



**Of ambition, opportunity and pretence**

**The Politics of Gender in Yemen**

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## **Declaration**

*I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.*

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## **Abstract**

Yemen has continuously been one of the worst places worldwide in terms of women's rights in education, health, and the economy, according to international development indicators. It is puzzling that this is the country's reality despite the fact that during the last two decades, Yemen witnessed a surge of high-level appointments of women in key decision-making positions, the creation of several women-related national institutions, and the implementation of various women's empowerment policies.

This research attempts to address this puzzle by investigating the failure of women's empowerment policies in Yemen between 2006 and 2014 in health, education, and the economy, from the perspectives of the women leaders themselves, who are at the forefront of the women's empowerment efforts in the country.

To demonstrate their failure, I first review the state's gender policies, using policy mapping, to identify trends and measure their success drawing on existing policy evaluation approaches. Next, I present empirical findings collected through a mixed-method approach, which notably include descriptive-statistical analysis of surveys and qualitative examination of elite interviews. This research investigates feedback from leading Yemeni women, who are the main drivers behind gender equality in Yemen, and who were directly involved in women's empowerment efforts in the researched time frame. Using women's empowerment's agency-structure framework, I investigate the relevance of: lack of capacity of women leaders, political and economic instability, and the culture of political support, to policy success. I argue that all three factors contributed to the failure of women's empowerment policies through sub-mechanisms, however, the culture of political support – or lack thereof, had the highest explanatory power of the three factors.

This research departs from existing scholarly work on Yemeni women's empowerment in that it focuses on the experiences of the women leaders as champions of the empowerment agenda, while also acknowledging the importance of the socio-political context in which they operated. This research provides gender policy makers with insights into the practical implications of gender policies in conservative societies such as Yemen, by addressing sustainability and impact of women's empowerment efforts.

## **Acknowledgement**

It is done at last. The journey of this research has been a professional and emotional rollercoaster with a steep learning curve. Although I know that I will miss working on it, I am glad it is finally done. Accompanying me on this journey were the brave Yemeni feminist pioneers whom this research is about, and to whom this piece of work is dedicated. They have my eternal gratitude for holding the torch for Yemeni women to dare to dream of gaining their rights and living in a fair society.

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## Chapter I:

### Introduction

*“We need to learn more from the outcomes of initiatives to promote gender equality in particular economic, social, cultural, and geographical contexts. We need to consider what made them successful or unsuccessful, in order to develop policies and practices that will transform girls’ and women’s lives and thus contribute to achieving wide goals for gender equality.”<sup>1</sup>*

#### 1. The context: The status of women in the Republic of Yemen

The Republic of Yemen (RoY) is deemed to be one of the worst places to be a women,<sup>2</sup> with the gap between men and women (Gender Gap Index)<sup>3</sup> persistently ranking as the highest globally since 2006.<sup>4</sup>

Located at the southern point of the Arabian Peninsula, Yemen is the least developed country in the Middle East and one of the poorest in the world.<sup>5</sup> It was formally established on 22 May 1990, when the Yemen Arab Republic in the north and the Peoples’ Democratic Republic of Yemen in the south were united. The RoY is home to around 29 million inhabitants. It is surrounded by the Red Sea from the west, the Gulf of Aden from the south, Oman from the east and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia from the north. Oil and gas are its main sources of income, accounting to around 65% of the

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<sup>1</sup> S. Aikman & E. Unterhalter, *Beyond access: transforming policy and practice for gender equality in education*, Oxfam, 2005, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> L. Adams, ‘The worst place to be a woman this year got even worse’, *Huffington Post*, 18 August, 2016, <[http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/laurie-adams/yemen-worst-place-to-be-a-woman\\_b\\_8006268.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/laurie-adams/yemen-worst-place-to-be-a-woman_b_8006268.html).> (accessed 13 January 2017).

<sup>3</sup> GGI is a composite index that compares women's development to men as a mathematical aggregate of health, education, economic, and political indicators. See more about how the Global Gender Gap Index is calculated including political empowerment: <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2016/measuring-the-global-gender-gap/>

<sup>4</sup> Gender Gap Index of 2018. This index is published annually by the World Economic Forum. Yemen ranked last at 149 out of 149 countries in 2018, remaining as the worst country in terms of gender equality continuously since 2006. For more details on the various indicators involved in the calculation see <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2017/dataexplorer/#economy=YEM>

<sup>5</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, ‘Yemen’, CIA World Factbook, <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ym.html> (accessed 8 November 2018).

national revenue,<sup>6</sup> and which are rapidly declining. The Yemeni society is a largely conservative one, predominantly tribal,<sup>7</sup> and more than three thirds of the population live outside the urban centres.<sup>8</sup> Despite having a wealth of natural and historical resources, the country is plagued with corruption, mismanagement, and instability, which rendered it one of the most challenging countries to live in. However, Yemeni women suffer the greater impact of hardships; even in times of relative prosperity, they remain critically disadvantaged in terms of their health, education, and economic rights.

With regards to health, two primary gender-specific risks include pregnancy and childbirth. Giving birth presents a 1 in 39 death risk in Yemen,<sup>9</sup> with seven women dying every day due to childbirth and pregnancy complications.<sup>10</sup> In 2015, the maternal mortality ratio was reported at 385 deaths per every 100,000 live births.<sup>11</sup> Almost half of all deaths of Yemeni women in the reproductive age were due to reproductive reasons.<sup>12</sup> Three quarters of these deaths were preventable,<sup>13</sup> and mainly due to the absence of a skilled attendant during the delivery,<sup>14</sup> or the fact that the mother-to-be was a child herself; as half of the Yemeni girls are married off before they reach the age of 18, at an average age of 15 years old.<sup>15</sup> Maternal mortality is more prevalent in rural areas, where according to UNICEF statistics of 2013, only 26% of the deliveries are supervised by a skilled health attendant compared to 62% in urban areas.<sup>16</sup> To put these numbers in perspective, the latest statistics of Yemen's Maternal Mortality Rate

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<sup>6</sup> CIA, Yemen, *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Where tribes are considered the main point of reference for many Yemenis as their norms and culture superseding anything else, even the laws.

<sup>8</sup> World Bank, Health Equity and Financial Protection Datasheet – Yemen, Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2012, [http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/PDF1\\_192.pdf](http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/PDF1_192.pdf), (accessed 23 October 2018).

<sup>9</sup> R. Cooke, 'Is this the worst place on earth to be a woman?' *The Guardian: The Observer*, <http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2008/may/11/women.humanrights> (accessed 23 October 2018).

<sup>10</sup> J. S. Al-Raiby, 'Partnerships to save Yemeni women's lives', *Huffington Post: Global Motherhood Blog*, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jamela-saleh-alraiby/yemen-women\\_b\\_1311149.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jamela-saleh-alraiby/yemen-women_b_1311149.html), (accessed 23 October 2018).

<sup>11</sup> WHO, et. al., *Trends in maternal mortality: 1990 to 2015*, World Health Organization, Geneva, 2015, p. 56

<sup>12</sup> IRIN News, 'Yemen: Five thousand more midwives needed – UNFPA', 19 May 2008, <http://www.irinnews.org/report/78291/yemen-five-thousand-more-midwives-needed-unfpa>, (accessed 23 October 2018).

<sup>13</sup> IRIN, *op. cit.*

<sup>14</sup> A. Al Serouri et al, 'Reducing maternal mortality in Yemen: Challenges and lessons learned from baseline assessment', *International Journal of Gynecology and Obstetrics*, Volume 105, Issue 1, 2009.

<sup>15</sup> Ministry of Health and Population, & UNICEF, *Yemen Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2006*, Pan-Arab Project for Family Health (PAPFAM), United Nations Children's Fund, 01 October 2008, [http://mics.unicef.org/survey\\_archives/yemen/survey0/outputInformation/reports.html](http://mics.unicef.org/survey_archives/yemen/survey0/outputInformation/reports.html), (accessed 4 April 2016).

<sup>16</sup> UNICEF, 'At a glance: Yemen Statistics', [http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/yemen\\_statistics.html#117](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/yemen_statistics.html#117), (accessed 1 January 2016).

show that it is almost two and a half times the average ratio of the Arab World and 48 times higher than the ratio of women in Europe.<sup>17</sup>

Similarly, in education, according to the World Bank's 2015 indicators,<sup>18</sup> only one in two Yemeni women – aged 15 and older – can read and write. This is half the female population. UNICEF's 2013 statistical indicators confirm Yemen's gender-specific challenges in the education sector, indicating that the percentage of girls who actually attend school drops from 64% at primary level to only 27% at the higher secondary level.<sup>19</sup> This means that only one in three Yemeni girls actually graduates from high school. Rural girls of 14 years old are 40% less likely to enrol in lower secondary education compared to girls living in urban areas.<sup>20</sup>

Moreover, there is a significant gender parity gap even at the basic education level (school years 1-6), according to data by the Yemeni Ministry of Education. The ministry's records also suggest that the risk of 14-year old girls out of schools is 25%, compared to only 3% of boys in the same age group.<sup>21</sup> Likewise, the World Bank gender data portal shows that for middle income families the gender ratio of primary education completion rates has improved by only 20% from 0.71 to 0.84 in the ten years between 2005 and 2015.<sup>22</sup> This outcome significantly fell short of the Millennium Development Goals country target,<sup>23</sup> which aimed to close the gap entirely by 2015.

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<sup>17</sup> WHO, op. cit., p. 58.

<sup>18</sup> World Bank, 'Yemen - Literacy rate, adult female (% of females ages 15 and above)', cited in Trading Economics [tradingeconomics.com], <https://tradingeconomics.com/yemen/literacy-rate-adult-female-percent-of-females-ages-15-and-above-wb-data.html>, (accessed 1 January 2016).

<sup>19</sup> UNICEF, 'At a glance: Yemen statistics', op. cit.

<sup>20</sup> UNICEF & International Policy Centre, 'National Social Protection Monitoring Survey in Yemen, Baseline, 2012', in UNICEF Yemen, *Situation Analysis of Children in Yemen 2014*, 2014, p. 185, [https://www.unicef.org/media/files/Yemen\\_Situation\\_Analysis\\_report\\_-\\_English\\_Final.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/media/files/Yemen_Situation_Analysis_report_-_English_Final.pdf), (accessed 24 October 2018).

<sup>21</sup> UNICEF et. al., *Yemen National Social Protection Monitoring Survey (NSPMS): 2012-2013 Final Report*, International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth, 2014, p. 75, [http://www.ipc-undp.org/pub/eng/Yemen\\_National\\_Social\\_Protection\\_Monitoring\\_Survey\\_2012\\_2013.pdf](http://www.ipc-undp.org/pub/eng/Yemen_National_Social_Protection_Monitoring_Survey_2012_2013.pdf), (accessed 24 October 2018).

<sup>22</sup> World Bank, *Gender data portal: Yemen*, Rep., <http://datatopics.worldbank.org/gender/country/yemen-rep>, (accessed 24 October 2018).

<sup>23</sup> Q. Khan & S. Chase, *Yemen and the millennium development goals*, World Bank, 2003, p. 6, <http://web.worldbank.org/archive/website01418/WEB/IMAGES/WP31SEPT.PDF>, (accessed 24 October 2018).

As for the economy, women only constitute 6% of the formal labour force and their employment is usually limited to the education and the medical sectors.<sup>24</sup> Paradoxically, women constitute a much higher percentage in the informal sector; mostly as unpaid farmers in rural areas. In fact, in the agriculture sector, “most crop production operations and tasks are performed by women manually, whereas men keep mechanized work that is less constraining, less time consuming and better paid.”<sup>25</sup> The International Labour Organisation estimates that female unemployment rates have actually doubled between 2000 and 2016, climbing from 13.6% to 26.5% of the total female labour force, whereas for men according to the same model the rate remained the same.<sup>26</sup>

Compared to the health, education, and economy indicators above, Yemen scores much higher when it comes to political rights in terms of both their political participation and their presence in decision making positions. In fact, the involvement of women in the political process during the last two decades was higher in Yemen than in many more prosperous countries in the region such as the neighbouring Gulf States. A report by the US-based National Democratic Institute on the 2003 primary elections in Yemen stated that “women’s political participation in Yemen is significantly higher than that of other countries in the region.”<sup>27</sup>

To this end, Yemeni women have enjoyed access to political institutions and rights, such as the right to vote, for the last five decades. Notably, they have had suffrage in South Yemen since 1967,<sup>28</sup> while in North Yemen they gained the right to vote in 1980.<sup>29</sup> Women’s access to the democratic process continued to be guaranteed following the unification of North and South Yemen in 1990, and today women

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<sup>24</sup> International Labour Organization, ‘Yemen Labour Force Survey 2013-14’, Beirut: ILO Regional Office for Arab States, 2015, p. 7, [http://www.ilo.org/beirut/publications/WCMS\\_419016/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/beirut/publications/WCMS_419016/lang--en/index.htm), (accessed 1 January 2016).

<sup>25</sup> M. Abdelali-Martini, ‘Empowering women in the rural labor force with a focus on agricultural employment in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)’, paper prepared for the 2011 Expert Group Meeting Enabling rural women’s economic empowerment: institutions, opportunities, and participation, UN Women, [un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw56/egm/Martini-EP-9-EGM-RW-Sep-2011.pdf](http://un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw56/egm/Martini-EP-9-EGM-RW-Sep-2011.pdf), (accessed 12 August 2016).

<sup>26</sup> World Bank, Gender data portal, op. cit.

<sup>27</sup> National Democratic Institution, ‘The April 2003 parliamentary elections in the Republic of Yemen’, 2003, p. 30, <https://www.ndi.org/files/Parl%20Elections%20Yemen%20part1.pdf>, (accessed 5 January 2016).

<sup>28</sup> Freedom House, ‘Women’s rights in the Middle East and North Africa – Yemen’, 14 October 2005, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/47387b712f.html>, (accessed 5 October 2016).

<sup>29</sup> When a constitutional amendment was decreed in 1980 allowing women the right as voters and candidates in elections, although at the time, the only elections were that of the cooperative councils, and the first parliamentary elections took place in 1993, while the first presidential elections took place in 1999.

represent more than half of the voters in all elections.<sup>30</sup> “In essence, when it comes to the democratic processes, Yemen was the first country in the Arabian Peninsula to enfranchise women.”<sup>31</sup> Inspired by the seemingly democratic environment during the 2006 elections, three women ran for presidency, creating an unprecedented event not only in Yemen but in the entire region’s history. Furthermore, the 2011-uprising boosted women’s involvement in politics even further, as many women took on leading roles in protests and in political activities, such as Tawakul Karman, who is the first Arab woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize Award.<sup>32</sup> In fact, the visible political and public participation of Yemeni women in the 2011-uprising represented an important political turning point for Yemeni women.<sup>33</sup> It is said that Yemen’s uprising “created a new space for women’s empowerment, networks, courage and voices.”<sup>34</sup> This led to women’s most critical political development; as they composed one third<sup>35</sup> of the National Dialogue Conference’s (NDC) membership. The NDC was a ten-month political transition forum, headed directly by President Hadi, following the 2011 protests and resignation of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh. The National Dialogue Conference aimed at rewriting the national constitution and determining the specificities of Yemen’s transitional political process. Indeed, year 2014 marked another unprecedented political milestone for Yemeni women,<sup>36</sup> which was the inclusion of women legislators in drafting the country’s constitution. This draft constitution was based on the NDC outcomes and pending a national referendum of endorsement.<sup>37</sup>

In addition to that, the number of Yemeni women in decision-making positions is relatively high. Effectively, in the last two decades the number of women holding high ranking positions in the Republic of Yemen has increased considerably. For example, since 2003, Yemen has always had at least two female ministers in every cabinet. In

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<sup>30</sup> EU Election Observation Mission, ‘Final report: Presidential and local council elections, Yemen’, 2006, [http://www.eods.eu/library/FR%20YEMEN%202006\\_en.pdf](http://www.eods.eu/library/FR%20YEMEN%202006_en.pdf), (accessed 5 January 2016).

<sup>31</sup> National Democratic Institution, ‘The April 2003 parliamentary elections in the Republic of Yemen’, 2003, p. 30, <https://www.ndi.org/files/Parl%20Elections%20Yemen%20part1.pdf>, (accessed 5 January 2016).

<sup>32</sup> BBC-Middle East, ‘Profile: Nobel peace laureate Tawakul Karman’, *BBC*, 7 October 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-15216473>, (accessed 5 January 2016).

<sup>33</sup> S. Khamis, ‘The Arab ‘feminist’ spring?’, *Feminist Studies*, vol. 37, no. 3, 2011, pp. 692–695.

<sup>34</sup> K. Fattah, ‘Yemen: A social Intifada in a Republic of Sheikhs’, *Middle East Policy*, 18(3), p. 81.

<sup>35</sup> E. Gaston, *Process lessons learned in Yemen’s National Dialogue*. United States Institute for Peace, 2014.

<sup>36</sup> Four women were included in the 17 member committee responsible for drafting the new draft constitution based on the National Dialogue Conference’s outcomes for political transition.

<sup>37</sup> The 2014 Coup d’état put halted the transitional processes including the referendum.

fact, for the first time in the country's history, and the proportion of women in ministerial positions reached a high of 11.4% in 2015, when four women were appointed as ministers.<sup>38</sup>

By 2017, women represented 5.7% of the country's top legislators, senior officials, and managers.<sup>39</sup> While this percentage may seem small in comparison to western societies, where the equivalent percentage for the same year reached up to 43.4% in the USA and 34.3% in the UK,<sup>40</sup> it is a considerable percentage in the Yemeni context. As mentioned above, Yemen is a poor country with conservative patriarchal communities in which women's careers are hindered by social norms and structural barriers.

Furthermore, the Yemeni state has continuously created women-related national bodies and instruments since 1996.<sup>41</sup> It has also appointed women to be in charge of these institutions and tasked them with promoting and improving the overall situation of Yemeni women especially in health, education, and the economy. Examples include the Women National Committee, a government body created in 1996 to design national strategies for women's development; the Higher Council for Motherhood and Childhood established in 1999; the creation of women's departments in all ministries and government institutions in 1999; and the introduction of women's departments in the local governing bodies around the country in 2001. As per the mandate of these departments and institutions, women in these leadership positions played the role of gate keepers and acted as intermediaries between the larger female population and Yemeni state institutions. They were responsible for handling complaints and providing services to Yemeni women and representing them as a social group in the respective institution. In addition to creating organisations concerned with women's rights and affairs, the Yemeni government appointed women as deputy ministers or at least director generals in the health, education, and trade ministries - among other ministries - and tasked them with the responsibility of foreseeing the advancement of women in

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<sup>38</sup> In the 2014 cabinet there were four women ministers in a total of 35 ministers.

<sup>39</sup> World Economic Forum, 'The Global Gender Gap Report 2017: Yemen', 2017, <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2017/dataexplorer/#economy=YEM>, (accessed 5 January 2016).

<sup>40</sup> Ibid

<sup>41</sup> The state represents the a) people: officials at the highest levels, this means the president, the cabinet, and political party leaders in positions of authority; and the b) political systems and culture, which is encapsulates institutions, laws and regulations, as well as ways of work.

those fields since the year 2000 onwards. Consequently, several policies aiming at women's empowerment and gender equality on the national level were issued. Chapter IV presents an overview of such policies their consequences on the situation of Yemeni women.

Moreover, the past 15 years saw a surge of women appointments in other important state institutions such as the Supreme Council for Elections and Referendum, the Supreme Court, The Supreme National Authority for Combating Corruption, Yemen's delegation to the United Nations, Yemen's national teams reporting to the United Nations General Assembly on development processes, and many diplomatic missions abroad.

Considering the above, it is puzzling how while there were several Yemeni women in prominent political positions, and despite the existence of women's empowerment institutions and policies – also led by women in senior positions – the country maintained a poor record regarding women's health, education, and economic participation. This presents us with an interesting conundrum, which is answered by the research question in this thesis; Why have women's empowerment policies implemented between 2006 and 2014 in health, education, and the economy, failed in Yemen?

The failure of women's empowerment policies in Yemen, especially in light of the advanced public and political positions Yemeni women enjoy, has not been adequately addressed in the scholarly literature on gender politics in Yemen. The lack of agency Yemeni women have over their bodies and personal choices in the domestic sphere, despite women's empowerment efforts and institutions, is yet to be explained. Aiming to fill this gap in the literature, this research seeks to answer the question of why women's empowerment policies failed in the three mentioned areas within the context of the larger gender policy in the country. This assumption of failure is substantiated in chapter IV drawing on a published policy evaluation model.<sup>42</sup> More specifically, I

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<sup>42</sup> I draw on Newman's 2014 four-dimensional evaluation model using sub-sets of this framework to demonstrate the failure of these policies. Two of these dimensions are straightforward as they relate to policy goal achievement and the process of translation of goals to action plans. These are evaluated in Chapter IV. However, the other two dimensions of distribution of impact and political gains relate to political aspects of policies, and the evaluation of which is subjective and done by the women leaders' themselves who were involved in these policies, the findings of which are detailed in Chapter V.

chose policies relating to maternal health, girls' education, and women's economic participation in the labour market as key empowerment areas. The research question was answered by collecting empirical data from Yemeni women in positions of power, who are the key drivers of the women's empowerment agenda in Yemen. Attention was paid to their personal experiences and perceptions of the dynamics surrounding gender equality and women's empowerment efforts in the country. Through surveys and interviews, this research explored the gender-related political context of the country, highlighting elements in the political, socio-cultural, and economic domains that impacted the gender-power relations at policy and decision-making levels.

