospitals are in the center of the city. In Taiz, both men and women considered women the number one victim of the poor infrastructure for roads, electricity, and water, especially in rural areas. It is a woman's duty to make their way through mountainous areas on a daily basis in order to bring water and firewood back to the home. This duty is expected to be fulfilled even during pregnancy.

In Sana'a women shared concerns of sexual harassment. This prevents them from using public transportation, thus limiting the time they spend outside of the house. Similarly, men in Ibb considered public transportation as unsafe for women for the same reasons even though it is available and remains affordable when compared to prices in other governorates. Al-Hudaida was the only governorate represented in the focus groups where neither the men nor women had severe complaints about transportation and roads.

Water and Electricity:

Both women and men in all focus groups complained about water shortages and regular power cuts that last between two and twelve hours. However, focus group discussants from villages in each of the five governorates did not express any extraordinary complaints regarding water and electricity shortages. These services had never been provided to them in the first place. The lack of water and electricity in villages is compensated through traditional means as women are responsible for carrying water and firewood to their home regardless of their health condition or age.

Women from fishing communities in the governorate of Aden stated that the lack of water

and a sewage system does not allow them to have bathrooms in their homes. They described how challenging it was for them to find opportunities in neighboring houses to take a shower. Above that, they mentioned that neighbors complained about them doing their laundry in the middle of the street. They claimed that they were unable to do it anywhere else.

Men and women from all governorates agreed that the shortage of water and electricity are most unbearable in the coastal governorates such as Aden and Al-Hudaida. They shared stories they heard about deaths in public hospitals because they could not afford to run generators around the clock in order to provide patients with air conditioning and other indispensable care, particularly in intensive care units.

In Taiz, both women and men stated that even in neighborhoods located in the center of the city, locals receive water only every two weeks. They blamed it on what they described as Saleh's poor and corrupt governance and infrastructure.

In Sana'a City, women described how the power cuts affected their daily activities in terms of security and their freedom to commute within the city. They all agreed that they do not feel safe outside their homes after sunset, saying that they are scared of what might happen to them while it is dark. As a result, many women feel restricted, as they are unable to work two shifts or to sell their handicrafts and homemade foods in wedding halls or on the street. This severely affects a women's income.

Working Hours:

Non-organized fishermen and/or porters in Al-Hudaida and Aden estimated that they worked twelve to thirteen hours a day. Even so, their average daily income did not exceed 900-1200 YR per day. Women in Aden complained about how marrying a fisherman obligates a woman to help at sea even when she does not have the necessary skills for such a job. They estimated that they worked four to five hours a day at sea. Farmers in Ibb, Taiz, and Al-Hudaida agreed that women do most of the work on farms. They work an average of fifteen hours a day of unpaid labor. Besides the actual work on the farm, the duties of women include carrying water from waterfalls and wells, and collecting firewood. They also create handicrafts like breadbaskets. Because she might only have access to primitive tools, the manufacturing of one such items could easily takes months.

I spend three months making one breadbasket, which I sell later for 500 YR. I work on the basket for four hours every day. *Saeeda, A farmer from Ibb*

Organized working Women in Taiz, Al-Hudaida, and Sana'a City did not complain about the working hours as much as salary deductions. These deductions are often due to family obligations that women have to fulfill at home, particularly during maternity periods. These obligations cause absences and tardiness at the work place. They also agreed that not having day care facilities makes it difficult for mothers to work because she cannot work as many hours as men. These circumstances in both the private and public sectors often force women to have to make a decision between work or family. Men had similar responses related to what they described as an unfair accountability. Among their female colleagues, this issue effects their punctuality, attendance, and performance.

I was one of the top students in my class. I received my master's degree before I was married. Now that I gave birth to my first child and my maternity leave is over, every morning I have to wake up early to leave my son at his grandparent's house. I often end up arriving late to work. The result is a daily deduction from my salary. My male colleagues leave an hour early every day to go buy qat. Their salaries are never deducted because the human resource manager is a man too and they are all friends. It's a man's world. Said Afaq, A computer engineer from Al-Hudaida

