Policy Paper
The Disruption of the Social Fabric of Yemen during the War
The Resultant Impact on Women
Consequences & Remedies

Executive Summary:
This Policy Paper is presented to address Yemen’s social fabric as it is being torn apart as a result of the ongoing war and the consequent impact on the women across the country. The Paper is prepared as one of the initiatives being implemented by the Youth Leadership & Development Foundation (YLDF)’s in collaboration with Oxfam under the theme of “Leading Women for Peace”, the project that aims to realize a comprehensive gender sensitive peace process through civil society organizations and strong community initiatives capable of communicating and representing the needs and voices of affected women at the local, national and international levels. The Paper has adopted a methodology that is primarily based on a review of previously completed studies and papers and it compiles testimonies and comments from field activists involved in humanitarian relief work.

The ongoing war in Yemen has brought the country to a collapse of security, living standards, and public services. Furthermore, the country’s inclusive fabric and culture is falling apart and this situation is one of the most serious consequences of this war. The war has played the most prominent role in the occurrence of deep social fabric troubles, triggered especially by the armed confrontations that attracted adversaries and supporters for the warring parties. Also, the media played a key role in increasing the level of political polarization and creating regional and sectarian conflicts. Women emerged as a major victim of the social fabric being torn out.

Women enjoy the rights to be protected during conflicts, as stipulated by international laws and treaties. Women also enjoy protection that is guaranteed by Yemeni social and tribal norms, which regulate the traditions that have to be followed during armed conflicts in a way that surely guarantees protection for women in particular. Additionally, women are subject to a series of implications within the family including the increasing rates of domestic violence, divorce and child marriage. Also, women bear more burdens and responsibilities because of the absence of husbands from home to be engaged in confrontations, or husbands who died or these who remain unemployed and are searching jobs. As a consequence, women's lives may be directly threatened when they go out of home or go to public places to claim their rights or the rights of their male relatives detained by the warring parties.

Hence, it is believed that the relevant entities - identified by this Paper at the local and national levels including the respective ministries and civil society organizations as well as the international organizations will have to work together on a range of intervention programs that mainly aim to address the needs of women during the war as a result of social fabric disorders. Also, there has to be an effort to enhance the legal protection actions for women in many different target areas and provide support and social protection, and sponsor the health and psychological programs women need.

The Paper also recommends that employment opportunities be maximized and that economic alternatives for women be made available in order to protect them from the war consequences and the existing disruption of the social fabric that led to a series of negative impacts including high rates of divorce, domestic violence and increased displacement. The improvement of women's economic situation should contribute greatly to the mitigation of these war effects on women.

The paper also recommends that awareness programs should continue to raise awareness about the importance of preserving the fabric of the society and avoiding practices, words and language that can lead to further deteriorating social fabric and the protection of women from the consequent effects. Hence, the role of women and community leaders in this effort at the community is quite important in order to build bonds and to call for the rejection of discrimination calls, and to allow a room for women to play their role as advocates and leaders in peace-building.

It is also expected that the awareness programs will play a role in combating the child marriage which might appear as a direct result of families being separated due to problems associated with the society fabric or as of people being displaced due to the ongoing war.

---

1 The views in the policy paper do not necessarily represent the views of the Youth Leadership Development Foundation and its partners in the project of “Women’s Leadership ” Oxfam and Awam.
Introduction:
The current war in Yemen, which impacts all aspects of life including Yemen’s security and stability, threatens the lives of Yemenis; pushing the country’s economy and Yemenis’ livelihood, people's means of living, and the public services to the verge of collapse. However, the most devastating effect is the rupture of the social fabric and inclusive culture.

As all countries witnessing conflicts and interventions, differences within the same family get wider and push the war to higher levels of conflict. The Yemeni family and all society in general pay the price. In a special conference on "The impact of wars and conflicts on the family in the Arab World" held in Doha, participants said that wars in countries such as Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Libya and other countries have exacerbated the challenges existing in these countries and created problems that could not be addressed and tackled in the short term. At the same time, the wars contributed to the disruption of the social fabric.