## 2. Research goals and hypotheses

In light of the patterns described above, the main research goal of this thesis is to investigate why women's empowerment policies in Yemen between 2006 and 2014 failed to improve the rights and opportunities of women in health, education, and the economy.<sup>43</sup>

Combining the fields of political theory and feminism, this research centres on the concept of *empowerment*, which is found in different disciplines such as “community psychology, management, political theory, social work, education, women studies, and sociology.”<sup>44</sup> In analysing state-driven empowerment efforts of a specific social group, in this case Yemeni women, the core theoretical concepts used are that of ‘power’ and ‘empowerment’. In the literature, power paradigms are predominantly presented as neutral without any explanation of how power is dispersed socially whether according to gender, class, or race.<sup>45</sup> This creates a serious flaw in the design of empowerment

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<sup>43</sup> The time scope for this research for the years between 2006 and 2014, has been chosen because there has not been much qualitative research on Yemeni women in the last two decades focusing on the women leaders' experiences, and also because during this time frame many development projects aiming at women's empowerment have been implemented in Yemen. The research stops in 2014 since the country has been going through a civil war since then.

<sup>44</sup> M. H. Hur, Empowerment in terms of theoretical perspectives: Exploring a typology of the process and components across disciplines, *Journal of community psychology*, 34(5), 523-540, 2006, p. 524.

<sup>45</sup> J. Rowlands, 'A word of the times, but what does it mean? Empowerment in the discourse and practice of development', in H. Afshar (ed.), *Women and Empowerment. Illustrations from the Third World*, Women's Studies at York, Springer, 2016, p. 13 (Original work published 1998).

policies targeting women, especially those designed for conservative and male-dominated societies such as the Yemeni one. Using the method of policy mapping, a review of the Yemeni gender and women's empowerment policies carried out between 2006 and 2014, provided a detailed picture of what these policies were. The empirical data explains why, despite women occupying important positions in the government, they failed to lead to their outlined objectives in the fields of health, education and the economy.

To account for this failure of women's empowerment policies in Yemen, this research investigates the relevance of three potential explanations. These are: women leaders' lack of capacity to implement the women's empowerment policies, political and economic instability on the national level, and the lack of political support to gender equality from authorities at the highest decision-making levels.

The first factor regarding capacity includes the women leaders' professional qualifications, management and communication skills, and leadership abilities as high-level government officials and drivers of the women's empowerment agenda in the country. This factor is important considering that these women were instrumental in implementing the women's empowerment policies in their respective fields. The main focus in these three areas are policies directly relating to reproductive and maternal health in the health sector, girls' education in the education sector, and women's economic participation in the economic sector.

The second factor that could have potentially hindered the improvement of gender equality in Yemen is the country's notorious instability, both politically and financially. Political events such as the presidential and local council elections in 2006, the parliamentary crisis of 2008, the 2011 uprising, and the political transition period between 2012 and 2014 impacted national development projects in general as they caused power shifts in the political arena and were accompanied by economic instabilities. Consequently, these events had a direct effect on women development processes in the country. Thus, this research focuses on whether Yemen's economic and political instabilities had a destabilising influence on women's empowerment.

The third factor concerns the political and institutional culture in which these women leaders operated. It specifically addresses whether the political culture at the high-level

circles supported women leaders, and their missions to empower women. This culture is examined through both the administrative and structural endorsement within the government institutions of the women leaders, as well as the general championing of the women's empowerment agenda nationally.

The three factors hypothesised above are derived from the existing research on Yemeni women as well as from the women's empowerment literature in general. As such, it is important to note that empowerment from a gender perspective differs from a general approach to empowerment. Feminist literature assumes that women are oppressed by men not only individually through men's exercise of their natural characteristics such as physical strength, but collectively through broader patriarchal practices, which endorse men's domination over women.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, in order for women to be empowered, the social gender inequalities have to be addressed first.<sup>47</sup>

Women's empowerment researchers have proposed a number of comparable conceptual models such as the Resources-Agency-Achievements model by Kabeer<sup>48</sup> and the Opportunity-Structures model by Alsop and Heinsohn.<sup>49</sup> Malhotra and Schuler's<sup>50</sup> provide a general review of several inter-related frameworks for defining empowerment. The various empowerment models converge in describing empowerment as a process resulting from changes in external environments that foster a woman's internal autonomy (agency), and hence, enable her to make more choices that lead to positive outcomes.<sup>51</sup> Agency factors are related to a woman's own strengths and capacities that increase her power, while structural factors relate to her living and work environments, including formal and informal structures such as laws, social values, political cultures, and national crises.

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<sup>46</sup> N. D. Lincoln, et. al., 'The meaning of empowerment: The interdisciplinary etymology of a new management concept', *International journal of management reviews*, 4(3), 2002.

<sup>47</sup> C. O. N. Moser, *Gender planning and development: theory, practice and training*, London and New York, Routledge 1993. <http://www.polsci.chula.ac.th/pitch/urbansea12/moser1993.pdf>, (accessed 8 January 2016).

<sup>48</sup> Kabeer, N., 'Resources, agency, achievements: reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment', *Development and Change*, 30(3), 1999.

<sup>49</sup> R. Alsop & N. Heinsohn, *Measuring empowerment in practice: Structuring analysis and framing indicators*. The World Bank, 2005.

<sup>50</sup> A. Malhotra, S. Schuler & C. Boender, 'Measuring women's empowerment as a variable in international development', in D. Rayan (ed.) *Measuring empowerment: Cross-disciplinary perspectives*, World Bank 2005.

<sup>51</sup> R. A. Richardson, 'Measuring women's empowerment: A critical review of current practices and recommendations for researchers', *Social Indicators Research*, 137(2), 2018, pp. 539-557.

Consequently, the literature on women's agency calls for an increase of women's skills and qualifications through education,<sup>52</sup> confidence-building,<sup>53</sup> economic independence,<sup>54</sup> physical and emotional wellbeing,<sup>55</sup> political participation,<sup>56</sup> and activism, among other factors. Feminist literature also proposes implementation of a number of structural or opportunity-based determinants in order to create a more favourable environment that facilitates women's empowerment. As these examples indicate, resources and structures relied on in women's empowerment include both material and human or social resources,<sup>57</sup> as well as institutional environments.<sup>58</sup>

In this research, the theoretical framework of women's empowerment has been used to define empowerment and how it is achieved. This was necessary to evaluate the success of empowerment policies. Consequently, analysis of the failure of these policies required identification of which empowerment agency and structure elements had the most explanatory power to account for this failure. As mentioned earlier, the three elements chosen for analysis were 1) capacity - as an element of individual agency, 2) instability as a structural element, and 3) the culture of political support – also as a structural element - as it encapsulates many of the institutional environment aspects.

### **3. Empowerment as a concept**

The concepts of power and empowerment are fundamental to this research as it aims to explore the reasons behind the failure of women's empowerment policies in health, education, and the economy. Empowerment is a “highly illusive theoretical concept” that has been used across many disciplines.<sup>59</sup> Empowerment is seen here as the process

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<sup>52</sup> E.g. S. Shetty & V. B. Hans, 'Role of education in women's empowerment and development', *Issues and Impact*, 2015, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2665898>, (accessed 8 January 2017).

<sup>53</sup> E.g. N. Kabeer, 'Gender equality, economic growth, and women's agency: the “endless variety” and “monotonous similarity” of patriarchal constraints', *Feminist Economics*, 22(1), 2016.

<sup>54</sup> E.g. R. Amin, S. Becker & A. Bayes, 'NGO-promoted microcredit programs and women's empowerment in rural Bangladesh: quantitative and qualitative evidence', *The Journal of Developing Areas*, (Winter 1998).

<sup>55</sup> E.g. L. Moonzwe Davis et. al, 'Women's empowerment and its differential impact on health in low-income communities in Mumbai, India', *Global public health*, 9(5), 2014.

<sup>56</sup> V. M. Moghadam (Ed.), *From patriarchy to empowerment: women's participation, movements, and rights in the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia*, Syracuse University Press, 2007.

<sup>57</sup> Kabeer, op. cit., 1999.

<sup>58</sup> Malhotra & Schuler, op. cit.

<sup>59</sup> Lincoln, op. cit., p. 272.

of acquiring greater power to achieve equality.<sup>60</sup> In the case of women's empowerment, the inequality between men and women is a key concept in the feminism literature. In the context of this research, women's empowerment is understood as an approach or a process to achieving gender equality. For women to be empowered they have to develop their relative power vis-à-vis men.<sup>61</sup> Power itself has been theorised to be multidimensional, including not only 'power over', but also the 'power to', the 'power with', and the 'power within'.<sup>62</sup>

In the early 1990s, women's empowerment was theorised to exist at two levels, intellectual and experiential.<sup>63</sup> While the first level relates to a woman's own knowledge, the second describes her ability to control what happens to her. In more recent literature, these two levels were understood through 1) the concept of autonomy or agency, and 2) through a woman's agency-dependent outputs or achievements, withstanding the structures that surrounds her. Agency represents the personal authority a woman has to have in order to make choices that positively reflect on her reality, whereas structures indicate the formal and informal institutions and practices around these women, which either empower or disempower them. Empowerment was also defined as the "process of awareness and capacity building, which increased the participation and decision-making power of citizens and may potentially lead to transformative action which will change opportunity structures in an inclusive and equalising direction."<sup>64</sup>

When it comes to women's empowerment, a number of definitions have been proposed (Batliwala 1994<sup>65</sup>, Kabeer 1999<sup>66</sup>, Alsop and Heinsohn 2005<sup>67</sup>, and Mosedale 2005<sup>68</sup>).

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<sup>60</sup> N. Page & C. E. Czuba, 'Empowerment: What is it?' *Journal of Extension*, 37(5), 1999.

<sup>61</sup> C. M. Hall, *Women and empowerment: Strategies for increasing autonomy*, Routledge, 2013.

<sup>62</sup> J. L. Parpart, S. M. Rai & K. Staudt, *Rethinking empowerment: Gender and development in a global/local world*. New York, Routledge, 2003. And Rowlands, op. cit.

<sup>63</sup> J. Holland et. al, *Pressure, resistance, empowerment: Young women and the negotiation of safer sex*, London, The Tufnell Press, 1991.

<sup>64</sup> J. Andersen & B. Siim (Eds.), *The politics of inclusion and empowerment: Gender, class and citizenship*, Springer, 2004, p. 2

<sup>65</sup> S. Batliwala, 'The meaning of women's empowerment: new concepts from action', in G. Sen, A. Germain, & L. C. Chen (Eds.), *Population policies reconsidered: health, empowerment, and rights*, Boston, Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies, 1994.

<sup>66</sup> Kabeer, op. cit., 1999.

<sup>67</sup> Alsop & Heinsohn, op. cit.

<sup>68</sup> S. Mosedale, 'Assessing women's empowerment: towards a conceptual framework', *Journal of International Development*, 17(2), 2005.

They share the same fundamental concept of achieving outcomes through improving a woman's agency and allowing her access to resources or supportive structures. The concept of women's empowerment used in this research builds on Kabeer's<sup>69</sup> understanding of empowerment as the ability to make choices and achieve results that improve one's overall condition. In this thesis, women's empowerment is defined as *"the sustained ability to have and exercise choices, yielding desired outcomes, regarding important decisions related to health, education, economic opportunity, in a way that positively addresses the gender power imbalances in her life."* This means that for a woman to be considered as empowered, not only does she have to have options in terms of her health (both physically and emotionally), education, and economic opportunity but she must also have the will and the ability to continuously and sustainably use those options and achieve desired outcomes that would eventually make her life better.

This definition was adopted because it nicely falls in line with the global indicators that measure women's empowerment, such as the Gender Gap Index (GGI), which measures women's empowerment compared to men in health, education, economy and politics. The GGI, among other established indicators, consistently points out that the population of Yemeni women is disempowered or not empowered enough,<sup>70</sup> indicating that so-called efforts to empower Yemeni women since 2006 have been inadequate. There have been some wins in terms of Yemeni women's political presence as described earlier. However, since the GGI is a mathematical aggregate, the dire situation for Yemeni women in terms of their health, economic and educational situations invariably pull down the calculated average. Given the low GGI score, it is reasonable to expect the Yemeni government to adopt a new approach to improve Yemeni women's health, education and economy in a sustainable manner.

While the conceptualisation of empowerment in this research is done from a gender perspective, it is equally important to understand women's empowerment within the

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<sup>69</sup> Kabeer, op. cit, 1999.

<sup>70</sup> Since Yemen has always come last in the GGI rankings as the country with highest gap between men and women in their access to health, education, economy and political rights.

context of their personal and family sphere as well as their larger social and public environment.

#### 4. Research design

This study employed a mixed-methods approach as it combined descriptive-statistical analyses of surveys with qualitative in-depth elite interviews. Mixed-methods research had become popular in social sciences as it provided an alternative to the purists' qualitative vs. quantitative debate, drawing on the strengths of both paradigms.<sup>71</sup> In fact, since this research concerned policy and the practical implementation of women's empowerment theories, this type of methodology was particularly suited. Mixed methods offered "great promise for practicing researchers who would like to see methodologists describe and develop techniques that are closer to what researchers actually use in practice."<sup>72</sup> The use of both surveys and interviews helped triangulate this project's findings and increased their validity.<sup>73</sup> Triangulation was defined as "the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon."<sup>74</sup> It captured "a more complete, holistic, and contextual portrayal of the unit(s) under study."<sup>75</sup>

Policy mapping was the method used to review women the Yemeni state's gender policy and empowerment efforts relevant to maternal health, girls' education, and women's economic participation. It was a research mechanism apt for examining primary materials such as government reports, statements, and documents.<sup>76</sup> As a method, policy mapping was also concerned with framework analysis, which involved

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<sup>71</sup> A. J. Onwuegbuzie & N. L. Leech, 'On becoming a pragmatic researcher: The importance of combining quantitative and qualitative research methodologies', *International journal of social research methodology*, 8(5), 2005.

<sup>72</sup> R. B. Johnson & A. J. Onwuegbuzie, 'Mixed methods research: A research paradigm whose time has come,' *Educational researcher*, 33(7), 2004, p. 15.

<sup>73</sup> D. T. Campbell & D. W. Fiske, 'Convergent and discriminant validation by the multitrait- multimethod matrix', *Psychological Bulletin*, 56, 1956.

<sup>74</sup> N. K. Denzin, *The research act*, 2d ed. New York, McGraw-Hill, 1978, p. 291.

<sup>75</sup> T. D. Jick, 'Mixing qualitative and quantitative methods: Triangulation in action', *Administrative science quarterly*, 24(4), 1979, p. 603.

<sup>76</sup> Anderson, S. et. al., 'Asking the right questions: scoping studies in the commissioning of research on the organisation and delivery of health services', *Health research policy and systems*, 6(1), 2008, p. 7.

filtering and thematically categorising document contents according to predefined themes.<sup>77</sup>

This research also utilised surveys, which are used by social scientists to investigate and test theories about people's opinions and their activities.<sup>78</sup> Surveys as a data collection tool could be analysed quantitatively or qualitatively. In this research I used surveys to analyse, through descriptive statistics, a much larger *N* than the interviews so as to bring out general trends in the researched sample. I used surveys containing a total of 41 questions centred around three main explanatory factors: capacity, instability, and the culture of political support. Within each section, the same ideas were phrased differently in order to identify contradictions. All survey questions were closed-ended, a choice that was deliberately made to allow easy comparison between answers. "Since all responses fall into a fixed number of predetermined categories. These advantages aid in the quick statistical analysis of data."<sup>79</sup> Additionally, respondents were more likely to answer sensitive or personal questions if they were designed as closed-ended.<sup>80</sup> This was particularly helpful in researching women's attitudes towards the very policies they were involved in implementing, if not responsible for. However, that being the case, in each section of the survey there was the option for respondents to provide alternatives to the presented choices by selecting the option: "others" as well as adding their comments in the space provided in each section. This option was included to prevent respondents from having to choose an answer that did not represent them – a well-known and often criticised limitation of closed-ended survey designs.

The target group of the survey were Yemeni women leaders working at the middle and higher levels of various government institutions and influential organisations. In total, 65 women leaders responded to the survey using the survey's multiple choice, ranking, and closed-ended questions. Many took the opportunity to add their comments or provide an alternative to the options presented in the questionnaires. The survey analysis provided an initial framework for the findings by ranking the three

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<sup>77</sup> M. Dixon-Woods, 'Using framework-based synthesis for conducting reviews of qualitative studies', *BMC medicine*, 9(1), 2011, p. 39.

<sup>78</sup> Johnson & Reynolds, op. cit., p. 276.

<sup>79</sup> Johnson & Reynolds, op. cit., p. 281.

<sup>80</sup> Johnson & Reynolds, op. cit., p. 276.

hypothesised factors to policy failure in terms of their explanatory powers, as well as dimensions of how these factors influenced policy success. The survey results were examined using simple statistical analysis such as percentages, preference trends, and rankings.

Consequently, in-depth elite interviews served as a useful explanatory tool that enriched the conclusions derived from surveys and provided context. Twelve in-depth elite<sup>81</sup> interviews were conducted, with three leading women from each of the four main researched fields: health, education, the economy, and politics. Elite interviewing stressed the exploratory nature of research and the fact that an interviewee's own interpretations were central, surpassing the researcher's own assumption and interpretations.<sup>82</sup>

The women leaders were chosen as the targeted population of this research for two main reasons: a) their direct professional roles as champions of the women's empowerment agenda and their respective positions of authority, and b) their insights as women who are supposedly empowered and yet in touch with the larger less-empowered female population. Clearly, as an elite group in positions of authority, these women leaders<sup>83</sup> influenced gender policies in Yemen, which made them an ideal sample in this research endeavour.

The survey and interview questions were developed on the basis of a thorough desktop literature review and online research, including relevant published and unpublished materials in both Arabic and English. The author's own expertise and experience, as a former Minister of Information and a political activist in the field of women's empowerment further benefitted the preparation of the research design and the understanding of findings.

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<sup>81</sup> L. A. Dexter, *Elite and specialized interviewing*, ECPR Press, First published in 1970 by Northwestern University, 2006.

<sup>82</sup> Johnson & Reynolds, op. cit., p. 271.

<sup>83</sup> For elite interviews to work, the interviewees have to trust the researcher. My position and background in the Yemeni society has helped in this regard, especially since I myself was an independent journalist for many years in Yemen.

## 5. Importance and contribution to scholarly research

This project aimed to make an important contribution to the vast academic literature on feminism and politics by shedding light on an overlooked topic in an overlooked country. Existing research on women's empowerment in Yemen focused on specific fields of empowerment efforts, such as the relation between women's empowerment and community health,<sup>84</sup> women's use of cyber space and the social media<sup>85</sup> in their struggle for political empowerment, women's role in the Arab Spring,<sup>86</sup> and Yemeni women's political activism and cultural segmentation.<sup>87</sup> In addition, research examined microfinance as an empowerment tool for Yemeni women entrepreneurs<sup>88</sup> and the role of gender equality and income generation to elevating poverty.<sup>89</sup> A relevant study<sup>90</sup> addressed the impact that international development organisations had on women's empowerment in several countries including Yemen. The study described the dilemma of such organisations that want to achieve and visibly demonstrate their impact yet try to avoid being involved in the local power relations. Another relevant piece of research was a gender assessment<sup>91</sup> conducted in late 2013, which explored women's access to education, health, political participation, economic empowerment, water, sanitation and hygiene, and identified barriers to development opportunities.

The above were the highlights of existing scholarly literature on Yemeni women, which demonstrates the gap in women's empowerment in Yemen studies. Additionally, much of the existing research<sup>92</sup> relied on quantitative statistical methods rather than in-depth qualitative research. Chapter II provides a more detailed review of such literature. My

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<sup>84</sup> P. Varkey, P. S. Kureshi & T. Lesnick, 'Empowerment of women and its association with the health of the community', *Journal of Women's Health*, 19(1), 2010.

<sup>85</sup> M. Odine, 'Role of social media in the empowerment of Arab women', *Global Media Journal*, 12(22), 2013.

<sup>86</sup> C. C. Radsch & S. Khamis, 'In their own voice: Technologically mediated empowerment and transformation among young Arab women', *Feminist Media Studies*, 13(5), 2013.

<sup>87</sup> S. P. Yadav, 'Segmented publics and Islamist women in Yemen: rethinking space and activism', *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 6(2), 1-30, 2010.

<sup>88</sup> S. Z. Ahmad, 'Microfinance for women micro and small-scale entrepreneurs in Yemen: achievements and challenges', *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business*, 16(1), 2012.

<sup>89</sup> S. S. Al-Shami, et. al, 'Conceptual framework: The role of microfinance on the wellbeing of poor people cases studies from Malaysia and Yemen', *Asian Social Science*, 10(1), 2014.

<sup>90</sup> S. Mosedale, 'Women's empowerment as a development goal: taking a feminist standpoint', *Journal of International Development*, 26(8), 2014.

<sup>91</sup> H. Fortune-Greeley, et. al., *Yemen Gender Assessment*, USAID, 2014.

<sup>92</sup> See for example N. Krishnan, *The status of Yemeni women: From aspiration to opportunity*, World Bank, Washington, DC, 2014. And F. Torabi & M. J. Abbasi-Shavazi, 'Women's Human Capital and Economic Growth in the Middle East and North Africa', *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 16(3), 2015. And Fortune-Greeley, op. cit.

study contributes to filling this serious academic gap, firstly by adopting a largely qualitative mixed-methods approach. While both surveys and interviews were applied, it was the qualitative elite interviews that significantly adds to the literature on Yemeni women's empowerment. Despite its important implications on policy and development projects, few researchers attempted to understand the impact of existing women's empowerment policies in Yemen, and why despite various efforts, the situation of Yemeni women continues to be one of the worst in the world.