CONCLUSION

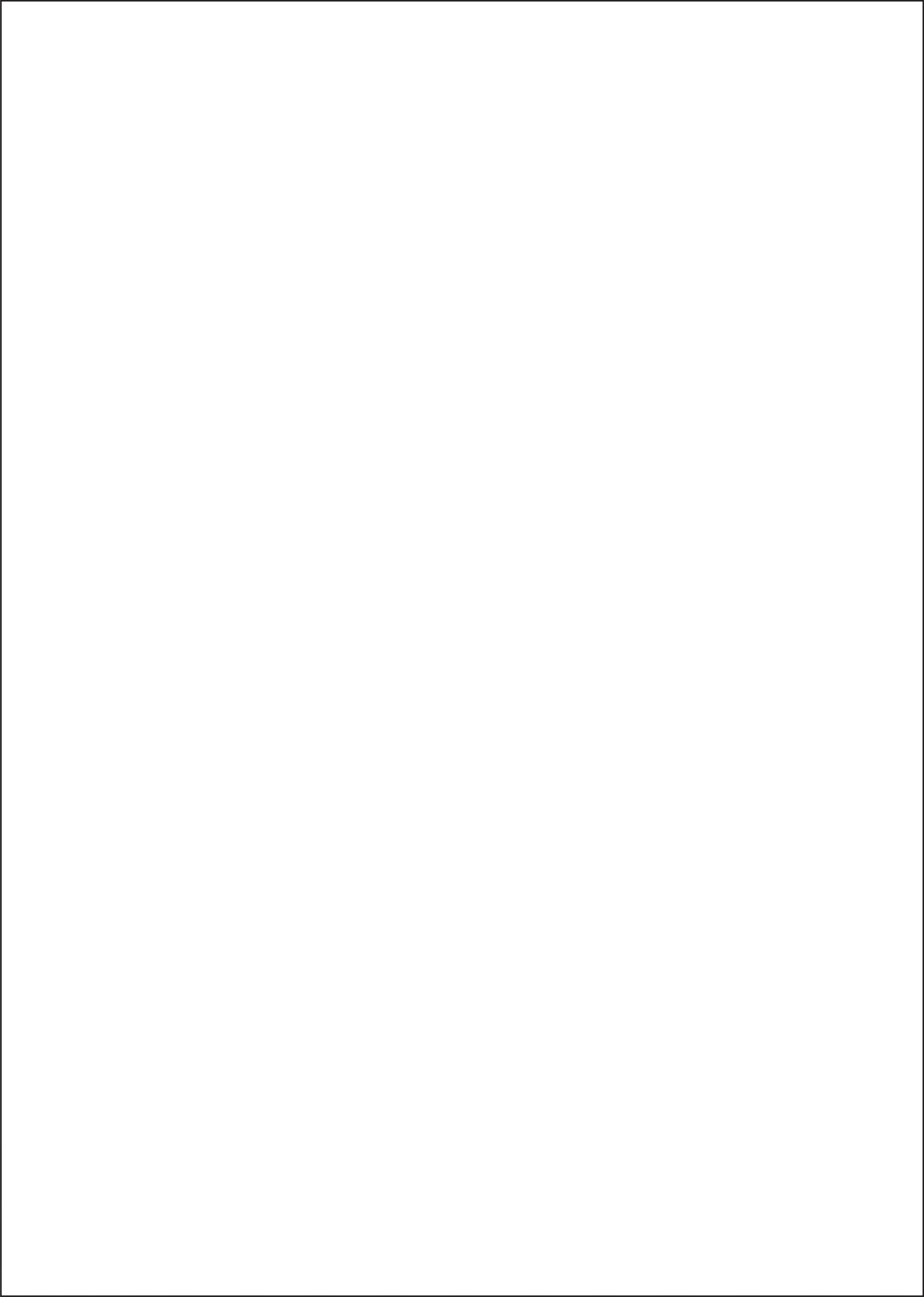
Since the 2011 uprising, little progress has been made in terms of women's rights. This is reflected in the sentiment within the population that believes that there have been no significant improvements in the conditions for women. On a general level, the patriarchal nature of Yemeni society poses a great challenge. The predominantly male policy makers lack the interest in actively improving the women's rights situation, while female decision-makers have little influence. The gap between ordinary Yemeni citizens and women's rights advocates further results in limited popular support for the agendas of women's rights advocates. While an average Yemeni woman knows little about what women's rights advocates do, they are still generally viewed rather negatively. The general distrust in political parties impacts the way these activists are perceived by the public. Often they are seen to be acting in their own, or in their political parties, interest, rather than in favor of the community. This results in distrust towards female activists who represent women's interests on a national level.

Even though the recommendations made by the NDC cover many of the priorities of the population in regards to women in Yemen, the lack of tangible changes that could improve the lives of women in a more direct manner create a difficult environment for women's rights activists to build trust among the population and mobilize support for women's rights. While there is a certain degree of support for the central issues of women's rights advocates' agendas, such as the 30% quota and a legal age for marriage, the ordinary population does not immediately relate an improvement of women's situation with such demands. Based on traditional family values, both men and women see the role of the woman to be one that takes care of the family to the best of her ability. The priorities of the population are therefore related to improving a women's ability to better fulfill this role.

The improvement of women's health is seen to enable women to fulfill their role. The employment of women is seen as a way for them to contribute to the family's wellbeing on a financial level. Enabling women to work and become financially independent will not only enable them to contribute to the family financially, but may also counter the trend of early marriages. If women are seen as potential breadwinners for the family, the perceived need to marry girls off at a young age may decrease.

A major challenge for women in general is the lack of governmental services. While the general population suffers due to the lack of regular service provisions, this research showed that women in particular are particularly affected by this. The lack of infrastructure, government services and water (especially in rural areas) prevent women from seeking medical help, attending school, or adequately performing their work.

While the general female population is not widely engaged in a struggle to improve the women's rights situation, they are calling for an improvement in health, education, and basic infrastructure, and services. In order for women's rights activists to mobilize grassroots support, they must address these priorities first. By improving the immediate living conditions of average women, trust can be created and built between them and the political elite that claim to represent women in the higher echelons of the government.



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