In turn, the ruptured social fabric does not only represent a catalyst for the continuation of the conflict, but it is becoming a root cause of problems and violations particularly affecting the most vulnerable society groups such as women and children.

This Paper will also attempt to examine the impact of Yemen’s ruptured social fabric on women and provide recommendations that can benefit decision makers and stakeholders to mitigate these effects. The process of developing this paper has gone through two stages: the first stage was the collection of literature, previous researches and studies on the same subject matter; whether these researches be local, regional or even international, taking into account the similarity of the social environment between the cases examined or studied and Yemen.

The process of developing this paper has gone through two stages: the first stage was the collection of literature, previous researches and studies on the same subject matter; whether these researches be local, regional or even international, taking into account the similarity of the social environment between the cases examined or studied and Yemen.

A number of activists in the target governorates of Sana’a, Aden and Hodeidah were also contacted. It was through these activists and humanitarian workers that the major effects of the social fabric rupture on women were identified and were confirmed by the activists as they have witnessed such effects on women in their regions. The Women National Committee, the Yemeni Women’s Union and international organizations such as GIZ and CARE, as well as with social researchers have also been surveyed. In addition, an online research was conducted on any studies or papers related to the subject of this Paper. Among the key questions that were addressed with the organizations contacted were the availability of any research information on the impact of social fabric disruption on women in Yemen. Also, some activists working in the governorates concerned were contacted. One representative was selected for each of the targeted three governorates based on how they are directly involved in their local communities, credibility of their work and their objectivity in reporting stories and testimonies purely without any political polarization. The questions addressed to these activists were related to any stories and testimonies associated with the impact of social fabric disruption on women in the target governorates.

Context of the problem:

(1) The Yemenis always pride themselves that they constitute a homogeneous society with no sectarian, ethnic or regional differences. However, the current war has caused major cracks in the country’s social fabric and culture. The media escalation, which is often based on inflaming regional and sectarian differences and even inciting the sectarian language that ignites wars in the entire Arab region, contributed to widening the gap between Yemenis and their integrated social fabric.

Before the outbreak of the war and even the Revolution of Change that took place in 2011, a spiral of protests and demands of rights, especially political rights, has emerged in the provinces of the South through what was known in 2007 as the Southern Movement and the six wars launched in the province of Saada since early 2004. Despite the start of peaceful transition, the government has failed to tackle all these issues. However, the outbreak of the current war, which came under several headings, exacerbated the situation in the country and led to the divisions of the social fabric in the north and the south of Yemen to the extent that that social fabric in every single village, neighborhood and even the same house was also affected. As a result of the continuation of the war and its complexity over time, the threat of social fabric disruption is alarmingly increasing.

(2) When the social fabric is ruptured, it has an impact on all components of the society starting with the family. Women and children bear a considerable share of the negative impacts

[^2]: “After Seven Years of War, the Syrian Family Stranded between Social Disintegration, Displacement, and Seeking Refuge,” by Shaza Zafer Al-Jondi on 7 December 2017 and article available at https://geroun.net/archives/104076
that the family is vulnerable to when the society is torn apart by political, religious and religious differences. Strikingly speaking, one of the differences that is specific to this war in Yemen is the negative and positive role of women in its events. Unfortunately, there are women who contribute to fueling the war and widening the differences as well as the gap of the social fabric. At the same time, we cannot deny that there are women on the other side who are trying to stop the war and help mitigate any effects on the social fabric, as a result. The Paper will explore later in detail the consequences women are affected with.

As a result of the current social division and the ruptured social fabric and the unavoidable impact on the country’s social cohesion, there is also a negative impact on many of the social considerations and the traditions Yemenis have inherited as part of a tribal society in order to control individual and societal behavior in war and peace alike. Women and children are among the most vulnerable groups as a result of this change.