Secondly, this study covered the period between 2006 and 2014, thereby making an important empirical contribution to the literature on Yemeni gender politics, which mostly focused on women in former South Yemen,<sup>93</sup> and to a lesser extent the former North Yemen.<sup>94</sup> Some further research<sup>95</sup> compared women's rights before and after unification in 1990, and on Yemeni women living abroad.<sup>96</sup> However, academic research on more contemporary women's empowerment efforts and gender politics is lacking, especially from a local insider's standpoint. Moreover, the time frame of this study will be helpful to evaluate the impact of around two decades<sup>97</sup> of international funding aimed at women's empowerment. It is worth mentioning that the coup d'état in September 2014 and the subsequent outbreak of armed conflict limited the time frame of this project to 2014. In the context of Yemen's ongoing war, access was difficult, collected data would have been unreliable, and women's situation could not be generalised.

Thirdly, this research presented the candid voices of Yemeni women leaders themselves. This unique focus on women leaders sets this project apart from previous studies which considered Yemen's women population as a homogenous social group. As mentioned before, the focus on women leaders stemmed from the fact that they were

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<sup>93</sup> M. Molyneux, A. Yafai & A. Mohsen, 'Women and revolution in the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen', *Feminist Review*, (1), 1979. And Kruks, S., Rapp, R., & Young, M. B., *Promissory notes*, NYU Press, 1989.

<sup>94</sup> C. Myntti, *Women and development in Yemen Arab Republic*, Eschborn, German Agency for Technical Cooperation, 1979, p. 169.

<sup>95</sup> S. Carapico, 'Women and public participation in Yemen', *Middle East Report*, 21(6), 1991. And M. Badran, 'Unifying women: Feminist pasts and presents in Yemen', *Gender & History*, 10(3), 1998. And J. Peters & A. Wolper, 'Women's rights, human rights: International feminist perspectives', *Psychology Press*, 1995. M. Molyneux, 'Women's rights and political contingency: the case of Yemen, 1990-1994', *The Middle East Journal*, 1995.

<sup>96</sup> B. Aswad, 'Yemeni and Lebanese Muslim immigrant women in Southeast Dearborn, Michigan', *Muslim Families in North America*, 1991.

<sup>97</sup> Since the Millennium Development Goals in 2000 and its 2005 country needs assessment.

the ones tasked with improving the situation of women in their respective fields, including health, education, and the economy. As such, this research addressed Yemeni feminists' pioneers who in their various capacities worked on improving the general conditions of Yemeni women and not solely on politically ambitious women who contributed to the national struggle for democracy.<sup>98</sup>

Fourthly, this research provided an important contribution to the literature by being the first to address the conflicting public-private reality of Yemeni women through a mixed-methods research approach. It placed the experiences of women as policy makers, activists, advocates at the centre of the analysis. It is the first academic research that analysed the socio-political struggle behind Yemen's gender policies, told by women in positions of authority. This research gave women leaders a voice to explain why women's empowerment policies failed to achieve sustainable impact and at the same time, it provided insight to their personal and professional experiences as pioneers in Yemen's feminist movement in a patriarchal society.

Consequently, this research focused on gender equality from the inside-out rather than outside-in. In an inductive manner, it presented local understandings and candid explanations by leading women themselves, rather than accepting text-book theories and global approaches to women's empowerment.

Finally, this research added a unique insider's perspective<sup>99</sup> to existing scholarship on Yemeni women and politics, which had so far been mostly done by outsiders looking in. As mentioned earlier, I as the author, was Yemen's Minister of Information between 2014 and 2015, and before that a member of all the high-level committees of the political transitional committees between 2012 and 2014. Before that I was leading the country's first and only independent English newspaper, *The Yemen Times*, since 2005. In sum, my personal insight as a Yemeni women leader, added value to this research,

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<sup>98</sup> There are a few journal articles that cover Yemeni women in the Arab Spring or the political process of Yemen such as S. Yadav, S. & J. A. Clark, 'Disappointments and new directions: Women, partisanship, and the regime in Yemen', *HAWWA: Journal of Women of the Middle East and the Islamic World*, 8 (1), 2010.

<sup>99</sup> Not only am I native to Yemen and have extensive knowledge of the researched area, I myself am considered one of the prominent women politicians in the country being the first woman to become Information Minister and before that leading a national influential media establishment. It is important to note that while this is clearly an advantage, caution is taken of potential biases and reflexive measures are taken throughout this research.

as it provided unique access to Yemeni female decision makers and relevant data, as much as it is presented upfront and treated reflexively throughout the research.

## **6. Key research findings**

While acknowledging the importance of stability and the implementers' capacity to the success of Yemeni women's empowerment policies, this research provided evidence that the third factor: the culture of political support, was the variable with the most explanatory power. The main finding of this research was that political support was, in fact, lacking and disingenuous to gender equality efforts in Yemen.

Furthermore, findings revealed sub-mechanisms through which each of the three factors influenced the success of women's empowerment policies. Capacity influenced the success of empowerment policies through: the women leaders' professional qualifications, their management/communication skills, and their leadership and bravery. Evaluation of the first two dimensions were concluded the women leaders to be highly adequate, as data showed that they were verily qualified and adequate in terms of the various skills. The third dimension concerned their ability to lead and their bravery to resist the patriarchal environments where they worked. Findings showed that this aspect of capacity differed among the women leaders and decreased substantially with the decrease in level of authority, and therefore, had relative negative impact on the success of empowerment policies.

In terms of instability, three sub-mechanisms were identified through which instability impacted the success of women's empowerment policies. These were: instability as a disruptive force of national policies, instability as a threat to women leaders, and instability as a creator of positive social opportunities. Findings revealed that instability was indeed a disruptive force of national policies but its impact on women's empowerment policies was higher than other policies. This was attributed to two reasons: first, women's empowerment was not a political priority and hence was first to be dropped from the national priorities' agenda; and second, women's empowerment was mostly funded by international organisations, which stopped their projects during instability. The second instability dimension referred to the direct threats faced by

women leaders in times of instability because of their visibility and nature of work. Women leaders explained that they found that working in a patriarchal society was riskier during times of instability, a fact that limited their efforts and success. In terms of the potential positive impact of instability as a disruptive force of social norms and opportunity creator, findings indicated that although there were success stories of women's economic empowerment among the female population, these were individual and unsustainable gains, and did not directly facilitate the success of women's empowerment policies.

Finally, findings produced four dimensions through which the culture of political support was identified to impact the success of women's empowerment policies. These were: the influence of patriarchal values on the institutional cultures, the nature of authoritarian regimes and its handling of gender equality, the relation between political decision making and redistribution of social gender power, and the relation between political decision making and the women's movement.

The first mechanism concerned the spill-over of the conservative traditional values from the social spheres to official institutions, an event which limited women leaders' power and value in the workplace. In terms of the nature of authoritarian regimes and gender equality, findings showed that political leaders of such regimes found themselves burdened by both the pressure from donors to empower women, and that of the traditional forces, which threaten to remove them from power if they do empower women. The third mechanism refers to the low-cost yet visible approach political decision makers took in order to appease both powers mentioned in the second dimension, and this was done by implementing women's empowerment policies such as appointing women in high level positions as well as approving women's empowerment projects, without actually giving women in positions of authority the power they deserve, or implementing projects that sustainably achieve gender equality. Findings of the final dimension explained that the lack of a strong women's movement contributed to the failure of women's empowerment policies due to their weakness and inability to support women leaders and/or hold the political leaders accountable for their promises to women.

The results of this research resonant with empowerment studies<sup>100</sup> in the larger feminist literature, which argued that women's empowerment cannot be achieved solely through political representation and quotas,<sup>101</sup> appointments in decision making positions, and implementation of projects that do not create a sustainable change in the social gender relations. This research challenges the notion that a woman in a public position of power is automatically empowered, demonstrating how cultural attitudes on gender in a country such as Yemen, dominate the institutions and undermine the authority of women leaders.

Yemen's gender policy, as dictated by the political elite, focused on isolating women's issues by creating women-related bodies/institutions, and appointing women in visible high-level positions, mainly as heads of these entities. Politicians thereby delegated the responsibility of improving the situation of women to the appointed women leaders without creating enabling structures to improve their chances of success. Simultaneously, most women's empowerment initiatives did not address the underlying causes of gender inequality in the society. The policy mapping conducted in chapter IV and the empirical findings in chapter V showed that some of the policies did achieve their goals, even if partially. However, when it came to impact and sustainability, the women's empowerment initiatives fell short. In fact, the political gains of implementing the various gender policies in Yemen were in favour of the politicians more than of the targeted population. The Republic of Yemen's approach regarding its gender policy aimed at the international community by portraying its political leaders as supportive of gender equality. They did this by seemingly supporting women in political positions, and implementing top-down development projects led by donor organisations.<sup>102</sup> Simultaneously, the political leaders submitted to traditional forces<sup>103</sup> such as tribes and Islamic groups who were essentially opposed to gender equality, which was visible in the way controversial gender issues were handled such as women's rights in the Personal Status Law. Additionally, the top-down approach to women's empowerment

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<sup>100</sup> See for example: Malhotra and Schuler, op. cit. p.71. And F. Afridi, 'Women's empowerment and the goal of parity between the sexes in schooling in India', *Population Studies*, 64:2, 2010.

<sup>101</sup> See for example High-Pippert, A.& Comer, J., 'Female empowerment: The influence of women representing women', *Journal of Women and Politics*, Vol 19 issue 4, 1998. In addition, Franceschet, S., et. al, *The impact of gender quotas*, Oxford University Press, 2012.

<sup>102</sup> Z. OXAAL, Z. &S. BADEN, *Gender and empowerment: definitions, approaches and implications for policy*. Bridge, Institute of Development Studies, 1997.

<sup>103</sup> Manea, Elham op. cit., p. 116.

emphasised the supply side of empowerment structures such as access to resources and availability of services. In the meantime, it ignored the demand side of empowerment, which relates to creating popular interest in utilising these services and achieving gender equality in the Yemeni society. As a consequence, women leaders found themselves in continuous battles not only with the conservative society they hoped to change, but also with their own institutions where their efforts were directly and indirectly undermined.

To conclude, when seen in isolation, the factors that supposedly contributed to women's empowerment tell little about women's reality; a highly educated woman might still find herself unable to take a job without the consent of her husband, or find herself in a position of undesirable social status as an old spinster. There is also the question of agency – her ability to make independent decisions about her life, which is determined by her personal status in the law, plus the practical application of the law. This, in turn, is determined by the 'political culture' – of those in positions of power and the incentives that shape their decisions (from money, influence, continuation in post, conservative ideals and patriarchy).

To this end, this research shows that the success of women's empowerment policies was hindered by the presumption that provision of services and resources to women will automatically empower them regardless of the social context in which the women are living. Moreover, there was a critical sustainability issue manifested by the lack of commitment on behalf of the decision makers themselves, who were supposed to champion these policies and see them through. Additionally, the Yemeni women's movement and civil society were too weak to put pressure on the decision makers and hold them accountable for their commitments. Hence, empowerment efforts were rendered useless according to various gender development indicators of Yemen since 2006.<sup>104</sup> A contextualised explanation was provided in this research through interviews and surveys with Yemeni women directly involved in implementing the women's empowerment policies. Finally, donor interventions were seen to represent a double-edged sword in that they were the only source of funding for the majority of women's

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<sup>104</sup> See for example, World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index, The Economist Intelligence Unit's Women's Economic Opportunities Index, the United Nations Development Programme's Gender Inequality Index, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Social Institutions and Gender Index.

empowerment efforts in Yemen, however, their objectives were short-term and unsustainable especially during the frequent times of instability.

This conclusion has important implications on gender policy and politics in Yemen and in other countries with similar contexts. It opens the door for investigating alternatives to the current Yemeni women's empowerment approach. Alternatives that are supported by empirical data derived from the local stakeholders themselves. Not only do the findings provide basis for a drastic shift in the women's empowerment strategies and donor interventions, they also present a foundation step for future research that would enhance our understanding of women's empowerment in developing nations, especially those with patriarchal societies. Future research could create comparative case studies between Yemen and another developing country in the Middle East or Africa or even Latin America. It could also be used to evaluate international organisations and donor countries' involvement in gender equality projects based on sustainable impact and not just statistical indices. Moreover, this research could help understand and promote better policies for women's empowerment in post-conflict Yemen since the country is currently going through an armed turmoil. This on its own right is a significant opportunity for policy makers and donors not to engage in repeating the previous trends in policy design, which, as this research argues, do not lead to successful empowerment of women.

## **7. Structure of the Thesis**

Following the introduction chapter, this thesis comprises five additional chapters as below:

### **Chapter II Literature Review**

This chapter situates the thesis in the literature. It starts with a brief review of the Yemeni women's movement across three phases to provide a background of the research sample and country in focus. Then the chapter addresses the concepts of power and women's empowerment, and how these concepts evolved in feminist discourse, creating a working definition for empowerment to be used in this research. Using

existing approaches to women's empowerment, a theoretical argument was developed as to why the efforts to empower women in Yemen have failed. From the works examined in this chapter, factors impacting women's empowerment were identified based on an existing agency-structures framework. Of these factors, a choice of three factors was made: the element of "capacity" as a factor relevant to agency, as well as the elements of "instability" and "the culture of political support" as structural factors contributing to the failure of empowerment policies. The mechanisms or dimensions through which each one of those factors influences policy success were demonstrated in detail. Aspects of the state and gender equality policies were discussed next, with a presentation of policy success measurement and aspects of authoritarian regimes' attitudes towards women's empowerment. The chapter concluded with a review of statistical research done on women's empowerment in Yemen.

### **Chapter III. Methodology**

The methodology chapter of this thesis explained the research philosophy and presented the adopted data collection and analyses methods to answer the research question. It provided the rationale behind the choice of methods: policy mapping, surveys, and elite interviews. Emphasis was made on the position of the researcher and reflexive measures adopted to acknowledge the self and its influence on the research course. As it stands, validating women's experiences through the voice of the researcher was not an undertaking to be taken lightly. Therefore, a note on reflexivity and research ethics was included in this chapter and it concluded with a description of the scope of this study.

### **Chapter IV. Gender policies in Yemen**

This chapter mapped the various state policies /strategies aimed at empowering women in the years between 2006 and 2014. It described the state's political attitude towards women and the efforts made by government institutions to achieve gender equality in the key areas of health, education, and the economy. It started by identifying the Republic of Yemen's gender policy through reviewing the constitution, i.e. legal and judicial systems involving gender. This includes a review of gender-related laws between 1990 and 2006 to give a historical background of women's rights in the Yemeni laws. This is followed by providing a picture of the aspects of the state's

attitude towards gender equality by analysing provisions of political spaces for women through quotas or appointments. A section on gender and the state situates the research question in the larger discourse of the feminist struggle the Arab state using women's political empowerment as window dressing. Next, the chapter then discusses the institutionalisation of women's empowerment through establishment of gender-related institutions. Following this, the chapter demonstrated women's empowerment strategies and projects in maternal and reproductive health, girls' education, and women's economic participation. It first described how policy success was measured and the how this measurement was drawn on to review and evaluate the aforementioned gender policies in Yemen.

### **Chapter V. Findings and analysis**

Building on the systematic mapping of women's empowerment policies in Yemen, this chapter used surveys and interviews to investigate the impact of the three factors identified in chapter II – capacity, instability, and the culture of political support – on the failure of women's empowerment policies in Yemen. The chapter started with an overall presentation of the research problem giving a contextual description of Yemeni women's situation. An introduction to the findings was presented next with emphasis on the contributions this thesis offered to the literature. The empirical findings from survey responses and elite interviews were detailed next, demonstrating the research sample, and then addressing each of the hypothesised factors and the sub-mechanisms or dimensions through which they influenced policy success.

### **Chapter VI. Conclusion**

This concluding chapter reiterated the research question and motivation behind the research puzzle. The concept of power and empowerment was described next and reframed in the context of the research findings, which are elaborated on in the following section, with a presentation of answers to the research question. The next section addressed contributions of this research and its importance to the scholarly literature. Finally, the chapter concluded with recommendations for future research and potential follow-up works to this thesis.

## Chapter II:

### Literature Review:

#### *Empowerment from a gender perspective*

*Existing feminist accounts of power tend to have a one-sided emphasis either on power as domination or on power as empowerment. This conceptual one-sidedness must be overcome if feminists are to develop an account complex enough to illuminate women's diverse experiences with power.<sup>105</sup>*

#### 1. Introduction to the chapter

In order to map and explain the failure of women's empowerment policies in Yemen, we need a clear understanding of the concept of empowerment. The aim of this chapter is to provide a theoretical context for the research in hand by reviewing the literature and state of the art on women's empowerment. A discussion of empowerment begins with an understanding of the notion of power in general. This is because empowerment in essence is a transformation in the power relations whereby the less powerful gains more power through an ongoing process.<sup>106</sup> Consequently, this thesis falls in the cross section between political theories of power on the one hand, and gender studies on the other. In fact, the issue of women's empowerment is in essence an interdisciplinary concept<sup>107</sup> present in psychology, community studies, management studies, in addition to political theory and feminism, to state a few.

In retrospect, a review of the political science literature on power and empowerment reveals that at first, the concept of power has been considered predominantly gender

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<sup>105</sup> A. Allen, 'Rethinking power', *Hypatia*, 13(1), 1998.

<sup>106</sup> Kabeer, op. cit.

<sup>107</sup> M. H. Hur, 'Empowerment in terms of theoretical perspectives: Exploring a typology of the process and components across disciplines', *Journal of community psychology*, 34(5), 2006, p. 524.

neutral.<sup>108</sup> Indeed, a gender-based manifestation of power was hugely overlooked by the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century political philosophers who considered politics as a gender-neutral domain. One visible exception was John Stuart Mill in his essay on the subjection of women<sup>109</sup> that addressed the issue of gender inequality. This was the case until the end of last century when social scientists such as Sapiro (1981),<sup>110</sup> Pateman (first published 1988),<sup>111</sup> and Lovenduski (1998)<sup>112</sup> contended that “the very construction of the discipline of politics needs to be recast if it is to consider the political experiences of women and allow a meaningful consideration of gender.”<sup>113</sup> Evidently, a shift in the integration of feminism in political studies took place from the argument of including women in the political debate to one where the political debate was reconstructed from a gender perspective.<sup>114</sup>

Therefore, the notions of power and empowerment as shown in this chapter were reviewed from a gender perspective and not as abstract concepts. The following section reviews the context of theoretical concepts used in this research while providing a general review of Yemeni women’s movement so as to situate this research’s population and hypotheses in context. This is followed by a review of the literature relating to power as a central idea of this research is presented, followed by a narration of how this concept was understood in feminism literature with respect to the social roles of men and women. The section following that, addresses the emerging concepts of gender and power as feminist movements evolved.

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<sup>108</sup> J. Rowlands, ‘A word of the times, but what does it mean? Empowerment in the discourse and practice of development’, in H. Afshar (ed.) *Women and empowerment. Illustrations from the Third World*. Women’s Studies at York, Springer, 2016, p. 13 (Original work published 1998)

<sup>109</sup> J. S. Mill, *The subjection of women*, London, Longmans, Green, Reader & Dyer Mill, 1869. Although credit was said to be given to his wife for influencing his thoughts based on her own article published years before Mill’s. See Mill, Mrs. John Stuart, ‘The enfranchisement of women’, London, Westminster & *Foreign Quarterly Review*, 1851, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/012298199>, (accessed 25 July 2017).

<sup>110</sup> V. Sapiro, ‘Research frontier essay: When are interests interesting? The problem of political representation of women’, *American Political Science Review*, 75(3), 1981.

<sup>111</sup> C. Pateman, *The sexual contract*. John Wiley & Sons, 2018, 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition, first published in 1988.

<sup>112</sup> J. Lovenduski, ‘Gendering research in political science’, *Annual Review of Political Science*, 1(1), 1998.

<sup>113</sup> Squires, J., *Gender in political theory*, John Wiley & Sons, 2013, p. 12.

<sup>114</sup> See for example: K. B. Jones, ‘Citizenship in a woman-friendly polity’, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 15(4), 1990. Also C. Pateman, ‘The patriarchal welfare state’, *The welfare state reader*, 1988. And, V. Sapiro, ‘Feminist Studies and Political Science- and Vice-Versa’, in A. Phillips (ed.), *Feminism and politics*, Oxford University Press, 1998.

The following section describes research on the term women's empowerment itself, introducing two philosophical paradigms on women's empowerment, leading to the adopted definition of empowerment in this thesis.

Existing literature on the state and gender is presented next, highlighting the issue of gender policies aiming at women's empowerment. These policies were considered within the larger context of gender equality in patriarchal societies focusing on the connection between women's empowerment and social power relations. Here, theories on policy evaluation are presented with focus on the evaluation model subscribed to in this thesis.

The empowerment framework of structures and agency is covered in the next section framing the theoretical background for the three elements researched in this thesis. Within this section, each of the three researched factors is presented through the examination of its dimensions or sub-mechanisms, through which they influenced policy success. Capacity was considered through three dimensions: capacity as professional qualifications, capacity as management/communication skills, and capacity as leadership skills and bravery in resisting patriarchy. Instability was also considered through three dimensions: instability as a disruptive force of national policies, instability as a threat to women leaders, and instability as a creator of positive opportunities. Thirdly, the culture of political support factor was considered through four dimensions: the influence of the patriarchal culture on institutions, authoritarian regimes and their political support for gender equality, empowerment policies and the redistribution of social gender power, and the relation between political decision making and women's movement as a form of resistance to patriarchy.

Finally, the last section in this chapter presents an outlook of the existing literature on Yemeni women's empowerment, demonstrating that the bulk of available work focused on statistical indicators through quantitative studies, or on partial elements of the issue of Yemeni women and empowerment without providing a comprehensive understanding of the complexity of gender politics in Yemen.

