Yemen has been suffering from conflict and political instability for a long time, ranking seventh among the most vulnerable countries in the Fragile States Index for 2015\(^1\) and the poorest country in the Arab region according to international development reports, in addition of suffering from the persisting enormous gender gap in all domains and in the economic, social and political opportunities. Although in 2015 Yemen ranked the last for seven years in a row in the gender gap, women issues remain marginal and limited within the general policy framework of the country.

Yemen is currently facing a serious humanitarian crisis, with more than 21.2 million people needing humanitarian assistance, 50% of whom are women and children. Women have been massively and directly affected by the conflict since 2011; they have lost their families, and have been subject to forced displacement or gender-based violence, as well as to psychological damage. Although women\(^2\) account for 51% of the total population, and they had an active role in the Arab Spring as a corrective revolution, in addition to their active participation in the comprehensive national dialogue by 29% and in drafting the constitution by 23%, and despite the international conventions and resolutions supporting the participation of women, the most important of which is the Security Council Resolution 1325, the participation and the representation of women in peacebuilding since the outbreak of the war in 2015 began to recede. Women participation has become almost nonexistent in the official peace paths; in fact, only two women participated in the official negotiating table in Geneva or Kuwait, and women were totally absent in the subcommittees, such as the de-escalation committee and the security committee, despite the importance of the presence of women in those committees at the negotiations roundtable in order to reach a lasting and inclusive peace.

This policy paper sheds light on the experiences of the Youth Leadership Development Foundation, in addition to the available reports and studies on the main challenges and factors that have led to the absence of women from the process of peacemaking. This paper also looks into the main policies and measures that should be taken to activate the role of the granddaughters of Balkis, the Queen of Sheba, in the peace process, given the positive impact this might have in fastening the peace process and reaching fair, inclusive and sustainable solutions.

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1. The term frailty is used to describe a diverse set of relationships between State, civil society and citizens. The concept frailty allows a departure from the often artificial divide between ‘humanitarian’ and ‘development’ settings (Programing in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Counties, Program Policy Guidelines, Oxfam, 2011).

2. The use of the terms “woman” and its plural “women” stems from the belief in the importance of the non-stereotyping of women in one pattern and the importance of diversity and differences in the patterns of women. – “One Size Does Not Fit All”.

Women Political Participation in Peacemaking in Yemen
The main challenges and factors that impede the participation and the engagement of women in peacebuilding:

**Political Impediments:**

The weakness of the national and political will to involve women in formal peacebuilding negotiations

Women have always expressed their willingness for various political participations through their participation at the elections in 2006 and at the demonstrations in 2011, as well as through leading initiatives, etc. In addition, this has been expressed through the success of women in civil action through civil society organizations in which women have undertaken leadership positions and have worked on development issues in general and human rights issues in particular. However, the reality is that women have not reached any official decision-making positions, given the weak political will to push women into the first ranks and to place women issues on the list of priorities. For example:

1.1 Based on the unprecedented active and popular participation of women in the Arab Spring, and the various decisions related to the initiative of the Arab Gulf countries or the United Nations resolutions (2051 - 2014), the percentage of women participation in the national dialogue in 2015 was 29.6%. The percentage of participation of women in drafting the constitution was 23.5%. However, subsequent presidential and executive decisions didn’t commit to the participation of women in accordance with the outcome of the dialogue and the UN resolutions which affirmed the equal participation in the peace process and the decision-making positions. It is noteworthy that no woman was appointed among the president's advisers during the transitional period, and one woman was appointed as a consultant for women affairs. In addition, women did not receive any share of administrative appointments in leadership positions. Women received two portfolios in successive governments, but their role was limited to the Ministry of Human Rights, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor, and the position of Minister of State. Yemen has not had a woman Minister of Finance, or Planning, or International or Foreign Cooperation, or even Education and Higher Education which may be an extension of the educational role of women in the family or of their role as directors for superior schools. These are all indicators of the weakness of the political leadership's orientation to support women before and after the conflict.