(3) The International law underlines the principle of protecting women during conflict and criminalizing any violation of women’s rights and their vulnerability during war as stipulated in the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the Additional Protocols of 1977. In addition, similar stipulations and obligations are also endorsed in other treaties and conventions that Yemen is a signatory to.

(4) Although the conflict varies in terms of severity from one region to another in Yemen where some regions suffer much conflict compared to other safer areas, the problem, however, lies in that the social fabric is being ruptured in all regions of Yemen. It is therefore possible to say that the severity of the effects of this problem dominates all regions of Yemen taking into account the fact that it is of course more severe in areas where confrontations intensify.

(5) There are several effects of war and women bear a large part of these effects and burdens, both economically and at the level of the services provided. In addition, the war results in high rates of unemployment and rare employment opportunities and increasing number of people are at risk of starvation. Statistics indicate that about 17.8 million citizens are in an urgent need for humanitarian aids to meet their basic needs. These needs are often a major burden on women and housewives, who are more interested than ever in providing food and medicine, especially in families where men have lost their jobs or died.

(6) The major effects of the ruptured social fabric on women include the following:

1. Women are exposed to the risk of death as a result of the direct targeting of homes and communities by the parties to the conflict. The social fabric has been torn apart to that point that makes the targeting of houses and residents including women and children and sniping at women more likely because the social ties have been torn apart too. It would not have been possible, nor permissible that all of this happens if the dispute is still governed by the rule of one society and the moral legacy of the Yemenis that used to exist even at the times of their most raging conflicts.

2. Crackdowns as well as physical and verbal abuse of women in public places and homes, As a result, women do not enjoy any legal, moral, or even tribe-oriented social protection because they are viewed by the aggressors as persons representing the other opposing party at a time of no social ties that can govern and control the dispute.

3. Women are subjected to psychological pressure due to the war and its consequences, and the disruption of the social fabric. Furthermore, they face the difficulty of running family and households especially in cases of divorce or family disputes.

4. The rise of social problems such as divorce: An article was addresses the rise in divorce cases since the outbreak of war though there is no authentic study that looks into this specific problem and comes out with accurate figures of divorces cases.

5. Child marriage: In a study completed by the Youth Leadership and Development Foundation in collaboration with UNICEF, it was found that the rate of child marriage increased by 66% during the current conflict. The disruption of the social fabric leads to increased displacement of families and divorce, pushing the family to get rid of the burden of girls by marrying them.

6. Increased domestic violence against women due to the fragile functioning of state institutions and the absence of a legal umbrella that can protect women from the domestic violence.

7. Women are exposed to marginalization and the return of many old negative ideas about them due to the violence prevailing in the society during such conflict situations.

8. Woman are harassed because of their regional and sectarian affiliation when they are present or crossing into...
impact on the lives and health of children and mothers.
- Provide capacity-building programs and expand women's opportunities in small and income-generating projects.
- Carry out studies and researches to closely identify the extent of the effects of ruptured social fabric on women.
- Strengthen monitoring, tracking, training and rehabilitation programs.

Second: Recommendations for Actions at the Policy Maker Level

These in charge:
Specific ministries such as the Ministry of Awqaf and Guidance (Endowments), Ministry of Education, Ministry of Youth, Ministry of Information, Women National Committee, the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Justice