## 2. Background and context

The concept of power has been predominantly understood as the exercise of control by a person or a group over others, usually in the form of coercion.<sup>115</sup> There is also a covert form of “power-over”, which is not so blatant but it still is a form of control.<sup>116</sup> Therefore, in general terms, empowerment based on this concept of power directly means the acquiring of power-over, thus destabilising the status quo. However, as the feminism discourse progressed, a gender oriented<sup>117</sup> take on power came to be. Most feminist research viewed empowerment as a form of enabling women to become more powerful in terms of allowing them to take more control over resources and be given opportunities to participate in economic and political decision making.<sup>118</sup> Within this context the issue of quotas and representation took centre stage as feminists demanded such affirmative measures of women’s empowerment in order to achieve gender equality. Tools were developed to measure empowerment and the agency-structure framework<sup>119</sup> was particularly useful for my research on Yemeni women’s empowerment because it understood empowerment as a result of various factors relating to both the woman’s agency as her own capacity, and structural elements such as the surrounding environment, which could either empower or disempower her.

Specifically, agency elements focus on improving a woman’s own capacity to gain more power such as improving her education and skills, improving her mental and physical wellbeing, and her ability to make informed choices that aim at improving her situation.<sup>120</sup> On the other hand structural elements relate to the formal and informal rules and regulations of the institutions wherein the woman exists. These could be the

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<sup>115</sup> R. A. Dahl, *Who governs?: Democracy and power in an American city*, Yale University Press, 2005, first published in 1961. And P. Bachrach & M. S. Baratz, ‘Power and its two faces revisited: a reply to Geoffrey Debnam’, *The American Political Science Review*, 69(3), 1975. And P. Bachrach, ‘Elite consensus and democracy’, *The Journal of Politics*, 24(3), 1962.

<sup>116</sup> S. Lukes, *Power: a radical view*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, Palgrave, Macmillan, 2005, first published 1974. <http://voidnetwork.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Power-A-Radical-View-Steven-Lukes.pdf>, (accessed 25 July 2017). And G. Pheterson, ‘Alliances between women: overcoming internalized oppression and internalized domination’, *Signs*, 12(1), 1986.

<sup>117</sup> See for example, N. Hartsock, ‘Foucault on power: a theory for women?’, in L. J. Nicholson (ed.), *Feminism postmodernism*, New York, Routledge, 2013, first published in 1990. And Allen, op. cit.

<sup>118</sup> Rowlands, op. cit. p. 12.

<sup>119</sup> Alsop, R., & Heinsohn, N., *Measuring empowerment in practice: Structuring analysis and framing indicators*, World Bank Publications, 2005.

<sup>120</sup> N. Kabeer, ‘Resources, agency, achievements: Reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment’, *Development and Change*, Vol. 30 (3), 1999.

national laws, the organisational culture of her workplace, and even the social values of her family and neighbourhood. Within these structural elements comes the role of the state as a chaperone of citizens; the community and religious leaders; and especially the father figures in the patriarchal society of Yemen. The aforementioned are deliberate structural factors, however, conflict, instability, and economic crises are also considered elements of the structures surrounding women even if they are not usually directly controlled by the authority figures.

For the purpose of this research, three elements were hypothesised as contributing to the lack of empowerment or as described in the research question: failure of women's empowerment policies. The capacity of the women leading the empowerment process was analysed as an agency element, while instability and political support – or rather lack thereof – were analysed as structural factors contributing to the failure of women's empowerment policies in Yemen.

The theoretical question therefore is: what is empowerment? Specifically, when it comes to empowerment of women in poor male dominated cultures such as Yemen? Ample research on power and women's empowerment discussed determinants and factors such as education, economic independence, political participation, as means to achieving empowerment. There is evidence that these factors do indeed contribute to improving women's situations in various contexts including poor and male dominated societies such as India,<sup>121</sup> Pakistan,<sup>122</sup> Nigeria,<sup>123</sup> and Guatemala.<sup>124</sup> Consequently, in the case of Yemen, the two decades up until 2014 witnessed numerous efforts, albeit almost always donor-funded, to improve the situation of Yemeni women generally, but especially in health, education, and the economy. The Millennium Development Goals<sup>125</sup> in particular took lead in the development frontier of women's empowerment. To this end, the Yemeni government, supported by the international community, carried

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<sup>121</sup> H. Y. Sultana, M. A. Jamal & D. E. Najaf, 'Impact of microfinance on women's empowerment through poverty alleviation: An assessment of socio-economic conditions in Chennai city of Tamil Nadu', *Asian journal for poverty studies (AJPS)*, 3(2), 2017.

<sup>122</sup> H. Rehman, A. Moazzam & N. Ansari, 'Role of microfinance institutions in women's empowerment: A case study of Akhuwat, Pakistan', *South Asian Studies*, 30(1), 2015.

<sup>123</sup> B. A. Mathias, 'Problems and prospects of education for women's empowerment in Nigeria', *Social Science Research*, 3(1), 2016.

<sup>124</sup> K. E. Poelker & J. L. Gibbons, 'Guatemalan women achieve ideal family size: Empowerment through education and decision-making', *Health care for women international*, 39(2), 2018.

<sup>125</sup> See for example, E. Schlaffer, et. al., 'Fair Share in Yemen: Capacity building for achieving the Millennium Development Goals', Women Without Borders, 2011.

out several strategies aimed at improving girls' education, provision of reproductive healthcare, and women's participation in the labour market. However, despite money spent, strategies designed and implemented, announced commitment to women's issues, regular indicators produced by national and international organisations concerned with women indicate that the situation of Yemeni women has not significantly improved.

## **2.1 Yemeni women's movement**

The other important question is empowerment according to whom? Or in other words, from whose perspective are we understanding the process of empowerment and against whose interest. It is argued that in order to deem any development<sup>126</sup> effort successful, it has to be evaluated against the rising and recognition of new interests that were not there during the original planning process.<sup>127</sup> Based on this approach, when considering factors contributing to the success or failure of women empowerment policies in Yemen, it is logical to seek answers from the women themselves. In the case of this research, the target population was the women leaders who were the appointed officials responsible for implementing the women empowerment agenda, and who were also pioneers in the Yemeni women's movement. Therefore, the judgement on how these policies could become more successful in taking into consideration women's best interests in a sustainable and fundamental manner, should come from the women themselves as the main stakeholders in the quest for gender equality.

In order to put the research's target population in context, a brief overview of the Yemeni women's movement or Yemeni feminism is in order. At the outset, there are three main defining phases through which one can view the Yemeni women's movement: 1) the Yemeni women's movements of what was known as South Yemen (Peoples Democratic Republic of Yemen: PDRY and North Yemen (Yemen Arab Republic: YAR) prior to the unity, 2) the Yemeni women's movement of the united

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<sup>126</sup> Development in this context is understood as the process of improving the conditions of the target group. It is considered as part of the empowerment process.

<sup>127</sup> S. Wieringa, 'Women's interests and empowerment: gender planning reconsidered', *Development and Change*, 25(4), 1994, p. 836.

Yemen (Republic of Yemen) between 1990 and 2000, and 3) the Yemeni women's movement in the 21<sup>st</sup> century starting from year 2000 onwards.

It must be acknowledged that within each phase, Yemeni women leaders as individuals and as a collective have been influenced by their national political and economic events, as well as by the larger regional and global developments especially in the recent decades. As such, an analysis of the history of women's movement in the Middle East could be done using "older approaches of women worthies [in reference to the history of notable women] and compensatory political theory as well as newer methods in social history and the study of dominant and contesting gender discourse."<sup>128</sup> Use of the later approach was made in the following review of Yemeni women's movement's progress within the national and regional contexts.

#### ***a) Yemeni women's movement in the PDRY***

The earliest record of a women's organisation was in Aden during the British colonisation of the port (1839- 1963). This was of Aden Ladies Child Welfare Committee, which was established in 1938 to support the maternity clinic in the district of Crater.<sup>129</sup> In the two decades between 1940 and 1960, educated Adani women (women from Aden) learned from their British counterparts and organized themselves to create the Adani Women Society, the first Yemeni civil society exclusive for Yemeni women on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1956, and which included 450 women in its membership. The organisation conducted meetings twice a week providing "a welcome opportunity for Arab women in Purdah<sup>130</sup> to meet together outside their homes."<sup>131</sup> Moreover, since 1961, Adani women managed to take part in international conferences for women around the world, which increased their outreach and helped them create alliances and networks beyond Yemen. However, it must be emphasised that Adani women had participated significantly in political and revolutionary committees and events between

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<sup>128</sup> M. L. Meriwether, *A social history of women and gender in the modern Middle East*, New York, Routledge, 2018, p. 3.

<sup>129</sup> A. Alalas, *The conditions of Yemeni women under the British rule between 1937 and 1967*, National Library of Aden, Aden University Printing and Publishing House, 2005.

<sup>130</sup> A purdah is a large piece of cloth women used to cover themselves when being outdoors.

<sup>131</sup> *Welcome to Aden: A comprehensive guidebook*, The Guides and Handbooks of Africa Publishing Company, 1961, p. 97.

the 50s and 70s, especially during the 60s as southern Yemenis struggled against the British occupation to finally gain independence in 1967. This participation, although it provided women with excellent organisational and political skills, was not integral to the feminist movement as such because it was never specifically about women or women's issues. This was not unique to Southern Yemeni women, as similar cases were documented in Egypt and Palestine for example where women's movements were often an integral part of the nationalist struggle.<sup>132</sup>

The first real organisational attempt of the women's movement in Yemen was on 16 February 1968 when the General Union for Yemeni Women was created. Although this organisation was created as a government entity and by a republican decree, which means it did not have autonomy from the state, it was still considered a strong advocate for women's rights. The union covered what is known today as Greater Aden, which includes governorates of Aden, Lahj, Dhaleh, and Abyan. It took the union six years before it organized its first conference in 1974, through which its mandate, activities, and additional branches in Shabwa, Hadramout, and Almahara were established. The union was instrumental in advancing women's issues in the south and in the four years following its first conference, it managed to heavily influence the content of the Family law,<sup>133</sup> push for the appointment of the first female judge, sign agreements with international women's organisations, and participate in the Mexico Conference in 1975,<sup>134</sup> which resulted in designating the years between 1976-1985 a "decade for women."<sup>135</sup> The union also was instrumental in encouraging women to participate in elections not just as voters but also as candidates. The first elections in which women in the south participated as voters and candidates was the 1976 for the general body of the local popular councils and around 10% of those elected were women.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> M. L. Meriwether, *A social history of women and gender in the modern Middle East*, New York, Routledge, 2018, p. 5.

<sup>133</sup> This law was decreed on January 1, 1974 and is considered one of the most advanced laws in the region when it comes to women's rights (Dahlgren, revisiting the issue of women's rights)

<sup>134</sup> This was the first world conference on the status of women. It was convened in Mexico City to mark the International Women's Year 1975. See <[http://www.5wwc.org/conference\\_background/1975\\_WCW.html](http://www.5wwc.org/conference_background/1975_WCW.html)>

<sup>135</sup> R. Shamsheer, 'The role of women's movement in Yemeni women's empowerment', a working paper presented in *The Second and Third Democratic Forum on Women and Politics* organized by Sisters Arab Forum in Sana'a on September 14, 2004 and in Aden on December 23, 2004.

<sup>136</sup> S. Carapico, *Civil society in Yemen: the political economy of activism in modern Arabia*, Vol. 9. Cambridge University Press, 2007.

By 1980, southern Yemeni women were present in the presidential committee of the popular council and there was a woman in the position of deputy minister. Many women held high positions in the judicial system, as deans at universities, and leaders in several unions and syndicates.<sup>137</sup> The General Union for Yemeni Women was successful in lobbying South Yemen's political leadership to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in May 1984, making the PDRY the first country in the gulf region to do so and one of the earliest countries in the Middle East.

### ***b) Yemeni women's movement in the YAR***

Contrarily to women in the PDRY, women in the Yemen Arab Republic were far behind their southern sisters in terms of women's rights and organised structures. The first recognised attempt to improve the situation of women in North Yemen was the creation of an Egyptian funded<sup>138</sup> small women literacy centre in Taiz in 1964, only two years after the YAR gained independence from the Imamate rule.<sup>139</sup> In November the following year this centre was transformed into the first women's organisation in the north and was named the Yemeni Women Society copying that in South Yemen. However, this organisation was unable to progress much, and a new one under the same name was created in 1967 in the northern capital Sana'a. This new organisation was concerned with charity work and eradicating women's illiteracy, particularly as the nature of the community where it operated was very traditional and less liberal compared to the south, hence any talk of gender equality or women's rights would face extreme resistance.

A breakthrough took place when the Cooperatives Law decreed of 1978 encouraged women in the north to create women-based organisations. Within a few years, there were women's organisations in Ibb, Dhamar and Hodeidah in addition to the existing

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<sup>137</sup> A. M. Alasbahi, 'Panorama of the October 14 revolution from peaceful struggle to military resistance', a working paper presented in the golden anniversary celebration of October 14th revolution organized by the Yemeni Research and Studies Centre on 23 November 2013.

<sup>138</sup> This centre was actually part of a national literacy project known as The Salal (the Yemeni president then) and Jamal (Egyptian president at the time) Project.

<sup>139</sup> North Yemen was ruled by an Imam as part of Hashemite Mutawakkilite Kingdom of Yemen (1918–1962), also known as the Kingdom of Yemen. Before 1918, it was under the Ottoman suzerainty.

two in Sana'a and Taiz. These organisations continued to focus on literacy and charity work in order to survive in the conservative society and also because education and economic independence were indeed two of the top priorities for Yemeni women in the north at the time.

As the years progressed and particularly due to their participation in international women's conferences, women leaders in North Yemen started advocating for women's equality and political rights. There was a serious attempt for a woman's campaign in 1983 when the Shoura council [upper house] was established and feminist pioneers in the north demanded to be represented in it; however, they did not succeed.

### ***c) Yemeni women's movement in the Republic of Yemen 1990-2000***

When the unity between North and South Yemen took place on 22 May 1990, the northern women's associations and the General Union for Yemeni Women in the south merged under one umbrella and a new entity was established on 6 October 1990 under the name of Yemeni Women's Union. Because of the great variance in experience, southern feminists took the lead in educating and empowering their colleagues from the north on women's rights and advocacy techniques, and their first collective achievement was to ensure that the united Yemen: the Republic of Yemen, continued to endorse the CEDAW, and a new ratification in the name of the new country took place on 8 March 1992.

On the political front, the union participated in promoting women's political participation in elections as candidates and hence 50 women candidates ran in the 1993 parliamentary elections of the Republic of Yemen.<sup>140</sup> The YWU pressured the three main political parties at the time to nominate women as candidates. As a result, two women candidates were nominated by the General People's Congress political party, four were nominated by the Yemeni Socialist Party, while the Islah party did not

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<sup>140</sup> S. Carapico, 'Elections and mass politics in Yemen', *Middle East Report*, November-December 1993.

nominate any woman.<sup>141</sup> The remaining women candidates were independent.<sup>142</sup> Only two women, both from Aden one independent and the other representing the Socialist Party, managed to eventually win seats in the 1993 301-member parliament. Women's percentage in the 1993 parliament was at 0.66%, which is a substantial deterioration from the 10% in the South Yemen parliamentary elections of 1986, where 11 women won seats in the 111-member parliament. The Republic of Yemen's following parliamentary elections in 1997 were even worse for women as only one woman affiliated to the GPC party won a seat in the 301 member-parliament.

In general, the socio-political factors of united Yemen did not help push the women's movement forward, especially since positions of power in the united country was in the hands of the conservative north. The fact that northern population at the time of unity was three times larger than that of the south,<sup>143</sup> did not help either. In fact, southern women today complain that they were better off in terms of representation in the parliament before unification with the conservative north because the number of female candidates in elections deteriorated rapidly<sup>144</sup> compared to the number of voters.<sup>145</sup> Moreover, "many southerners were concerned about aspects of traditional YAR [North Yemen] society such as tribal influence and greater circumscription on the role of women."<sup>146</sup>

However, another milestone in women's movement post unity was the Yemeni Women's Union's participation in the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. Yemen's commitment to Beijing Declaration and its Platform of Action resulted the establishment of the Women's National Committee in August 1996. Following that, a number of women's organisations were created across the country but

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<sup>141</sup> The GPC was the ruling party of the north, the YSP was the ruling party of the south, and Islah was a newly created party with Islamic background and as an extension of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood.

<sup>142</sup> National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), *Promoting participation in Yemen's 1993 elections*, Washington, 1994, p. 46, [https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/331\\_ye\\_promoting.pdf](https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/331_ye_promoting.pdf) (accessed 15 April 2016).

<sup>143</sup> In 1990, the population of the north was seven million inhabitants compared to only 2.5 million in the south. Post unity, the currency name was maintained of the north as Riyal compared to the south's Dinar. The capital was that of the north: Sana'a, and even the country call code for the united Yemen was that of the north.

<sup>144</sup> In the 1993 parliamentary elections there were 42 female candidates and 18% female voters, in the 1997 parliamentary elections the candidates went down to 19 and female voters went up to 27%, and in the 2003 parliamentary elections the number of female candidates decreased to 11 only whereas the voters increased to 43%.

<sup>145</sup> Shamsheer, the role of women's movement, op. cit.

<sup>146</sup> N. Choueiri, et. al., *Yemen in the 1990s; From unification to economic reform*, International Monetary Fund, 3 May 2002.

mainly in the capital Sana'a and these organisations were run by leading feminists and were supported by donor-led projects. In the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, these organisations were also criticised and used as an argument against the feminist movement by radical Islamists and conservative traditionalists who claimed that the movement was the West's tool to infiltrate Yemeni society.<sup>147</sup>

#### ***d) Yemeni women's movement in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century***

The feminism of the 70s and 80s in South Yemen was mostly characterised by its connection to the political struggle for independence. During the same years, feminism in North Yemen was barely existing. Post unity, the women movement in the early 90s, which was mostly led by southern feminists or influenced by international feminism, was rights-based and the concept of gender equality was key. However, the dynamics of the women's movement were based on independent initiatives and backgrounds. For example, early feminists and women empowerment pioneers from the North demanded an immediate recognition of women's rights as equal citizens and were rather confrontational in their approach.<sup>148</sup> Women leaders from South Yemen were nostalgic about their lost achievements and were trying to identify their place in the united Yemen especially in light of visible discrimination against southerners in positions of power.<sup>149</sup>

The new century produced an international dimension to Yemen's women's movement through the Millennium Development Goals of 2000, which Yemen as a state committed to. While gender issues have been a cross cutting theme in all the MDGs,

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<sup>147</sup> W. Shakir, 'Al"ishkaliyat wa aljadal hawl altamkeen alsiyasi lilmar"a" [Controversy and debate around political empowerment of women], a working paper presented to *The Second and Third Democratic Forum: women and politics – Religious perspectives, problems and solutions*, organised by Sisters Arab Forum, Sana'a, 14 September 2004, and Aden, 23 December 2004.

<sup>148</sup> This was more visible through the abundance of gender related conferences and workshops both training and advocacy and mostly funded by international organisations in the 90s. Leading feminists from the north such as Dr Raufa Hassan and Amal Basha were running NGOs that organised many of these events.

<sup>149</sup> It did not take long after the unity on May 1990 for many southerners to realise that they were not entering into a fair deal with the more populated with stronger army. The positions of power were distributed unjustly, and many southerners felt excluded. The resentment built up until a civil war took place in 1994 when southern leaders wanted out. They lost the war, and many were sent to exile leaving the political arena mostly in the control of the conservative north.

two goals were specifically dedicated to women: Goal 3: to promote gender equality and empower women, and goal 5: to improve maternal health.

Therefore, the Yemeni state was obliged through its commitment to the MDGs to ensure that its national policies and strategies were gender-sensitive and this meant including women in the planning process. As a consequence, the women's movement in Yemen was development driven in the first decade of this century and was closely tied to policies and national strategies. The Yemeni state established the Women National Committee (WNC) in 1996, which in turn designed a number of strategies for women's development 2001, 2003, 2006, and 2008 and issued regular reports on the status of women. The WNC advocated for the creation of focal points in all government institutions and ministries and in 1999. However, these focal points, which were termed as women's departments, were heavily disregarded by the leadership in the institutions they were placed in, especially since they had no operational budget or real authority.

A breakthrough took place in 2007 when the WNC managed to convince the Prime Minister to issue a decree instructing the Ministry of Finance to dedicate operational budgets to those departments. Moreover, in some ministries those departments were elevated to a directorate level and so their women heads became directors general, which is a significant position in the public sector. In 2010, another decree was issued requiring all ministries to involve heads of the women's departments in planning and budgeting process of their relative institutions to ensure gender mainstreaming.

The Women National Committee, along with civil society organisations especially the Yemeni Women's Union, played a vital role in the last two decades in promoting women's issues and putting them on the political agenda. Gender equality was made a component of the National Plan for Socio-Economic Development and Poverty (2006-2010), and in the same year a National Strategy for Women's Development was created and updated in 2010. Political advocacy for women's rights and gender equality was at its peak towards the end of the first decade of 20s and Yemeni women leaders were strongly connected with women's movements around the world especially because of the rise of internet communication and social media.

Furthermore, some Yemeni feminists focused in their advocacy campaigns since the early 20s on political and public participation of women especially the demand for a

30% quota in decision making positions.<sup>150</sup> However, the majority of women related advocacy was tied to development projects by the government or those in civil society funded by donors.