1.2 In addition, women are excluded from the current official dialogues and negotiations. There is also suspicion and fear of the participation preparation or representation of women, as a third party in the peace process. The parties to the conflict do not accept the initiative of the UN envoy to invite 7 women from the Yemeni Feminist Consensus for Peace and Security to push forward the process of negotiations in Kuwait in May 2016. This is due to the weakness of the political structure of the parties, which exclude women from the decision-making positions within the parties, as well as to the pejorative attitude towards the capabilities of women to work in political parties, in comparison with men's competences, due to the lack of awareness among party leaders about the importance of gender, in addition to the structure of the patriarchal society.

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Social violence against women is a major obstacle to the participation of women in various areas of life, and most importantly political participation. Among the bad social habits of Yemeni society, we mention describing women as being mentally and religiously deficient, in addition to the societal pressures generated by the patriarchal structure of the family, which presents men with a harsh upbringing that generates violence against women, and allows the marriage of young women, preventing thus the education of girls in addition to allowing their circumcision. The high rate of illiteracy among females is also one of the biggest problems facing the activation of political participation, given that it reaches 60%.

In addition to the tribal, religious, and clan-based society dominating the current electoral system, as one of the biggest obstacles to the political participation of women, this system was first established to serve tribal or clan affiliation and is governed by specific tribal traditions. In this system, the candidate submits his/her candidacy or participates in the elections as a representative of the tribe in principle, and not as an individual in the community, meaning a citizen. Political rivalries dominate the narrow confines of the tribe over the sense of citizenship and equality. Since women are totally absent from the tribal society, they are also almost absent in the Parliamentary elections (One female was elected in the parliament, she deceased 3 years ago) and local council elections.

Social and Economic Impediments:
The full participation of women in the political or social life, or in the peacebuilding process, is an important and fundamental issue for building sustainable peace. The participation of women is vital in all areas. However, some social barriers make this participation difficult, with many factors impeding the participation of women in many areas, including peacebuilding. These impediments include:

- Not dealing with the issue of political participation of women as a community issue and considering it as a factional or welfare issue.
- The popular culture prevailing in the Yemeni society, based on the distinction between public and private affairs, which states that the role of women is limited to the special work related to the affairs of the house and the children, while the state administration regards any public work as an inherent part of men's jurisdiction. The patriarchal structure of the Yemeni family is based on social upbringing on authority and submission to the man in the family. The patriarchal domination over the entire family continues until the man’s death, which is an obstacle in itself. As a result of this culture, development policies, plans and programs to promote gender equality and women empowerment continue to make their way with extreme difficulty, as there are still negative social and cultural customs and traditions.

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Economic obstacles that are outside the control of the society as a result of the spread of poverty and the increase in the number of those affected by it, especially women, impede the speed of empowerment of women and raise the rates of development in the country. A large number of men are migrants or members of armed groups, which led women to play roles that are mainly played by men. Also, since most women have difficulty accessing education and health, or even having ownership over lands, the economic vulnerability of women is thus increasing.

**Legislative Impediments:**

The main suffering of the political participation of women stems from the absence of laws and fair legislations for women. This is a major factor in the weakness of their participation in the political life. The State did not seek to address this problem, although it needs a legal effort by political elites such as the parliament and the government. For instance:

- Yemeni women were granted legislative gains in Yemeni laws that had a positive impact on contributing to significant changes in their economic, social and political situation, and their entry into the field of development. However, the problem in legislations and laws pertaining to women's sphere of work, which is the actual application and practice of different rights, creates a clear gap between the legal text and its application. Therefore, the challenges faced by women in this aspect lie mainly in the absence of awareness or lack of constitutional and legal rights in the administrative leadership of the state, the government, and even women, whether illiterate or educated. Raising awareness around laws and implementing them is the first step in the way of adhering to the right and obligation of involving women in drafting legislation and laws, including humanitarian, social and personal status laws issues.

- Lack of special legislations on the prohibition of violence against women that would protect women from many forms of abuse and injustice, which led to the lack of legislative controls in this area, the lack of legal bodies for review and field follow-up, and the nonparticipation of women in judicial control, police and security.

**Security Impediments:**

As a result of conflicts, war, and security imbalances, women faced many difficulties, the most important of which are:

- The difficulty of mobility and the decline of the participation of women in the public and the political life, both internally and externally.
- Women political activists were subjected to gender-based violence, defamation and attacks on the privacy of their lives and the lives of their families, which clearly limited their political participation.