- Ministries of Awqaf and Guidance, Education, Youth and Media are the entities that are involved in awareness, guidance and values promotion – we recommend that these ministries adopt clear policies as follows:
  - Prohibit the use of any media material that further ruptures the social fabric and instead take the effort to protect the country’s national cohesion.
  - Stress the importance to take into account the moral and legal obligations secured for women and children during the conflict and not to not to expose them to danger by any means.
  - Focus on the use of social media to convey positive messages calling for cohesion of society, urging the renunciation of discrimination and strengthening of national dialogue.
- Women National Committee: to monitor and track violations affecting women due to the disruption of the social fabric; coordinate with the concerned legal authorities to issue legislations and policies that secure protection of women.
- The Ministry of Social Affairs: identify the situation of women in the areas impacted by the social fabric disruption and include the women affected within the Ministry’s social security schemes.
- The Ministries of Justice and Legal Affairs: study the enactment of laws to protect women from the impacts generated by the disruption of the social fabric. These legislations might include, for example, criminalizing women's abuses and violations of their rights, and opening a legal framework through which women can prosecute the violators of their rights.
About Author:

Afrah Abdulaziz Alzouba is a specialist in Development and peace building. She worked for more than 15 years in development field and focused on empowering local communities by improving their living conditions including health, education and economic situation. She also worked for USAID as Governance & Democracy specialist. Then she was appointed as First Deputy of the Secretary General of the National Dialogue Conference (NDC)

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.”
Train the community leaders on concepts related to the rights of women during the conflict and to introduce them to the major effects women suffer from as a result of the ruptured social fabric.

- Encourage the community leaders to play an advanced role in resolving differences that may arise at the level of the target neighborhoods, districts and governorates and address any effects on women in the geographical scope of these leaders.
- These leaders can play an important role in identifying the families affected by the disruption of the social fabric – such as divorce and displacement – and coordinating with the donor entities to provide the required services for cases identified in the impacted families.
- Encouraging women's voluntary initiatives to promote the concepts of women's protection and to address the manifestations and forms of violence caused by the disruption of the social fabric.

Proposed Remedies:
At the beginning, we stress the importance of preserving the social fabric from being torn apart further and adhering to Yemeni traditional norms and local as well as international laws on wars, which emphasize the need to protect the civilians and women from the conflict.

First: Recommendations for Actions at a Local Level “District and Governorate”
These in Charge: Governors and District Directors

- They should work side by side with the offices of the Ministries of Guidance and Endowments in their governorates as well as the local media to promote and let aside the discourse of division, spread the spirit of brotherhood and focus on raising awareness about the impact of a ruptured social fabric on women and family in particular and the whole society in general.
- These offices can also establish voluntary entities composed of school students in coordination with their respective schools to identify specific days devoted to the dissemination of constructive concepts about the unity of the social fabric.
- These offices can circulate a set of guidelines to education, youth and media leaders to prevent the use or the dissemination of any material that might be a cause for further and wider gap in the social fabric.
- They should coordinate with community leaders - women and men - to play positive roles in resolving differences that may arise – due to different political stances – among people at the level of neighborhoods, districts, and the whole governorate, and try to contain the differences. Also, the major violations and effects on women should be identified and treated through mediation and awareness programs – and possibly also providing the support to the women affected in order to access the judiciary and claim their rights.

These in Charge: Community Leaders – Women and Men – in the Target Governorates and Districts

- Provide significant support to local organizations and initiatives to work on awareness-raising activities that aim at preventing the disruption of the social fabric and raising awareness of women's rights during conflict and the relevant local and international laws.
- Local leaders at the provincial and district levels need to raise awareness about the rights of women during conflict. Also, international organizations interested in supporting women's issues can provide the support required for advocacy programs and lobby the local leaders to encourage them to take appropriate actions to mitigate the effects of ruptured social fabric on women.
- Support human rights organizations and initiatives engaged in women advocacy and filing cases against the individuals and entities which are involved in practices against women based on their political affiliation in the target cities and governorates.
- Take into consideration the special circumstances of displaced women, particularly when basic and protection services have to be provided.
- Provide quality training and qualification for local women leaders to contribute to improving their roles in promoting the spirit of humanity and brotherhood, alleviating polarization and supporting women affected by the disruption of the social fabric.
- Provide psychosocial and social care for women.
- Reactivate anti-child marriage campaigns and clarify its