Another shift in the history of Yemeni feminism took place when the 2011 Arab Spring protests sparked across the region. There was an unprecedented visible participation of women in terms of numbers and coverage across the various protest grounds countrywide. Some accounts of this participation argue that there were in fact two revolutions in the making in Yemen's 2011 uprising, one about politics and another about women.<sup>151</sup> It was particularly striking how two women Bushra Almaqtari in Taiz and Tawakkol Karman in Sana'a led the protestors both men and women in the revolutionary call to oust the regime. The uprising produced a new generation of feminists who were younger but also represented the second phase of Yemeni feminism that focused on supporting women not only from a point of a victim of gender discrimination as their mothers in the struggle did, but also as an activist and a contributor to defending freedoms and human rights in general, somewhat like the women freedom fighters in the south in the early 60s. Despite the revolutionary spirit in the Change and Freedom Squares<sup>152</sup> across the country, female protestors against the regime received their fair share of harassment not only by pro-regime men, but many times by the conservatives in their own ranks. One documented incident was when several female activists against the former regime were beaten while participating in the protest by their fellow protestors who were offended that the women were marching side by side with the men.<sup>153</sup> The women were called infidels and this incident was alleged to be incited if not organized by former president Saleh who claimed that those who want to throw-off his regime are calling for immorality because of their mixed -

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<sup>150</sup>B. AbuOsba, 'Takhşeeş hişaş lîlnîsa' (alkota).. almafhoom, altajarub wa alîshkaliyat' [The quota system: concept, examples and challenges], *The Second and Third Democratic Forum: women and politics* – Religious perspectives, problems and solutions, organised by Sisters Arab Forum in Sana'a on September 14, 2004 and in Aden on December 23, 2004.

<sup>151</sup> A. Nasser, 'Yemen is experiencing two revolutions, says female activist,' *CNN*, 17 November 2011, <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/11/17/opinion/yemen-revolution-afrah-nasser/> (accessed 5 May 2016)

<sup>152</sup> These were nick names to the protest areas across the country similar to those in Tunisia and Cairo. Although in Yemen there were protest areas supportive of the former regime and they called themselves Freedom Square protestors.

<sup>153</sup> W. Albadawi, 'This is what happened to me', *Lahj News*, 20 April 2011, <http://www.lahjnews.net/news/news-13981.htm> (accessed 5 May 2016).

gender protests the day before the beaten took place.<sup>154</sup> Regardless of the conspiracy explanations behind the attacks, the fact remains that women protestors were beaten in 2011 by conservative men who did not approve the lack of segregation. It is worth noting that women's visible participation in the 2011 protests including sit-in areas were highly organised, mostly controlled by men, and gender segregated to a large extent.<sup>155</sup>

Nevertheless, Yemen's version of the 2011 Arab Spring that was engulfing the region highlighted the extent of Yemeni women's involvement in politics and how far they have come since the early 90s. It may seem that Yemeni women have gone a full circle back to the feminist revolutionary phase when southern Yemeni women in Aden led protests against the British Colonisation in the 60s and stood shoulder by shoulder with male freedom fighters. Also, similar to how the socialist regime leaders in the 60s used women to advance their political cause against the British at the time, the leaders of the 2011 political events also used women the same way. When the political struggle relatively subsided, there was no fair recognition of women and their role in the new political scenes. The only difference is that the political powers of the south were more liberal and hence, had a more favourable attitude towards women's rights than the ones who dominated the scene in Yemen post 2011.<sup>156</sup> Therefore, women's presence in the 70s and 80s in decision making positions in South Yemen was not directly relative to their contribution to politics as much as it was a consequence of the sociocultural environment of the time.

Consequently, women's participation in the political uprising in 2011 and their visible presence across platforms did not translate into positions of power post conflict because of the socio-cultural background of both the dominating political powers and the society in general, sometimes even in the south. Some cities such as Aden and Taiz which were known to be more liberal towards women in the past, are dominated by a more conservative culture driven mostly by Islah's political Islamic movement from the

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<sup>154</sup> H. Alattas, 'A statement on the beating of female protestors during a women's march', Afrah Nasser's blog, 23 April 2011, [http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2011/04/blog-post\\_23.html](http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2011/04/blog-post_23.html) (accessed 5 May 2016).

<sup>155</sup> N. Al-Sakkaf, 'Yemen's women and the quest for change', *Political Participation after the Arab Revolution*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2012.

<sup>156</sup> T. M. Salem, *Social exclusion of women in Aden*, Yemeni Foundation for Social Studies, *Almostaqbal Foundation*, 2013, [http://nashwanalothmani.blogspot.co.uk/2013/08/blog-post\\_9715.html](http://nashwanalothmani.blogspot.co.uk/2013/08/blog-post_9715.html).

north,<sup>157</sup> by fundamentalist Salafists,<sup>158</sup> as well by local branches of Al-Qaeda.<sup>159</sup> This was further exasperated after the coup d'état in 2014 when the very conservative Houthi rebellion took over majority of the norther areas and announced a constitutional declaration overthrowing the transitional regime. There are reports today of how the Houthis clamped down against civil liberties and freedoms including those of women,<sup>160</sup> causing women activists themselves to fear for their rights under the Houthi regime.<sup>161</sup>

Another compounding factor that weakens today's feminism in Yemen is that existing political women leaders seem to be disorganised in their work and their ability to create national alliances and networks falters. The general landscape of women's movement remains fragmented<sup>162</sup> although there have been several attempts across the years since 1990 to create alliances and women networks in order to push the feminist movement forward. A more recent example is the Women Independent Network, established in 2013 by leading women in order to "support women's political, economic and social rights and women's participation in the democratic transition underway in Yemen."<sup>163</sup> However, this network, similar to many others, is confined to the educated elite women. Additionally, Yemeni feminist leaders are mostly concentrated today in the urban centres and hence, are disconnected from the majority of Yemeni women who live in a very different reality and mostly in the rural areas.

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<sup>157</sup> S. Aldoubai, 'Aden's rising wave of conservatism', *The Yemen Times*, 28 April 2014, <http://www.yementimes.com/en/1775/report/3770/Aden%E2%80%99s-rising-wave-of-conservatism.htm>, (accessed 14 March 2017)

<sup>158</sup> M. A. Kalfood, 'In Yemen, Saudi-led intervention gives rise to new armed religious faction', *The Intercept*, 26 April 2016, <https://theintercept.com/2016/04/26/in-yemen-saudi-led-intervention-gives-rise-to-new-armed-religious-faction/> (accessed on 15 March 2017).

<sup>159</sup> U. Laessing, 'Women of southern Yemen port remember better times', *Reuters*, 22 January 2010, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-women-idUSTRE60L2ZD20100122> (accessed 14 March 2017).

<sup>160</sup> Y. Bayoumy, 'Yemeni women fear Houthis are restricting freedoms', *Reuters*, 18 December 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-women-idUSKBN0JW1QN20141218> (accessed 12 March 2017).

<sup>161</sup> M. Shuja al-Deen, 'What a Houthi-controlled Yemen means for women', *Almonitor*, 18 March 2015, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/03/yemen-women-activists-revolution-houthis-saleh.html> (accessed 12 March 2017).

<sup>162</sup> J. A. Raja, 'Yemeni women in transition: challenges and opportunities', CDDRL Working Papers 140, Center on Democracy, Development, and The Rule of Law, Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, Stanford University, [https://cddrl.fsi.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/Number\\_140\\_Yemen.pdf](https://cddrl.fsi.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/Number_140_Yemen.pdf) (accessed 25 July 2017).

<sup>163</sup> Women Independent Network Facebook page, [https://www.facebook.com/pg/Women-Independent-Network-WIN-132791610181138/about/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/Women-Independent-Network-WIN-132791610181138/about/?ref=page_internal) (accessed 13 March 2017)

### 3. The concept of power

Since the fundamental theoretical concepts of this research, which questions women's empowerment policies in Yemen, are the concepts of power and empowerment. A starting point for the literature review would be understanding the concept of power.

Some of the early attempts to conceptualise power were that of Hunter<sup>164</sup> (1953) and Mills<sup>165</sup> (1956), however, they both limited their definitions to those who govern, or rather the powerful elite, as they were speaking from the standpoint of their own social group. They understood power as a force of coercion based on a privileged right. This understanding was expanded by Dahl<sup>166</sup> (1957), who described power as a relation among people, through which, the more powerful actor influenced the actions of the less powerful. He detailed four elements in this relation: source, means, amount, and scope. Dahl argued that in order to capture a more comprehensive understanding of the power relation, the source of this power had to be defined, the means or tools for exerting this power needed to be identified, so did the amount of this power or its extent, and finally the scope or range of the exerted power had to be specified.

A few years later, Bachrach and Baratz (1975) claimed that the definition of power was viewed differently by sociology-oriented researchers, who, from an elitist point of view, interpreted power as centralised and stable over time. Whereas political science researchers interpreted it as diffused and "tied to issues, and issues can be fleeting or persistent."<sup>167</sup> They also argued a pluralist treatment of power; that it was not only the ability to coarsen someone into action, but also the ability to prevent another from doing what they want. That "power is also exercised when A devotes his energies to creating or reinforcing social and political values and institutional practices that limit the scope of the political process to public consideration of only those issues which are comparatively innocuous to A."<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> F. Hunter, *Community power structure: A study of decision makers*, UNC Press Books, first published in 1953.

<sup>165</sup> C. W. Mills & A. Wolfe, *The power elite*, Vol. 20, Oxford University Press, 2000, first published in 1956.

<sup>166</sup> Dahl, R. A., 'The concept of power', *Behavioral science*, 2(3), 1957.

<sup>167</sup> Bachrach & Baratz op. cit., p. 946.

<sup>168</sup> Bachrach & Baratz op. cit. p. 948.

The debate on the concept of power was further enriched by Lukes<sup>169</sup> (1974) who presented his three-dimensional model of power. The first two dimensions were based on the pluralists' understanding of power. Lukes' first dimension referred to as 'the making of decisions', understood power as an issue of control, whereby A makes B do something that otherwise B would not have done. In the second dimension, he added that power was also manifested when A prevents B from taking an action that B desires, and limiting B's access. In his third dimension, Lukes explained that while the first two were based on "Max Weber, for whom power was the probability of individuals realizing their wills despite the resistance of others,"<sup>170</sup> the third dimension, which he termed as a 'radical conception of power' related to covertly manipulating others, who either believed in the same causes, and therefore willingly took action according to what was dictated by the "power-holders," or submitted to them as a form of surrender to a recognised and accepted authority.<sup>171</sup>

Foucault (1979),<sup>172</sup> who is considered one of the leading philosophers challenging the concept of power as an instrument of coercion, introduced yet another dimension or face of power. He understood power as exercised by all and omnipresent. It was neither agency nor structure, to him power was fluid and a manifestation of knowledge that was tied to every aspect of our daily lives. He emphasised that as a society, "we must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes', it 'represses', it 'censors', it 'abstracts', it 'masks', it 'conceals'. In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production."<sup>173</sup> This understanding of power moved beyond the fundamental questions of: who has power over others (1<sup>st</sup> dimension: coercion), what is the result (2<sup>nd</sup> dimension: coercion or prevention), and why was this done (3<sup>rd</sup> dimension; lack of conflict in intentions).

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<sup>169</sup> Lukes, op. cit.

<sup>170</sup> Lukes, op. cit. p. 26.

<sup>171</sup> K. Dowding, 'Three-dimensional power: a discussion of Steven Lukes' power: a radical view', *Political Studies Review*, 4 (2), 2006, <http://psw.sagepub.com/content/4/2/136.full.pdf>, (accessed 25 July 2017).

<sup>172</sup> M. Foucault, *Discipline and punish: the birth of a prison*, 1979, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/3c08/d55cc882eadaf1f0c4bae4c4217fe2bc5cad.pdf>, (accessed 29 November 2018).

<sup>173</sup> Foucault, *Discipline*, op. cit., p. 194.

The fourth face of power “not only produces subjects, it lies at the bottom of all our social practices: politics, medicine, religion, psychiatry, work.”<sup>174</sup>

#### **4. Power and gender roles**

Considering how power was presented in the political science literature, as demonstrated above, these concepts failed to give justice to the complexities of gender power relations. What was overlooked in the generic literature on power was the culturally embedded problem of woman’s inferiority to man just because she is a woman, a fact which makes acquiring of power for her much more complicated. Concurrently, Hartsock (1990) stated that “power is associated firmly with the male and masculinity.”<sup>175</sup> She considered Foucault’s poststructuralist theory of power inadequate for women. And that Foucault’s understanding of power as “shared with” rather than exercised ‘against’, was not coherent with the reality of women as the dominated sex. Foucault saw power from an egalitarian point of view in the sense that everyone had it and could exercise it, while for women, the very essence of power to them, is a struggle for equality. Hartsock insisted that in feminism research, a careful examination of the epistemological grounding of the power theory needed to be done first before applying any theory to feminism studies. She emphasised the importance of differentiating between theories of power about women; those that included the element of subjugation, and theories of power for women that were based on women’s experiences, through and from which, the power relations are transformed.

Allen<sup>176</sup> (1998) took this argument a step further by stressing that the concept of power for women needed to be redefined and given its rightful weight without being reconstructed from and within recognised women’s issues such as marriage, motherhood, pornography, and gender based violence. She argued that by limiting the meaning of power in the feminism literature to women’s issues, despite their good intentions, feminists unknowingly perpetuated the gender stereotypes, which they

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<sup>174</sup> P. Digeser, ‘The fourth face of power’, *The journal of politics*, 54(04), 1992, p. 980.

<sup>175</sup> Hartsock, op. cit., p. 156.

<sup>176</sup> Allen, op. cit.

claimed to be challenging. As it stands, most definitions of power in the first two waves of feminist literature, starting from 1848 and ending in the late eighties<sup>177</sup>, were centred on men overpowering women, or women resisting men's control. Many feminists (such as Okin<sup>178</sup> 1989 and Butler<sup>179</sup>1990) complained about the patriarchal system, which dictated that women were powerless creatures dominated by men; whose entitlement over a woman's being - both physically and emotionally - stemmed from their nature as males. Andrea Dworkin (1989), one of the prominent second wave feminists wrote extensively on the issue of men controlling women through possessing and exploiting their bodies. She claimed that men had an "intrinsic authority" over women, and that a man's supremacy "to him is given, by faith and action, from birth. [Whereas] To her it was denied, by faith and action, from birth."<sup>180</sup>

On the other hand, another second wave feminism school of thought viewed women's relation to power differently, bringing an alternative definition, which was based on women's power to create and transform as nurturers. For example, Held (1993) termed this sort of power as transformational power. She stated that "the power of a mothering person to empower others, to foster transformative growth, is a different sort of power from that of a stronger sword or a dominant will."<sup>181</sup> Similarly, Allen explained that according to this view of women's power, women had the capacity to create and do, compared to men's form of power which could be described as making *others* do or act in a certain way. This creative form of power was "a positive one: rather than equating power with domination or control. This conception saw power as the capacity or ability to pursue certain life projects."<sup>182</sup> Paradoxically, as O'Reilly<sup>183</sup> (2008) pointed out,

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<sup>177</sup> The first wave started with the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848 and ended with the passage of women's suffrage in 1920. However, the exact starting and ending points of the 2nd, 3rd and 4th feminism waves are not really distinct and overlap; hence the term waves. Gilley, J. & Zabel, 'Writings of the Third Wave', *Reference & User Services Quarterly*, 44(3), 2005, pp.187-198, <http://www.library.spscc.ctc.edu/electronicreserve/soc101/russell/WritingsoftheThirdWaveGilley.pdf>, (accessed 25 July 2017).

<sup>178</sup> Okin, S. M., *Justice, gender, and the family*, Vol. 171, New York, Basic books, 1989.

<sup>179</sup> Butler, J., *Gender trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity*, Routledge, 1990.

<sup>180</sup> Dworkin, A., *Pornography: men possessing women*, Plume, Penguin Group, 1989, p. 14, <https://www.feministes-radicales.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/Andrea-DWORKIN-Pornography-Men-Possessing-Women-1981.pdf>, (accessed 25 July 2017).

<sup>181</sup> V. Held, *Feminist morality: Transforming culture, society, and politics*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1993, p. 209.

<sup>182</sup> Allen, op. cit., p. 27.

<sup>183</sup> A. O'Reilly, *Feminist mothering*, SUNY Press, 2008, <https://www.sunypress.edu/pdf/61029.pdf>, (accessed 25 July 2017).

there is a distinction between “mothering,” which is a woman’s power to reproduce through giving birth and taking care of children, and “motherhood”, which is the entire institution including both the mothers and children, an institution that is under the control of men. Building on the work of Adrienne Rich (1976), O’Reilly claimed that mothering is a source of empowerment for women, compared to motherhood, which is male-defined and oppressive.

#### **4.1. Women power**

Although this view of empowerment through mothering had somewhat trickled into third wave feminism literature, this wave’s feminists deliberately moved away from the ‘men vs. women’ attitude to a relatively complicated struggle for power that includes more than the differences between the sexes. Rampton (2008) explained this change by stating that “an aspect of third wave feminism that mystified the mothers of the earlier feminist movement was the re-adoption by young feminists of the very lip-stick, high-heels, and cleavage proudly exposed by low cut necklines that the first two phases of the movement identified with male oppression.”<sup>184</sup> It has been documented that third wave feminists felt restricted by the fixed vision of female empowerment they inherited from their sisters in the first and second waves. Consequently, third wave feminists decided it was OK to be “girly” and yet be powerful, leading to a new perception of women and power, which was largely depicted in television programs where the female heroes enjoyed super powers. In fact, Rampton<sup>185</sup> indicated that third wave, and even today’s feminists, have no problem using sexuality as means of power to control men in contradiction to the earlier convictions that sexuality was how men oppressed and controlled women. Rebecca Walker (1992), who was said to be one of the first feminists to announce the arrival of the third wave, emphasised that her generation will redefine women’s power for themselves, and according to their priorities and their issues. She believed that feminists in her generation should engage in understanding power

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<sup>184</sup> M. Rampton, ‘Four waves of feminism’, *Pacific University Magazine*, Pacific University, 2008, para 11, <http://www.pacificu.edu/about-us/news-events/four-waves-feminism>, (accessed 28 December 2015).

<sup>185</sup> Rampton, *ibid.*

structures in order to challenge them if they truly want to achieve women's empowerment.<sup>186</sup>

Multiple understandings of what power means for women were adopted by feminists since the 1990s. This diversity reflected the different approaches and sometimes ambiguity that characterised third wave feminism. Nevertheless, feminists celebrated their contradictions, and this sense of individualism in itself was considered a form of “power to choose as an end in itself, regardless of the choice made.”<sup>187</sup> A conviction that was shared by many third wave feminists such as Baumgardner & Richards<sup>188</sup> (2003). Moreover, with more and more women working in public domain these days, they challenge the traditional perception of male-women domain as being public-private respectively, a dichotomy which Phillips<sup>189</sup> (2003) argued has given the men power over women as a result of the former's control over the public domain, a control which is gradually being challenged. As the literature of feminism progresses, it is likely that a new definition of power will emerge from the fourth wave of feminism currently in the making. Already many of the concepts related to women and women's empowerment have drastically changed since they were conceptualised in the last century. For example, today the term feminism is inclusive of other minorities, and gender does not equal sex (see Hooks<sup>190</sup> 2000 and Cornwall<sup>191</sup> 1997).

In effect, women's empowerment in today's reality is about all manifestations of negotiating spaces and power sharing; whether physical, verbal or even psychological. For instance, although many of Lakoff's<sup>192</sup> (1973) claims on gender differences in language and expression were endorsed by other researchers, her definition of the submission in women's articulation as a sign of politeness, and what is 'lady-like' in the seventies and eighties, is challenged today as “the social significance of the choice

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<sup>186</sup> Walker, R., 'Becoming the Third Wave by Rebecca Walker', *Ms. Magazine*, 12(Jan./Feb.), 1992, p.41, <http://www.msmagazine.com/spring2002/BecomingThirdWaveRebeccaWalker.pdf>, (accessed 28 December 2015).

<sup>187</sup> Gilley & Zabel, op. cit., p. 189.

<sup>188</sup> J. Baumgardner & A. Richards, 'The number one question about feminism', *Feminist Studies*, 29(2), 2003, pp. 448–452.

<sup>189</sup> S. U. Phillips, 'The power of gender ideologies in discourse, in J. Holmes & M. Meyerhoff (eds.), *The handbook of language and gender*, Blackwell Publishing, 2003.

<sup>190</sup> B. Hooks, *Feminism is for everybody: Passionate politics*, Pluto Press, 2000.

<sup>191</sup> A. Cornwall, 'Men, masculinity and 'gender in development'', *Gender & Development*, 5(2), 1997.

<sup>192</sup> R. Lakoff, 'Language and woman's place', *Language in Society*, 2(1), 1973.

between woman and lady has altered in an interesting way.”<sup>193</sup> In revisiting her own claims on the language differences between men and women, Lakoff found “evidence in contemporary public discourse that women have begun to resist being silenced and to undertake the construction of their own discursive meanings.”<sup>194</sup>

Therefore, a founding principle in women and power literature is the concept of inequality. Or as Moser (1993) puts it “the empowerment approach acknowledges inequalities between men and women as well as the origins of women’s subordination in the family.”<sup>195</sup> Correspondingly, Malhotra & Schuler<sup>196</sup> (2005) explain that since women are originally less advantaged in the personal-spousal relationship, achieving empowerment for them is much harder than that for men. Based on this acknowledgement, a transformation in social positions could be achieved by redistributing power, especially in the intra-familial sphere. Consequently, we can conclude that empowerment policies that do not change the social distribution of power do not succeed at empowering women.