**Recommendations**

**The International Community:**

- Getting the commitment of the UN and the UN envoy to implement the provisions of UNSCR 1325 and to devise practical mechanisms to integrate all genders in the peacebuilding process.
Pressuring governments to involve women by at least 30% according to the outcomes of the dialogue and the UN resolutions in any formal and informal negotiations supervised by the communities regarding peacebuilding in Yemen.

Pressuring governments and decision-makers to develop national plans that implement UNSCR 1325 and UN resolutions ratified by the Republic of Yemen, and to monitor their implementation.

Allocating sufficient financial resources from peace programs in Yemen to support civil society organizations whose leaders are women, in addition to women empowerment programs, to allow women participation in the peacebuilding process and in various fields.

Supporting projects and programs that may reduce barriers to women empowerment, such as the programs on the education of girls, gender programs, anti-violence programs and women political participation.

**Political Parties:**

- Establishing mechanisms and controls to involve women in decision-making positions at various levels, such as allocating quotas for women that would ensure their participation in decision-making positions, and developing special plans for capacity-building and the rehabilitation of women.
- Establishing mechanisms and controls to ensure the political participation of women at the local, national and international levels, by amending party regulations to guarantee the participation of women belonging to a political party in any nominations at the local, national and international levels.
- Reviewing all party regulations and policies and making sure they put an end to violence and to discrimination against women.
- Implementing empowerment and capacity-building programs for women within parties.

**Yemeni Governments:**

- Including gender sensitive indicators within national plans and strategies for the country.
- Developing a national plan for the implementation of UN resolution 1324 and the resolutions associated to it.
- Reviewing laws and legislations to ensure that all details of the executive mechanisms of the UN resolutions and recommendations made are included.
- Directing the national media to promote the active role of women and the importance of involving them in decision-making.

**Civil Society:**

- Monitoring and following up on the work of the government and the decision-makers in implementing the obligations related to national resolutions and UN resolutions on women.
- Implementing programs that reduce impediments to the empowerment of women, such as programs for determining the safe age of marriage, the education of girls, gender programs and programs against violence against women.
- Promoting the importance of the participation of women in decision-making as well as their involvement in peacemaking.
- Promoting the effective participation of local communities in rights, laws and legislations related to women.
Reviewing legislations to ensure the rights of women that are provided in the Constitution, based on the above-mentioned recommendations.

Prohibiting all types and forms of violence against women.

Prohibiting the assault on the physical integrity of women (such as female circumcision) and sexual harassment.

Setting the minimum age for girls’ marriage to 18 years and punishing anyone who doesn’t abide by it.


Adding the phrase "so that the representation of women in each of these bodies is not less than 30% as a minimum" to Article 4 of the Constitution.

Adopting a proportional list system or a mixed system to ensure that women participate as marginalized groups protected by the proportional list system, rather than the individual election system adopted in Article 63 of the current Constitution.

Adding “feminization” in the conditions of the Presidency of the Republic of Article 107 of the Constitution.

Legislations and Laws:

- Reviewing legislations to ensure the rights of women that are provided in the Constitution, based on the above-mentioned recommendations.
- Prohibiting all types and forms of violence against women.
- Prohibiting the assault on the physical integrity of women (such as female circumcision) and sexual harassment.
- Setting the minimum age for girls' marriage to 18 years and punishing anyone who doesn’t abide by it.

About Program:

Goal: To ensure inclusive & gender sensitive peace building through strengthened & effective civil society and community initiatives to represent the needs and voices of Yemeni women affected by conflict in Yemen.

About YLDF:

Our vision is a Yemen in which skilled, well qualified and active young women and men play leadership roles smartly in all domains of society and enable Yemenis to contribute to a better world.

Our mission is “to increase youth participation in social, political and economic aspects of society through systematic training and education in vocational, communication, leadership and soft skills in order to bring them in the main stream to respond to community and labor market.”

About Author:

Al-Hasan has more than 7 years of experience in development. He has been enrolled in a master program in international development and Gender. He conducted and participated in several fields studies and researches. He took a management positions in international companies and NGOs. He is considered one of Gender specialists and trainers in the country.