#### 4.2. Defining women’s empowerment

Moving forward from the concept of power to that of empowerment, we find that there are ample examples in the literature that describe empowerment through a variety of manifestations, such as agency, status, control, choices, influence, freedoms, and high levels of education and/or economic independence (See for example: Patrinos & Psacharopoulos 2004<sup>197</sup>; Alsop<sup>198</sup> et al 2006; Lindsey<sup>199</sup> 2015; Emirbayer & Mische<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> J. Holmes, ‘Power, lady, and linguistic politeness in language and women’s place’, in R. T. Lakoff (ed.), ‘Language and woman’s place: Text and commentaries’, Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 156.

<sup>194</sup> K. Hall & M. Bucholtz, (eds.), *Gender articulated: Language and the socially constructed self*, Routledge, 2012, p. 9.

<sup>195</sup> Moser, C. O., *Gender planning and development: Theory, practice and training*. Routledge, 1993, p. 74, <http://www.polsci.chula.ac.th/pitch/urbansea12/moser1993.pdf>, (accessed 8 January 2016).

<sup>196</sup> A. Malhotra, S. Schuler & C. Boender, ‘Measuring women’s empowerment as a variable in international development’, in D. Rayan (ed.) *Measuring empowerment: Cross-disciplinary perspectives*, World Bank, 2005.

<sup>197</sup> H. A. Patrinos & G. Psacharopoulos, ‘Returns to investment in education: a further update’, *Education Economics*, 12 (2), 2004.

<sup>198</sup> R. Alsop et al, *Empowerment in practice: From analysis to implementation*, Washington, The World Bank, 2006.

<sup>199</sup> L. L. Lindsey, *Gender roles: A sociological perspective*, Routledge, 2015.

<sup>200</sup> M. Emirbayer & A. Mische, ‘What is agency?’, *American Journal of Sociology*, 103 (4), 1998.

1998; Meyers<sup>201</sup> 2002; World Bank 2012<sup>202</sup>; Malhotra, Schuler, and Boender 2002.)<sup>203</sup> However, from the feminist literature on empowerment I derived two paradigms where women's empowerment as a concept was approached differently; the first was a utilitarian practical approach based on development policies, while the second was an egalitarian philosophical approach derived from the understanding of women's empowerment as a political issue based on intrinsic grounds. Several researchers who took the development approach to women's empowerment such as Lopez & March<sup>204</sup> (1991); and Duflo<sup>205</sup> (2012), believed that the achieving empowerment is done through access to resources. For example, many of this category's researchers believed that poverty is one of the central elements that contributed to women's disempowerment, arguing that for example, microcredit programs not only alleviate poverty, but also empower women and improve their conditions.<sup>206</sup>

However, feminists who subscribed to the concept of empowerment as a political goal – in its own right – argued that the male-biased socio-political context must be acknowledged and dealt with when addressing women's empowerment (Okin<sup>207</sup> 1994; Batliwala<sup>208</sup> 2007; and Mukhopadhyay<sup>209</sup> 2004). That the political aspect of gender equality concerns “are being normalised in the development business as an ahistorical, apolitical, de-contextualised and [a] technical project that leaves the prevailing and unequal power relations intact.”<sup>210</sup> Furthermore, development researchers and policy makers prefer integrating women's issues in the larger development framework, moving away from philosophical concepts of social justice and power relations. To do

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<sup>201</sup> D. T. Meyers, *Gender in the mirror: Cultural imagery and women's agency*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2002.

<sup>202</sup> World Bank, *World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development*, Washington, DC, World Bank, 2012.

<sup>203</sup> Malhotra, Schuler & Boender op. cit.

<sup>204</sup> E. P. Lopez & C. March, *Gender considerations in economic enterprises*, Oxfam, 1991, <https://www.developmentbookshelf.com/doi/pdf/10.3362/9780855987343.000>, (accessed 25 July 2017).

<sup>205</sup> E. Duflo, 'Women's empowerment and economic development', *Journal of Economic Literature*, 50 (4), 2012.

<sup>206</sup> R. Amin, S. Becker & A. Bayes, 'NGO-promoted microcredit programs and women's empowerment in rural Bangladesh: quantitative and qualitative evidence', *The Journal of Developing Areas*, (Winter 1998).

<sup>207</sup> S. M. Okin, 'Political liberalism, justice, and gender', *Ethics*, 1994, 105(1).

<sup>208</sup> S. Batliwala, 'Taking the power out of empowerment – an experiential account', *Development in Practice*, 2007, 17(4-5).

<sup>209</sup> M. Mukhopadhyay, 'Mainstreaming gender or “streaming” gender away: feminists marooned in the development business', *Institute of Development Studies bulletin*, 35 (4), 2004.

<sup>210</sup> Mukhopadhyay, op. cit., p. 95.

this, they required an instrumentalisation of the concept of women's empowerment, hence reducing it to quantified values and measurable indicators tied to policies.

In general, this utilitarian approach of including gender equality goals in development projects has become more popular in national policies than the approach which considers women's empowerment as an intrinsic political right.<sup>211</sup> This is especially true in the development field where there is need to make efficient use of limited resources to deliver tangible and measurable results.<sup>212</sup> Therefore, renewed emphasis has emerged regarding women's access to material resources as a means to control over sources of power.<sup>213</sup> Researchers,<sup>214</sup> who adopt the utilitarian/development approach to women's empowerment, even claim that economic empowerment contributes to challenging the patriarchal system and the share given to women of the family resources. The weakness of this argument is that although it has been documented to improve the socioeconomic conditions of poor women (see for example Goetz & Sen Gupta <sup>215</sup> 1996; and Khandker<sup>216</sup> et. al 1994), its impact does not truly affect the political and socio-cultural relations, and its usefulness to women who are disempowered in different contexts [other than financially] is questionable at best.<sup>217</sup>

I highlighted these two paradigms because of their relevance to my research question and to provide a theoretical background to the Yemeni government's empowerment

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<sup>211</sup> Kabeer, (1999), op. cit.

<sup>212</sup> S. Razavi, 'Fitting gender into development institutions', *World Development*, 25(7), 1997.

And Regional Bureau for Arab States, *The Arab Human Development Report 2005: Towards the rise of women in the Arab world*, 2006, <http://hdr/undp.org/en/content/arab-human-development-report-2005>, (accessed 25 July 2017).

<sup>213</sup> Amin et al, op. cit.; S. Wieringa, 'Women's interests and empowerment: gender planning reconsidered', *Development and change*, 25(4), 1994; R. C. Das (ed.), *Handbook of Research on Microfinancial Impacts on Women's empowerment, Poverty, and Inequality*, IGI Global, 2018.

<sup>214</sup> For example: Amin et al, op. cit.; UN. Millennium Project, *Taking action: achieving gender equality and empowering women*, UN Millennium Development Library, Taylor & Francis, 2013; P. Smith, 'Feminist jurisprudence', in D. Patterson (ed.), *A companion to philosophy of law and legal theory*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, first published in 1996.

<sup>215</sup> A. M. Goetz & R. Sen Gupta, 'Who takes the credit? Gender, power, and control over loan use in rural credit programs in Bangladesh', *World development*, 24 (1), 1996.

<sup>216</sup> S. R. Khandker, B. Khalily & Z. Khan, *Is Grameen Bank sustainable?*, Human Resources Development and Operations Policy Division, World Bank, Washington, 1994, <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.837.4615&rep=rep1&type=pdf>, (accessed 25 July 2017).

<sup>217</sup> P. Mosley & D. Hulme, *Finance against poverty: Volume 2: Country Case Studies*, Routledge, 2006.

policies for women. Chapters IV and V will shed light on the Yemeni government's gender policies.

In terms of defining empowerment specifically for women, most of the literature<sup>218</sup> in the last two decades or so, focused on the ability of making choices. Kabeer<sup>219</sup> (1999) considered women's empowerment as the process whereby, those who could not before, acquire the ability to make strategic choices. She specifically considered power as the ability to make choices, conditioning this choice-making process to the reality of having more than one viable choice. Similarly, Sen<sup>220</sup> (1985) stressed the unconditional freedom of choice coupled with action based on that choice as prerequisites to people's ability to improve their lives.

However, some feminists who consider themselves equal to men and privileged to enjoy careers that their mothers and grandmothers only dreamed of, are questioning their presumable ability to choose. In her essay "pushing away the plate" Lee<sup>221</sup> (2007) questioned whether empowerment was about pursuing a career and competing shoulder to shoulder with men or having a viable choice to drop everything and go home to be a mother. Nonetheless, the notion that choice and decision-making automatically lead to empowerment is questionable, especially since the relationship between increased choices and changes in gender roles and power relations was not validated.<sup>222</sup> Arguably the word empowerment has been overused sometimes to an extent that dilutes its true meaning. Consequently, empowerment in the "sense of just expansion of choices can occur in many ways which do not touch the patriarchy, which do not touch women's status, and therefore to assume women are empowered...[and] ideologies have changed, doesn't make sense."<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> See for example: S. Batliwala, *Engaging with empowerment: An intellectual and experiential journey*, Women Unlimited, 2015; Kabeer, op. cit.; Alsop & Heinsohn op. cit.; Mosedale, *Assessing*, op. cit.

<sup>219</sup> Kabeer, op. cit.

<sup>220</sup> A. Sen, 'Well-being, agency and freedom: the Dewey lectures 1984', *The journal of philosophy*, 82(4), 1985.

<sup>221</sup> J. Lee, 'Pushing away the plate', *Min Jin Lee*, 13 April 2007, <https://www.minjinlee.com/writing/2007-04-13-pushing-away-the-plate/>, (accessed 30 November 2018).

<sup>222</sup> Rampton op. cit.

<sup>223</sup> D. Borenstein, 'Challenging patriarchy: the changing definition of women's empowerment', *New Security Beat*, 19 December 2013, Environmental Change and Security Program, Wilson Center, Washington, <http://www.newsecuritybeat.org/2013/12/challenging-patriarchy-changing-definition-womens-empowerment/>, (accessed 30 December 2015).

To this end, Ibrahim and Alkire (2007) presented a comprehensive comparison between 29 various definitions of empowerment in the literature published since the early 1990s, and almost all of which relate empowerment to increased agency/control over decision making at multiple levels through a transformation of power dynamics.<sup>224</sup>

Against this background, I adopted an expansion of Kabeer's<sup>225</sup> definition for my research, and therefore defined women's empowerment as "*the sustained ability to have and exercise choices, yielding desired outcomes, regarding important decisions related to health, education, economic opportunity, in a way that positively addresses the gender power imbalances in her life.*" This definition identified the issue of sustainability so as to emphasise that empowerment is not a one-off or occasional event. Additionally, it addressed the social dynamics relating to gender power relations, which if not challenged, empowerment becomes a superficial process that could be easily reversed with changes in the structural elements surrounding women.<sup>226</sup>

Equally important, the perception of alternatives and choices has to be from the women's point of view, and not merely a theoretical possibility. In other words, one must be attentive to the reality of some women's incapability to make choices not because of the lack of options but rather because women are not interested in, or do not consider themselves worthy of the better alternatives. This was described as 'Doxa' by Bourdieu,<sup>227</sup> which refers to the norms that have become neutral or natural in a society that they are not questioned even if they are discriminative in nature. As such, in the absence of contextual prerequisites that address the inequalities in the gender power relations, the exercise of agency becomes merely a simulacrum of choice.<sup>228</sup> Similarly, Appadurai<sup>229</sup> (2004) argued that considering women's access to alternatives without analysing their backgrounds, could mislead equality efforts. This is because the

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<sup>224</sup> S. Ibrahim & S. Alkire, 'Agency and empowerment: A proposal for internationally comparable indicators', Oxford development studies, 35(4), 2007, p. 380.

<sup>225</sup> Kabeer, op. cit., p. 437

<sup>226</sup> Yemen as a case study is a testimony to this. Chapter IV demonstrates a range of empowerment efforts, which even though some improved indicators relatively, did not create a significant improvement in the social power relations between men and women and hence did not create sustainable empowerment of Yemeni women.

<sup>227</sup> P. Bourdieu, *Outline of a theory of practice*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1977.

<sup>228</sup> M. Nussbaum, 'Capabilities as fundamental entitlements: Sen and social justice', *Feminist Economics*, 9(2 – 3), Routledge, 2003.

<sup>229</sup> A. Appadurai, 'The capacity to aspire: culture and terms of recognition', in V. Rao & M. Walton (eds.), *Culture and Public Action*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2004.

underlying socially imbedded preferences overshadow women's ambitions, and the context in which the women were raised in controls their capacity to aspire. This is in fact a complicated issue to the extent that the "contextual nature of empowerment and problems of adaptive preferences pose a major challenge to agency measurement."<sup>230</sup>

Consequently, it is important to keep in mind the local context of Yemen and what could be truly considered as empowerment. For example, a Yemeni woman may visit her neighbours every afternoon without needing her husband's permission because visiting neighbours is considered one of the traditionally acceptable, even encouraged, social practices in the Yemeni society. Therefore, this ability to move freely outside the home to visit neighbours is not considered empowerment, especially when in majority of the cases, the same woman would need her husband's permission to visit the health care provider even if in the case of an emergency. This line of argument has also been substantiated by other researchers such as Sathar & Kazi<sup>231</sup> (2000); and Kabeer<sup>232</sup> (1999).

In this regard, Muñoz, Petesch & Turk<sup>233</sup> (2013) explained that women's empowerment as such, is a multifaceted complicated process, especially since gender norms often clash with women's aspirations. For example, submission is considered an expected trait of women and therefore if a woman was to take action that requires being bold and taking risks, through for example increasing her agency by accessing income generation opportunities, she risks becoming a victim of domestic abuse or social ridicule and therefore, this form of empowerment backfires, and in fact, leads to disempowerment.

As such, the empowerment process in itself requires a constructive interaction of a peoples' abilities with the institutional and non-institutional structures in a way that increases their agency, otherwise, the empowerment process is incomplete.<sup>234</sup> The increased agency is therefore a reflection of empowerment, and it could be measured through assessment of three interrelated dimensions: "a) the behaviors or actions that

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<sup>230</sup> Ibrahim & Alkire, op. cit.

<sup>231</sup> Z. A. Sathar & S. Kazi, 'Women's autonomy in the context of rural Pakistan', *The Pakistan Development Review*, 2000.

<sup>232</sup> Kabeer (1999). *ibid*

<sup>233</sup> A. M. Muñoz Boudet, P Petesch & C. Turk, *On norms and agency: Conversations about gender equality with women and men in 20 countries*, The World Bank, 2013, p. 22. & p. 142.

<sup>234</sup> Ibrahim & Alkire op. cit., p. 9.

men and women associate with exercising agency, (b) the conditions and trends in their local structure of opportunities, and (c) the change in gender norms as part of those structure of opportunities.”<sup>235</sup> The important aspect of this three dimensional understanding of empowerment is that it goes beyond agency and structures as means of achieving empowerment but additionally, it requires that this interaction between agency and structures creates change in the gender norms of the society. The significance of this approach is that it considers social structures both cause and effect of the empowerment process, which is in a way understandable since empowerment is a process. This means that for sustainable empowerment the social structures have to continue to change to provide better opportunities for a woman to reclaim her agency, with which she will be able to take advantage of the enabling structures, and in turn challenge the discriminating structures in an iterative manner. Therefore, according to this premise, empowerment policies that provide opportunity structures and aim at increasing women’s agency without eventually creating a change in the gender norms do not lead to sustainable and genuine empowerment. Given this, we can agree that “social norms reproduced across institutions feed into a gender system that demands that men and women act in certain ways, although it also provides a sense of identity and a position in the community structure.”<sup>236</sup> To this end, Muñoz, Petesch & Turk’s<sup>237</sup> research on empowerment in 20 countries including Yemen, noted that perceived empowerment, opportunity structures and changes in local norms do not necessarily transform at the same pace, with the gender norms often being the slowest to change.

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<sup>235</sup> Muñoz Boudet, Petesch & Turk, op. cit., p. 140.

<sup>236</sup> Muñoz Boudet, Petesch & Turk, loc. cit.

<sup>237</sup> Muñoz Boudet, Petesch & Turk, ibid.

## 5. Gender, politics and the state

The above discussion provides a foundation for this thesis's argument emphasising the need to understand women's empowerment within the larger socio-political space, which is dominated by cultural values, many times over-riding national policies and laws. Hence, the politics surrounding women's empowerment's policies were scrutinised in the light of their inclusion of, and impact on gender power relations in the socio-cultural spheres especially regarding health, education and the economy. This was done through insights from the women leaders themselves who were responsible for implementing and sometimes designing those policies.

The concept of state feminism is understood as more than the official state's commitment to women's rights, whether it was a legal or ideological commitment. Political researcher Mervet Hatem adopted an understanding used in welfare states of Scandinavian societies and defined state feminism as "ambitious state programs that introduce important changes in the reproductive and productive roles of women."<sup>238</sup> This state policy also requires the removal of structural barriers to gender equality and turning the concern and control over women's welfare from the society through its individuals – mainly the men who hold the dominant social power – to the state as a governing body of all citizens. However, in her analysis of the Egyptian state feminism Hatem argued that although seemingly progressive in its creation of a system of public patriarchy, Egyptian president Gamal Abd al-Nasser's gender policies "did not challenge the personal and familial views of women's dependency on men that were institutionalized by the personal status laws and the political system."<sup>239</sup>

The bulk of literature on gender and politics considered "women as objects of state policy,"<sup>240</sup> and recognised the role of state policies in constructing gender concepts and relations. In fact, it could be argued that the development of women's movement in the Middle East, especially in the 1960s and 70s needs to be scrutinised through their connection to state policies, which were instrumental in the creation and shaping of

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<sup>238</sup> M. F. Hatem, 'Economic and political liberation in Egypt and the demise of state feminism', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 24(2), p. 231.

<sup>239</sup> M. F. Hatem, 'Economic and political liberation in Egypt and the demise of state feminism', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 24(2), p. 223.

<sup>240</sup> Randall, V. & Waylen, G. (eds.), *Gender, politics and the state*, Routledge, 2012, p. 4.

these movements. Hatem goes as far as to claim that women's organisations across the region served as representatives of regime policies and their "function and activities were largely determined by the priorities set by the existing regimes, whether it was rational household spending and savings in Egypt, birth control in Tunisia, and Iraq, education and training in traditional occupations in Syria, labor needs and/or the war economy in Iraq."<sup>241</sup> Another influence was that of international organisations and donors as some female activists and organisations seem to assemble and be active in response to funding possibilities due to donor-led agendas, and are therefore dependant in their existence on such funding.<sup>242</sup>

Moreover, previous research on gender politics in Yemen suggests that aspiring Yemeni women feel let down by their political system represented by the political parties whether ruling parties or opposition.<sup>243</sup> Their grievance was that women were treated as an object of political debate rather than an equal participant. For example, women were welcomed as voters but not as candidates. This observation is not new; the Arab Human Rights Development Report of 2005 stated that women in power are "often selected from the ranks of the elite or appointed from the ruling party as window dressing for the ruling regimes, especially those that are autocratic, or in response to external pressure."<sup>244</sup> In fact, this 'window dressing' was clearly described as a tool to appeal to either international players or local voters.<sup>245</sup>

The argument here is that while it's important to carry out measures to ensure rapid social transformations, it would be misleading to assume that appointing women in leadership positions is sufficient for achieving gender equality. Contrarily, this might lead to a conflict between the women leaders' reality and their social environment,

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<sup>241</sup> M. F. Hatem, 'Toward the development of post-Islamist and post-nationalist feminist discourses in the Middle East', in Judith Tucker (ed.) *Arab Women: Old Boundaries, New Frontiers*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1993, p. 30.

<sup>242</sup> N. S. Al-Ali, *Women's movements in the Middle East: case studies of Egypt and Turkey*, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, 2002, p. 19.

<sup>243</sup> S. P. Yadav, 'Does a vote equal a voice? Women in Yemen', *Middle East Report*, Oct 1(252), 2009, p. 38.

<sup>244</sup> United Nations Development Programme, *Towards the rise of women in the Arab World*, Arab Human Development Report 2005, New York, 2006, <http://www.arab-hdr.org/reports/2005/english/ahdr2005e.pdf?download>, (accessed 24 June 2019), p. 97.

<sup>245</sup> M. Tajali, 'Women's rise to political office on behalf of religious political movements', *Women and Gender in Middle East Politics*, The Project on Middle East Political Science (POMEPS), 2016, p. 19, [https://pomeps.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/POMEPS\\_Studies\\_19\\_Gender\\_Web.pdf](https://pomeps.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/POMEPS_Studies_19_Gender_Web.pdf), (accessed 24 June 2019).

especially if these political appointments were carried out as a response to pressures from the international community.<sup>246</sup>

Therefore, the success of women's empowerment policies, should be reflected on all Yemeni women. In all cases, evaluating policy success is not an easy undertaking, especially since it could be argued as subjective and political, because it is carried out by people, who are naturally influenced by their values, interests, and perceptions.<sup>247</sup> There are, however, arguments in favour of evidence based policy making and evaluation, which use statistical tools and econometrics.<sup>248</sup> Yet, researchers<sup>249</sup> argued that policy success is more than achieving predefined outputs, as they distinguished between 'programme' success and 'political' success. The first refers to outputs and the substance and projects' outcomes, whereas the second relates to political gains and public acceptance. Newman<sup>250</sup> (2014) elaborated on this by suggesting four aspects of policy success; a) process – the course through which policies are converted into practical actions; b) goal attainment – the extent of achievement of stated goals; c) distributional outcomes – the impact of the policy and how outcomes are experienced by different groups; and d) political consequences, being the political gains and support received as a consequence of these policies.

Considering the four-dimensional measure of policy above, the success of women's empowerment policies in Yemen is therefore measured against: a) how policies' are translated into action plans that change the gender social power imbalances in the society in favour of women; b) the achievement of the stated objectives and goals; c) the benefit the women population gains out of the policies compared to other target groups; and d) the political gains the politicians gained as a consequence of these

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<sup>246</sup> UNDP, Towards, op. cit., p. 213.

<sup>247</sup> I. Shaw, *Evaluating public programmes: contexts and issues*, Routledge, 2018.

<sup>248</sup> I. Sanderson, 'Evaluation, policy learning and evidence-based policy making', *Public Administration*, 80(1), 2002.

<sup>249</sup> See: A. McConnell, 'Policy success, policy failure and grey areas in-between', *Journal of Public Policy*, 30(3), 2010a; A. McConnell, *Understanding policy success: Rethinking public policy*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010b; M. Bovens, 'A comment on Marsh and McConnell: Towards a framework for establishing policy success', *Public Administration*, 88(2), 2010.

<sup>250</sup> J. Newman, 'Measuring policy success: Case studies from Canada and Australia', *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 73(2), 2014, p. 192.

policies. The table below describes the generic form of those four categories and their consequences.

Figure 1 Newman’s four categories of policy evaluation<sup>251</sup>

<b>Four Categories of Policy Evaluation</b>			
<b>Process</b>	<b>Goal Attainment</b>	<b>Distributional Outcomes</b>	<b>Political Consequences</b>
<u>Indicator of Success:</u> Public policy is converted into substantive legislation or public programming.	<u>Indicator of Success:</u> Stated policy objectives are achieved.	<u>Indicator of Success:</u> Some groups benefit from a particular policy, in specific ways, to a certain degree.	<u>Indicator of Success:</u> Governments or other political actors benefit from the public reaction to, or perception of, a policy.
<u>Significance:</u> Connects policy inputs to policy outputs.	<u>Significance:</u> Addresses the ‘top-down’ aspect of policy formulation and implementation.	<u>Significance:</u> Addresses the ‘bottom-up’ aspect of policy implementation.	<u>Significance:</u> Accounts for the cyclical nature of the policy process.
<u>Limitations</u> Inputs and outputs may not be evaluated according to the same criteria.	<u>Limitations</u> Objectives may be unclear, unstated, or falsely represented. Long-term objectives may be different from short term objectives.	<u>Limitations</u> How groups benefit can be subjective, so ‘success’ must be defined in terms of ‘success for whom’.	<u>Limitations</u> There may be a significant time dimension to political consequences, which could obscure evaluation in the short term.

Furthermore, evaluations may not lead to a clear failure/success verdict, rather a spectrum of degrees of failure or success. This reflects the complexity of gender equality as a policy objective and of gender behaviour in general. As such, the facets of gender behaviour are socially installed practices, whose combination forms an organised structure based on social relations and power distribution. Previous sections in this chapter demonstrated how women’s empowerment as means to gender equality has largely been overlooked by policy makers in the past because of the inadequate understanding of the differences in how power and empowerment are perceived and acquired by men and women. This short-sightedness was visible, as a consequence, in policy design and implementation. That being said, gender considerations in policies

<sup>251</sup> Newman, op. cit. p. 197.

and politics were not a matter of concern in the past as they are today. Indeed, mainstream political theory has developed extensively in the last three decades especially in terms of its interaction with feminist theory, a direction that was encouraged by the “feminist reinterpretations of the classic texts.”<sup>252</sup> The relation between political theory and feminism has shifted from attempts to gender-sensitise the political, to uncovering gender aspects of political theory.<sup>253</sup> One of the popular theories on the state and women in the 1970s comes from Marxism where gender subordination is understood in class terms and that women’s liberation is essentially a class struggle against capitalism, which is the root cause of all inequalities,<sup>254</sup> and that women’s oppression is deliberately enforced by the ruling class to serve their interests.<sup>255</sup>

Interest in gender and politics in this thesis is bifurcated into two thematic areas: first, the masculinity<sup>256</sup> of the politics surrounding women’s empowerment and gender policies - both in theory and practice - and second, the influence of the socio-cultural on the political, which is addressed in this thesis through the narratives of women leaders. To this end, emphasis on the role of women’s empowerment policies implemented by governing bodies has been substantiated by several researchers, who highlighted the stronger role structures have in strengthening a woman’s agency or personal authority, compared to the other way around of agency influencing structures. Malhotra (2003) acknowledged the influence of state policies on an individual’s empowerment process, stipulating that there “is ample justification for governments and multilaterals to promote policies that strengthen gender equality through various means, including legal and political reform, and interventions to give women (and other socially excluded groups) greater access to resources.”<sup>257</sup> Similarly, although she questions whether all these policies could be described as empowerment, Afridi<sup>258</sup> (2010) stated that autonomy of women is “a reflection of the social and cultural

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<sup>252</sup> C. Pateman, *The disorder of women: democracy, feminism, and political theory*, Stanford University Press, 1989, p. 2.

<sup>253</sup> J. Squires, *Gender in political theory*, John Wiley & Sons, 2013.

<sup>254</sup> R. W. Connell, *Gender and power: Society, the person and sexual politics*, John Wiley & Sons, 2014.

<sup>255</sup> K. Miles, *Women's liberation, Class Struggle*, Words for women, 1968, as cited in Connell, op. cit., p. 42.

<sup>256</sup> W. L. Brown, *Manhood and politics: A feminist reading in political theory*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998.

<sup>257</sup> A. Malhotra, conceptualizing, op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>258</sup> F. Afridi, ‘Women's empowerment and the goal of parity between the sexes in schooling in India’, *Population Studies*, 64 (2), 2010.

institutions that govern family behaviour and could also determine women's ownership of material resource.”

Similarly, it has been found that “household and interfamilial relations are a central locus of women's disempowerment...”<sup>259</sup> Even political empowerment, which is a manifestation of women's presence in politics and decision making, is also influenced and limited by social and cultural factors. Previous qualitative and quantitative research on women's political representation as one element of political empowerment “have largely converged around three sets of factors: institutional variables, including electoral systems and gender quotas; social and economic variables, like indicators of women's status and levels of national development; and cultural variables, such as religion and attitudes towards women in leadership positions.”<sup>260</sup>

Therefore, a lack of attention to the familial and personal gender power imbalances could seriously undermine empowerment efforts. Furthermore, it has been established<sup>261</sup> that there is a strong relation between gender roles and power relations especially in the context of conservative cultures such as Yemen, because gender relations, which are social conceptions, define power structures and are a central factor to what level of power is granted or even accepted. Moreover, in order to utilise the concept of women's empowerment in practical terms, an analysis of the empowerment framework is done considering its impact on redistribution of the gender power socially.

In order to understand the politics surrounding women's empowerment policies, one needs to examine how this concept as a national objective was integrated into mainstream policies and the state's attitude towards gender equality in general. In a way, these policies represent a part of the structures in the empowerment agency/structure paradigm used in this research. These policies include laws, institutions, budgets that have an impact on women's empowerment, a mapping of which will be presented in chapter IV. That being said, the Yemeni state has made

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<sup>259</sup> Malhotra, Schuler & Boender, op. cit., p. 71.

<sup>260</sup> M. L. Krook, 'Women's representation in parliament: a qualitative comparative analysis', *Political Studies Journal*, 58 (5), 2010, p. 887.

<sup>261</sup> G. Waylen, 'Analysing women in the politics of the Third World', in H. Afshar & M. Maynard (eds.), *Women and politics in the Third World*, University of York, Routledge, 2005.

efforts to improve the situation of women, yet these policies fell short when challenging the social norms underlying the formal and informal structures affecting women's empowerment. For example, despite declared commitment to gender equality, there is an unwavering objection to changing laws relevant to marriage age, divorced women's alimony, citizenship rights, and women's mobility without their male guardian's consent. These structures represent the mesh of interconnections between various social groups and dictates their values and access to benefits, in the same time pushing them to act in a certain way to defend their best interests.<sup>262</sup> Structures, therefore, are the collection of circumstances surrounding women because they are women, and consequently shape their social position and choices. Consequently, transformation, in this case empowerment, occurs as individuals continuously and consciously engage with their structures in a way that maximises their interests.<sup>263</sup> Social power could be described<sup>264</sup> as flowing in the society and defined through interaction with social systems. Therefore, women's empowerment policies that abstain from addressing the inequalities in the social power distribution, will not achieve their desired results.

Arguably, in order to promote women's empowerment, the state must instigate some intervening processes such as democratisation and political participation.<sup>265</sup> Oxaal & Baden<sup>266</sup> (1997) argued that in addition to the above, empowerment requires the state to create an environment that strengthens civil society and grassroots-organisations, including marginalised groups, through creating policies that would involve them in the political processes. A connection between empowerment and governance has been established in previous studies<sup>267</sup> indicating that good governance enables empowerment especially of disadvantaged groups such as women, which in turn, when empowered, demand good governance. This notion also suggests the question of whether empowerment is a bottom up or a top down process. Since it has been explained earlier that state's interventions to empower citizens are essential, it can also be argued

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<sup>262</sup> C. New, 'Structure, agency and social transformation', *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 24(3), 1995, p. 193.

<sup>263</sup> F. A. Tembo, 'Understanding agency through interface image-conflicts for improving the design of NGOs social transformation projects: case studies from Malawi', PhD thesis, Reading, University of Reading, 2001.

<sup>264</sup> S. R., Clegg, *Frameworks of power*, London, Newbury Park, and New Delhi, Sage Publications, 1989.

<sup>265</sup> Ibrahim & Alkire, op. cit., p. 386.

<sup>266</sup> Z. Oxaal & S. Baden, *Gender and empowerment: definitions, approaches and implications for policy*, Report no. 40, Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency, 1997, p. 14.

<sup>267</sup> D. Narayan, *Empowerment and poverty reduction*, Washington, DC, World Bank, 2002.

that empowerment is not only achieved through top-down approaches by the state, as some researchers<sup>268</sup> point out that it is important for the to-be-empowered to have their own social formations in order to collaborate in actions that would eventually bring justice or remove oppression, and hence create empowerment processes from the bottom-up. These researches build the case for the importance of having a strong women-rights' movements and civil societies to demand empowerment policies and good governance by holding the decision makers accountable to promoting the best interest of the female demographic of their constituencies. Equally important, women's groups support women leaders and feminist pioneers in their efforts and demands for gender equality.

All the above arguments are strongly relevant to the four-dimensional measurement of policy success described earlier in this chapter. Therefore, the discussion of the success of women's empowerment policies in the chapters IV and V will draw on those dimensions in the mapping of the various gender related policies in Yemen between 2006 and 2014.

## **6. Women's empowerment in terms of agency and structure**

The research question of this thesis examines potential factors contributing to the failure of women's empowerment policies in Yemen. In the context of this research, empowerment is understood not only as the woman's ability to gain more power due to her personal agency (which includes elements of capacity and confidence), but more importantly, due to the structures that surround this woman and enable (or disable) her to gain more power.

The circumstances in which women make their decisions become preconditions to achieving their agency. With enabling circumstances such as access to resources and

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<sup>268</sup> J. Friedmann, *Empowerment: The politics of alternative development*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1992; L. Mayoux, 'From access to empowerment: Gender issues in micro-finance', NGO Women's Caucus Position Paper for CSD-8, CSD, 2000a; L. Mayoux, 'Poverty elimination and the empowerment of women', Target Strategy Paper, London, DFID, 2000b; S. Mosedale, 'Towards a framework for assessing empowerment, New Directions in Impact Assessment for Development: Methods and Practice', Manchester, 24–25 November, 2003; Oxfam, *The Oxfam Handbook of Relief and Development*, Oxford, Oxfam, 1995.

supportive systems, women's options increase and become potential alternatives to their current situation. Since people are also heavily influenced by their backgrounds, habits, and reference frameworks, improved conditions do not necessarily translate into increased agency or empowerment.<sup>269</sup> Therefore, the existence of opportunities and people's ability to utilise them are essentially a result of the interaction between social norms, community expectations of gender roles, and personal aspirations and values.<sup>270</sup> Some studies<sup>271</sup> suggested that increased empowerment is a result of control over material resources and personal conditions aided with supporting structures. Munoz, Petesch and Turk (2013) defined the achievement of gender equality as improvement in three aspects: agency, economic opportunities, and endowments. And that this achievement is heavily dependent on the interactions between "four institutions: households, formal state institutions, markets, and informal institutions."<sup>272</sup>

The combined approach to empowerment through the interaction of agency and structural elements, is the founding theoretical framework for this research. Here agency is defined as the "ability to make meaningful choices and act upon them"<sup>273</sup> through increased capacity and personal strength. Whereas, the structures of opportunities represent the resources, institutions, established practices (traditions, moral codes, gender norms), and other enabling factors that foster the empowerment process and are necessary for agency to manifest (Alsop, Bertelsen & Holland 2006<sup>274</sup>; Narayan 2005<sup>275</sup>; Muñoz, Petesch & Turk 2013<sup>276</sup>; Narayan 2002<sup>277</sup>). These elements interact through a process of gaining control over resources in a way that increases a woman's ability to exercise choices and improves her situation. This process is therefore agreed on as the empowerment process, and which also refers to the way

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<sup>269</sup> D. Ray, 'Aspirations, poverty, and economic change', in A. V. Banerjee, R. Benabou & D. Mookherjee (eds.), *Understanding poverty*, Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 409-421.

<sup>270</sup> Muñoz Boudet, Petesch & Turk, op. cit., p. 210.

<sup>271</sup> Muñoz Boudet, Petesch & Turk, op. cit., p. 22.

<sup>272</sup> Muñoz Boudet, Petesch & Turk, loc. cit.

<sup>273</sup> Kabeer, op. cit. p. 438.

<sup>274</sup> R. Alsop, et al, *Empowerment in practice: From analysis to implementation*, Washington, The World Bank, 2006.

<sup>275</sup> D. Rayan (ed.), *Measuring empowerment: cross-disciplinary perspectives*, The World Bank, 2005.

<sup>276</sup> Muñoz Boudet, Petesch & Turk, op. cit., p. 144.

<sup>277</sup> Narayan, *Empowerment*, op. cit.

individuals acquire the ability to influence change in their lives,<sup>278</sup> and are able to take advantage of available opportunities.

To this end, various studies (Kabeer, 1999;<sup>279</sup> Kabeer 2000;<sup>280</sup> Kabeer 2001,<sup>281</sup> Moser 2009,<sup>282</sup> Narayan & Petesch 2005;<sup>283</sup> Appadurai, 2004;<sup>284</sup> Tilly 2007a,<sup>285</sup> 2007b,<sup>286</sup> Agarwal 2003;<sup>287</sup> Petesch 2011;<sup>288</sup> Petesch, Smulovitz & Walton 2005;<sup>289</sup> Morrison & Jutting 2005;<sup>290</sup> World Bank, 2012;<sup>291</sup> Escriche, Olcina, and Sánchez, 2004;<sup>292</sup> Beaman et al. 2009,<sup>293</sup> 2012;<sup>294</sup> Doss, 2011;<sup>295</sup> Ridgeway & Correll, 2004)<sup>296</sup> described factors within this agency-structures framework that potentially contribute collectively to empowerment such as their economic initiatives including both having a good job or/and source of income; positive attitudes and behaviours;<sup>297</sup> education and skills;

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<sup>278</sup> Moser, op. cit.

<sup>279</sup> Kabeer, op. cit.

<sup>280</sup> N. Kabeer, *The power to choose: Bangladeshi women and labour market decisions in London and Dhaka*, London, Verso, 2000.

<sup>281</sup> N. Kabeer, 'Reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment', in A. Sisask (ed.), *Discussing Women's Empowerment: Theory and Practice*, SIDA studies (3), Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Stockholm, Sweden, 2001.

<sup>282</sup> C. Moser, *Ordinary families, extraordinary lives: Assets and poverty reduction in Guayaquil, 1978–2004*, Washington, DC, Brookings Institution, 2009.

<sup>283</sup> D. Narayan. & P. Petesch, *Moving out of poverty: Understanding freedom, democracy, and growth from the bottom up—methodology guide*, Washington, DC, Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Network, Poverty Reduction Group, World Bank, 2005.

<sup>284</sup> Appadurai, op. cit.

<sup>285</sup> C. Tilly, 'Poverty and the politics of exclusion', in D. Narayan & P. Petesch, *Moving out of poverty: Crossdisciplinary perspectives on mobility*, Vol. 1., New York and Washington, DC, Palgrave Macmillan and World Bank, 2007a.

<sup>286</sup> C. Tilly, *Democracy*, New York and Cambridge, U.K., Cambridge University Press, 2007b.

<sup>287</sup> B. Agarwal, 'Gender and land rights revisited: Exploring new prospects via the state, family, and market', *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 3 (1), 2003.

<sup>288</sup> P. Petesch, *Women's empowerment arising from violent conflict and recovery: life stories from four middle-income countries*, Washington, DC, USAID, 2011.

<sup>289</sup> P. Petesch, C. Smulovitz & M. Walton, 'Evaluating empowerment: A framework with cases from Latin America', in D. Narayan (ed.), *Measuring empowerment: Cross-disciplinary perspectives*, Washington, DC, World Bank, 2005, pp. 39–67.

<sup>290</sup> C. Morrison & J. Jutting, 'The impact of social institutions on the economic role of women in developing countries', Working Paper 234, OECD Development Centre, Geneva, Switzerland, 2005.

<sup>291</sup> World Bank, World Development Report 2012, op. cit.

<sup>292</sup> L. Escriche, G. Olcina & R. Sánchez, 'Gender discrimination and intergenerational transmission of preferences', *Oxford Economic Papers*, 56 (3), 2004.

<sup>293</sup> L. Beaman et. al., 'Powerful women: Does exposure reduce bias?', *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 124 (4), 2009.

<sup>294</sup> L. Beaman et. al., 'Female leadership raises aspirations and educational attainment for girls: A policy experiment in India', *Science*, 2012.

<sup>295</sup> C. Doss, 'Intrahousehold bargaining and resource allocation in developing countries', Background paper for World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development, World Bank, Washington, DC, 2011.

<sup>296</sup> C. L. Ridgeway & S. J. Correll., 'Unpacking the gender system: A theoretical perspective on gender beliefs and social relations', *Gender and Society*, 18 (4), 2004.

<sup>297</sup> These include courage, community service, positive reputation, talents, optimism and even avoidance of bribery and alcohol abuse among other characteristics that are said to be personal drivers pushing people to improve their agency.

marital, familial and social networks;<sup>298</sup> markets; freedom of movement; formal institutions including state policies and regulations, the legal and judiciary systems, governmental and nongovernmental organisations; and informal institutions such as values, traditions, normative frameworks in the household and personal spheres, social roles and gender based stereotypes. However, it must be emphasised once again that the relevance of these factors to a person's empowerment differs based on their gender,<sup>299</sup> as “gender norms interact with local opportunity structures and individual initiatives to make processes of exercising agency quite different in reality for men and women.”<sup>300</sup> Not only do the gender norms influence women and men differently in terms of their agency, but also influence the openness of local institutions towards women's empowerment in general.

Since the research question addresses women's empowerment policies from the viewpoint of women leaders, achievement of empowerment was analysed according to their understanding and substantiated with theories from existing literature. Consequently, three elements were hypothesised as potential factors contributing to the failure of women's empowerment policies based on the agency-structures framework. These are: women leaders' capacity, which is a representation of agency; national political and economic instability for their obvious impact as a structural element on policy implementation; and the culture of political support for women leaders and for gender equality as a national goal, as an example of another structural element affecting women's empowerment.

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<sup>298</sup>These factors are related to empowerment by association through attaching to a more powerful person and gaining from their strengths.

<sup>299</sup> Muñoz Boudet, Petesch & Turk, op. cit., p. 144.

<sup>300</sup> Muñoz Boudet, Petesch & Turk, op. cit., p. 171.

## **7. Capacity, instability, and political support**

### **7.1. Capacity**

Capacity here is understood as the women's professional capacity as per their authority positions as well as their internal strengths, which enable them to overcome challenges and accomplish their missions. Therefore, I consider women leaders' capacity as an agency factor influencing the success of empowerment policies. As described in the previous section, agency is associated with one's ability to achieve functionings<sup>301</sup> whether at the basic level such as health choices, safety and income, or more complicated status such as being happy and respected.

Decision makers in Yemen historically have delegated the responsibility of improving the conditions of Yemeni women to the women leaders in authority at the various government institutions. Women were appointed to lead the women-related departments such as deputy minister for Girls' Education, deputy minister for Reproductive Health, chairperson of the Woman National Committee, to state a few examples. Chapter V presents the findings from surveys and interviews with women leaders responsible and involved in women's empowerment policies and efforts. Their capacity levels were investigated and questioned for their potential impact on policy failure. In the context of this research, three dimensions of how the capacity of women leaders potentially affected the success of women's empowerment policies were researched: professional capacity and qualifications of the women leaders; their management and communication skills; and their capacity in terms of leadership skills and bravery in resisting the patriarchy.

#### **a) Capacity as professional qualifications**

There is an increasing amount of scholarly research on the importance of policy makers' characteristics and education/qualifications on policy outcomes.<sup>302</sup> One of the

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<sup>301</sup> A. Sen, 'Well-Being, agency, and freedom: The Dewey Lectures', *Journal of Philosophy*, 82 (4), 1985.

<sup>302</sup> T. Besley, J. G. Montalvo & M. Reynal-Querol, 'Do educated leaders matter?', *The Economic Journal*, Vol 121(554), 2011.

direct manifestation of capacity is the field-related expertise and know-how, which is usually acquired through relevant education, on-going qualification, job-related hard skills, and expertise.

The relationship between improved capacity through educational qualifications on the one hand, and implementation efficiency and service quality on the other, has been promoted by many scholars especially those concerned with public administration and management.<sup>303</sup> Research shows that a leader's competence is directly related to education and qualification.<sup>304</sup>

### **b) Capacity in terms of management and communication**

In addition to the educational and professional qualifications mentioned above, a more inclusive and generic set of soft skills is proven to directly contribute to performance efficiency and goal achievement. These skills include management, communication, and networking.<sup>305</sup> Studies show that organisational and individual success is dependent on strong management skills as well as robust management systems. This includes both human management, and resources' management including finances,<sup>306</sup> and information technology.<sup>307</sup>

Such fluid skills interlock with technical capacity so as to enable the women leaders working in a position of authority to address challenges beyond the specialisation-specific issues of their projects.

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<sup>303</sup> P. M. Burgess, 'Capacity building and the elements of public management', *Public Administration Review*, 35(6), 1975. Also, B. W. Honadle, 'A capacity-building framework—a search for concept and purpose', *Public Administration Review*, 41(5), 1981.

<sup>304</sup> Besley, op. cit.

<sup>305</sup> A. C. Heckman, 'Does management matter? Testing models of government performance', Paper presented at the Ninth Public Management Research Association Conference, Tucson, AZ, 2007.

<sup>306</sup> Y. Hou, 'Putting money where the need is: managing the finances of state and local governments', in P. W. Ingraham (ed.), *Pursuit of performance: management systems in state and local government*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007.

<sup>307</sup> T. Ling, 'Delivering joined-up government in the U.K.: Dimensions, issues and problems', *Public Administration*, 80(4), 2002, pp. 615–42.

### c) Capacity in terms of leadership and bravery

Effective leadership is associated with high performance. Here leadership is different from management, as it goes beyond ensuring project success to providing vision and purpose. Research showed that good leadership is a source of “clear focus and well-defined goals, and it is linked to characterises such as credibility and vision.”<sup>308</sup>

In their daily lives, women continuously test their agency by confronting livelihood concerns and power norms including gender roles.<sup>309</sup> This manifestation of agency was examined at the women leaders’ institutional level, as their work environment was very much influenced by the social gender norms spilling over from personal spheres. An increase in a woman’s agency enables her to resist constraining and limiting circumstances instead of enduring them. Her internal strengths allow her to have aspirations, to question the unequal gender norms, and to seek change through utilising potential opportunities and achieving desired outcomes. However, perceived empowerment and increased freedoms may not always imply change in discriminating social norms,<sup>310</sup> which “permeate daily life and are the basis of self-regulation, hence affecting individual agency.”<sup>311</sup>

## 7.2. Instability

The element of instability covers both political and financial crises at the national level that potentially had a disrupting impact on national plans and policy implementation. As described in the introduction chapter, the Republic of Yemen had gone through several phases of political and economic instability, the last of which is the current armed conflict, which started in 2014. The instabilities that took place during the scope of this research do not reach the level of armed conflict, even though the uprising of

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<sup>308</sup> R. Andrews & G. A. Boyne, ‘Capacity, leadership, and organizational performance: Testing the black box model of public management,’ *Public Administration Review*, 70 (3), 2010, p. 444.

<sup>309</sup> D. Narayan et. al., *Voices of the poor: Crying out for change*, New York, Oxford University Press for the World Bank, 2000, p. 219.

<sup>310</sup> Muñoz Boudet, Petesch & Turk, op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>311</sup> Muñoz Boudet, Petesch & Turk, op. cit., p. 34.

2011 did in fact include several incidents of protestors subjected to brutal attacks by the state's security forces.<sup>312</sup>

The prima-facie theory in this regard is that instability halts development processes in general. A nuanced argument of this theory is that women's empowerment projects are especially at risk during instability in countries where gender equality is not a priority, as women's interests tend to be the first to be dropped when crisis occurs. In this research, the impact of instability on the success of women's empowerment policies was viewed through three dimensions: instability as a disruptive force to national policies, instability as a threat to women leaders, and instability as a creator of positive social opportunities.

#### **a) Instability as a disruptive force to national policies**

The failures of peace-time development policies could verily contribute to creating or prolonging instability,<sup>313</sup> which in turn, impacts success of development policies. In fact, it is argued<sup>314</sup> that poor countries going through instability are likely to get poorer and go through frequent phases of instability especially if they are also subject to other negative factors such as bad governance and unsustainable resources, such as the case of Yemen. Existing research<sup>315</sup> showed that gender equality policies were the first to drop from the national agenda when instability occurs. Additionally, donor countries and International Nongovernmental Organisations (INGOs) often pull out their funding for development projects during instability and redirect it to humanitarian and emergency relief that may not directly serve women's development. El-Bushra and Lopez<sup>316</sup> (1999) argued that INGOs dichotomy between humanitarian assistance and development projects is not conducive to the realities of communities living in instability. "Emergency interventions must serve the long-term development goals of strengthening the community's own capacity to deal with rapid and turbulent

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<sup>312</sup> The Yemeni uprising started in February 2011 and ended in November the same year with a political agreement. On the attacks on protestors see Human Rights Watch report <https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/03/18/yemens-friday-indignity>

<sup>313</sup> R. Luckham et. al., *Conflict and poverty in sub-Saharan Africa: an assessment of the issues and evidence*, 2001.

<sup>314</sup> P. Collier, *The bottom billion: Why the poorest countries are failing and what can be done about it*, Oxford University Press, 2008.

<sup>315</sup> J. El-Bushra & E. P. Lopez, *Development in conflict: the gender dimension*, Oxfam GB, 1999.

<sup>316</sup> El-Bushra, op. cit.

change.”<sup>317</sup> The consideration of instability as a factor impacting women’s empowerment policies in Yemen, is directly relevant to this dichotomy. Although this thesis did not examine women’s vulnerability as victims of instability, it did study how women’s development efforts were impacted by the instability, and consequently if and how instability contributed to the failure of women’s empowerment policies in Yemen.

#### **b) Instability as a threat to women leaders**

It has been argued that conflict and instability lead to the breakdown of political and economic structures as well as damage to the social fabrics leaving women especially vulnerable.<sup>318</sup> Consequently, some traditional-minded men in state institutions may perceive a threat in the success of their empowered female colleagues at the decision-making position, and hence work to undermine them especially if they realised they can get away with it during times of instability. Ridgeway and Correll (2004)<sup>319</sup> suggested that exposure to counter-stereotypical images such as a working mother or a female politician and the delinking of negative associations with these images can change the status of expected behaviour to the point that the gender norm varies or becomes irrelevant.” This means that for traditional men, the existence of successful women in positions of authority could be perceived as a threat that needs to be eliminated.

Moreover, research<sup>320</sup> showed that governments that endorse equal representation and democratic values were more able to withstand the effects of instability, whereas governments that thrived on maintaining the status quo used times of instability to subjugate minorities and oppress opposition. Not only are conflict and instability considered factors contributing to women’s disempowerment in general, but also in the aftermath, extremists can come to power and impose rigid religious and traditional rules that oppress women.<sup>321</sup> This is, in fact, where the national empowerment policies ought

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<sup>317</sup> El-Bushra, op. cit. p. 14.

<sup>318</sup> El-Bushra, op. cit.

<sup>319</sup> Ridgeway, op. cit.

<sup>320</sup> El-Bushra, op. cit. p. 6.

<sup>321</sup> Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD), *Claiming rights, claiming justice: A guidebook on women human rights defenders*, Bangkok, APWLD, 2007, p. 26,

to play their role in empowering women especially in terms of structural changes in community institutions and local markets to make them more welcoming of women.<sup>322</sup>

### c) Instability as a creator of positive social opportunities

Conversely to the above two dimensions, research<sup>323</sup> claimed that not all instability is bad for women, in the sense that the engagement of men in conflict allows for a relative relaxation in the limits dictated through women's traditional roles. However, it must be highlighted that in the context of this research, the concept of instability does not cover armed conflict in the sense that is prevalent in Yemen today. Although the years between 2006 and 2014 – the time scope for this research – were filled with instability events, they did not reach the scale of violence that could be argued to create a visible disruption in the traditional gender roles as a full-fledged conflict would. Nevertheless, economic crises in particular did shake up some of the gender stereotypes regarding women's capacity as a bread winner, and many Yemeni men found themselves accepting and sometimes encouraging women to work because of financial necessity.<sup>324</sup> However, previous research showed that this change in attitude was not essentially driven by a change in cultural values and was not necessarily sustainable,<sup>325</sup> as a relaxation in gender norms did not equal actual change in the gender norms.<sup>326</sup> The findings in chapter V will explore this dimension of instability through analysing feedback from the surveys and interviews with Yemeni women leaders.

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<http://apwld.org/wpcontent/uploads/2013/09/claiming-rights-claiming-justice.pdf>, (accessed 17 November 2018).

<sup>322</sup> P. Petesch, *The clash*, op. cit.

<sup>323</sup> C. Y. O. Cruz, 'Empowerment of women during conflict and post-conflict phases and the role of humanitarian aid organizations in supporting women's newfound empowerment gained during conflict', Master thesis, University of Geneva, Geneva, 2016, [https://www.cerahgeneve.ch/files/3615/2180/3727/MAS\\_Dissertation\\_Constanza\\_Ortega\\_Dissertation\\_FINALupdated\\_for\\_website.pdf](https://www.cerahgeneve.ch/files/3615/2180/3727/MAS_Dissertation_Constanza_Ortega_Dissertation_FINALupdated_for_website.pdf), (accessed 17 November 2018).

<sup>324</sup> M. Heinze & M. Baabbad, *Women nowadays do anything. Women's role in conflict, peace and security in Yemen*, Saferworld, 2017, <https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/1125-awomen-nowadays-do-anything-a-womenas-role-in-conflict-peace-and-security-in-yemen>, (accessed 17 November 2018).

<sup>325</sup> S. Herbert, *Links between women's empowerment (or lack of) and outbreaks of violent conflict*, GSDRC Helpdesk report 1169, Birmingham, UK, GSDRC, University of Birmingham, 2014, p. 8,

<http://gsdrc.org/docs/open/hdq1170.pdf>, (accessed 17 November 2018). And M. M. Hughes, 'Armed conflict, international linkages, and women's parliamentary representation in developing nations', *Social Problems*, 56(1), 2009.

<sup>326</sup> Muñoz Boudet, Petesch & Turk, op. cit.

### 7.3. The culture of political support

Political support is a structural factor that affects women leaders' success as it concerns their professional, political and institutional environment(s). It is defined as political support from authorities for the women's empowerment through endorsement of empowerment policies as a national priority, as well as direct support for the women leaders responsible for implementing these policies. From a structural point of view, the culture of political support could be understood as the socio-political environment surrounding women leaders in their work place. This environment could enable or disable women leaders and therefore influence the success of the women's empowerment policies they are involved in. As explained earlier in the section on the agency-structure framework, for the empowerment process to be successful, institutional and non-institutional structures need to be enabling and strengthening of a person's agency or ability to do better.<sup>327</sup>

Equally important, local structures should provide access-to-resources opportunities for empowerment to occur.<sup>328</sup> In this context, political support represents the structures surrounding women leaders that strengthen – or weaken – their agency and dictate their access to resources and opportunities. It must be mentioned at this point that there is an existing term in the Arabic political literature that describes this concept of 'culture of political support'. This is known as 'al-Iradah al-Siyasiyah'<sup>329</sup> literally translated as 'political will',<sup>330</sup> however, using the literal translation of this term in English does not do justice to the inclusive meaning of the term in its original context, and therefore the use of the 'culture of political support' in this research.

Furthermore, in terms of the socio-political environment of women leaders working in the government sector, the culture of political support includes four key dimensions: the influence of the patriarchal culture on formal institutions; the attitude of

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<sup>327</sup> Ibrahim & Alkire op. cit. P. 9.

<sup>328</sup> Muñoz Boudet, Petesch & Turk, op. cit., p. 140.

<sup>329</sup> Y. Alkhaza'leh, 'Political reform & political will to change In Jordan 2010-2013', *Al-Manarah*, vol. 21, no. 3, 2015, p. 185. pp. 181-220, <https://eis.hu.edu.jo/deanshipfiles/pub111777265.pdf>, (accessed 19 November 2018).

<sup>330</sup> However, there are some debates as to the meaning of Political Will in the collective sense in the English political literature. See for example, D. W. Brinkerhoff, 'Unpacking the concept of political will to confront corruption', *U4 Brief*, 2010, <https://brage.bibsys.no/xmlui/handle/11250/2474682>, (accessed 19 November 2018).

authoritarian regimes towards gender equality; the design of gender policies in terms of redistribution of social power; and political decision making and women's resistance.

**a) The influence of the patriarchal culture on formal institutions**

Despite representing an elite group, decision makers are in essence part of the larger Yemeni community and hence, are influenced by the dominant social values and traditions. Their interest in gender equality and women's empowerment therefore, would be a result of a combination of their personal beliefs, obligations to their political position as authority figures, and their interaction with influencing forces locally and internationally. This influence becomes problematic when the decision makers' personal beliefs are in contradiction with their alleged commitment to gender equality. This discordance becomes clearly visible in state institutions where women leaders work and try to push forward the women agenda, withstanding the resistance they face from male colleagues and the political culture in which they operate, as will be demonstrated in Chapter V.

One of the aspects of the gender dynamics in institutions is concerned with the proportionality of women and men in high level positions, since women's access to decision making is limited in the first place<sup>331</sup> in societies where gender inequality is dominant. Appadurai (2004)<sup>332</sup> noted that this context dictates the recognition of a woman's entitlement to decision making. Therefore, women are essentially excluded from domains which are instrumental in defining the rules, the norms, and accepted practices, which makes them a minority in high level leadership circles. "The notion of the normal has been monopolized by men. The overall societal norm is male; moreover, it is a particular sort of masculinity ("hegemonic" as Connell [1987]<sup>333</sup> terms it) that is regarded as normal."<sup>334</sup>

Furthermore, regardless of the text of the law and institutional regulations governing gender relations, social norms and traditions dominate in Yemen even in legal and

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<sup>331</sup> D. L. Rhode, *The difference "difference" makes: Women and leadership*, Stanford University Press, 2003.

<sup>332</sup> Appadurai, op. cit.

<sup>333</sup> Connell, op. cit.

<sup>334</sup> Muñoz Boudet, Petesch & Turk, op. cit., p. 35.

institutional contexts.<sup>335</sup> As a general rule, informal institutions, which are the reflection of traditions, cultural values, social norms, and beliefs governing men and women's acceptable social roles, influence all sorts of institutions. These cultural reference systems "interlock with civic institutions, the institutions of the state, the market, and intra-household bargaining dynamics to shape and sometimes reinforce the gender inequities of power—and impact the choices and freedom of women and girls."<sup>336</sup> Gender norms affect decision-making not only at the family and personal levels, but also publicly through affecting the way markets and institutions operate.<sup>337</sup>

### **b) The attitude of authoritarian regimes towards gender equality**

When researching gender policies in any country it is important to keep in mind the type of state itself – being a democracy or not – and its relation to its citizens. Since my research focuses on the Yemeni state, it is useful to provide a brief overview of the political context in regard to gender policies and why I have chosen the authoritarian regime dimension within the culture of political support factor. The fact is that last three decades witnessed intense pressures for democratisation in the Middle East in general, a concept mostly promoted by western developed nations.<sup>338</sup> Among these pressures, the issue of gender equality has emerged more recently as a part of the human rights perquisite for democracy. The reaction to these pressures differs from country to country, and in cultures that are dominated by patriarchal values, gender has become "a key marker of potential cultural instability and democratisation."<sup>339</sup> Conservative Arab countries such as Yemen have been continuously weary of the western-enforced values, especially those concerning women, and therefore, cultural and even political resistance occurred at different degrees throughout the last three decades. One example of this resistance is the states' tight control over personal status laws,<sup>340</sup> which signify

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<sup>335</sup> v Muñoz Boudet, Petesch & Turk, op. cit.

<sup>336</sup> Muñoz Boudet, Petesch & Turk, op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>337</sup> Muñoz Boudet, Petesch & Turk, op. cit., p. 210.

<sup>338</sup> A. Sreberny, 'Television, gender, and democratization in the Middle East', in J. Curran & M. Park, *De-Westernizing media studies*, 2000, Routledge, p. 57.

<sup>339</sup> Sreberny, op. cit. p. 66.

<sup>340</sup> These laws regulate marriage, divorce, custody of children, alimony, polygamy, inheritance, and even who has the upper-hand in the family.

gender power relations as “public manifestations of private issues,”<sup>341</sup> and the state’s endorsement of the patriarchal societal norms. Moreover, marital decisions reflect dominant social norms and gender power relations.<sup>342</sup>

However, it would be a mistake to generalise the attitude towards gender equality across the Arab region, as the Arab countries, despite their cultural and ethnic similarities, are different in terms of political systems and degree of conservativeness. Countries that are perceived more modern such as Tunisia and Lebanon have embraced gender equality and promoted women’s political participation in the pretext of democratisation and good governance. This is based on the belief that women’s “political participation results in tangible gains for democracy, including greater responsiveness to citizen needs, increased cooperation across party and ethnic lines and more sustainable peace.”<sup>343</sup> It is important to note that in these countries there is a strong feminist movement and women enjoy high levels of education.<sup>344</sup> Other countries, such as Egypt and Yemen, publically commit to such values in response to international pressures and that of their own civil societies, while indirectly undermining their commitment through enforcing conservative social roles.<sup>345</sup> There are some explanations as to why these differences towards gender issues occur across the region. Of these are: the balance or struggle between secular and Islamists traditional forces in each country, strength of relations with the United Kingdom and the United States of America, as well as influence of colonisation.<sup>346</sup> A testimony to this explanation in Yemen was during the 1988 elections, when even though it portrayed itself as a modern political party, the General People’s Congress let down its ambitious female members and surrendered to pressures from the extreme religious groups within and outside the party who issued a Fatwa<sup>347</sup> prohibiting women from being political candidates.<sup>348</sup> This

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<sup>341</sup> A. Rabo, ‘Gender, state and civil society in Jordan and Syria’, in E. Dunn & C. Hann (eds.), *Civil society: Challenging western models*, Routledge, 2004, p. 159.

<sup>342</sup> A. Malhotra, ‘Gender and the timing of marriage: Rural-urban differences in Java’, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 59 (2), 1997.

<sup>343</sup> S. Markham, *Women as agents of change: Having voice in society and influencing policy*, Women’s Voice, Agency and Participation Research Series 5, 2013, p. 7.

<sup>344</sup> At 99% (for youth between 15 and 24) in Lebanon and 96% in Tunisia. Source: UNICEF (2013), Info by Country.

<sup>345</sup> Sreberny, op. cit., p. 57.

<sup>346</sup> E. Kanner, ‘Some gendered aspects of the “Arab Spring”’, Department of Turkish and Modern Asian Studies, University of Athens, December 10-12, 2012, p. 703.

<sup>347</sup> According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, a Fatwa “is a formal ruling or interpretation on a point of Islamic law given by a qualified legal scholar (known as a mufti)”.

<sup>348</sup> S. P. Yadav & A. C. Clark, ‘Disappointments and new directions: women, partisanship, and the regime in Yemen’, *HAWWA: Journal of Women of the Middle East and the Islamic World*, 8 (1), 2010, p. 65.

trend, albeit more lenient today – considering the global progress in terms of women’s rights – is still being practiced when there is an event that could potentially challenge the social gender power relations.<sup>349</sup> Another indicating example was that whilst drafting the constitution for the ‘United Yemen’, political parties of the North and South agreed that when it comes to women’s rights, the social reality prevails, therefore, they did not delve much into the contentious details of gender equality.<sup>350</sup> Another example was the post-unification campaign<sup>351</sup> by rigid Islamists in Yemen to revise the relatively modern Personal Status Law, which was passed on from the legal system of the liberal south.<sup>352</sup> They succeeded in 1997 to pass 145 changes, among which was the ruling that only men’s testimony was accepted in court, and the removal of a minimum age for marriage, which was earlier set at 15.<sup>353</sup> As the politics of the Yemeni state became more defined through rapidly changing political alliances and struggle to dominate rivals, it became apparent that women’s rights and their empowerment became less prioritised even within liberal party structures such as the General People’s Congress and the Yemeni Socialist Party.<sup>354</sup> Likewise, in 2007, a group of religious scholars across various political parties – even rival parties in some cases – and independents organised themselves under the name of Fadhila<sup>355</sup> [translation: Virtue] and campaigned against the Yemeni women’s movement. That small yet rising women’s movement was demanding more freedoms for women and making efforts to influence the attitude of political leaders towards the feminist agenda. Concurrently, in its 2013 report on the progress of implementing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Women National Committee stated that there was an absence of “full desire to dedicate available

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<sup>349</sup> E. Strzelecka, ‘Gender and Islam in development policy and practice in Yemen,’ *Arabian Humanities, Revue internationale d’archéologie et de sciences sociales sur la péninsule Arabique/International Journal of Archaeology and Social Sciences in the Arabian Peninsula*, 1, 2013.

<sup>350</sup> E. Manea, *The Arab state and women’s rights: The trap of authoritarian governance*, Routledge Studies in Middle Eastern Politics, Taylor & Francis, 2010, p. 116.

<sup>351</sup> M. Molyneux, ‘Women’s rights and political contingency: The case of Yemen 1990-1994’, *Middle East Journal*, 49 (3), 1995.

<sup>352</sup> The PSL of the Republic of Yemen created in 1990 by unifying the conservative north and liberal south adopted many elements from the advanced PSL of the south. An issue that the conservatives in the north had a problem with.

<sup>353</sup> Yadav & Clark op. cit.

<sup>354</sup> Yadav & Clark op. cit.

<sup>355</sup> S. P. Yadav, ‘Antecedents of the revolution: Intersectoral networks and post-partisanship in Yemen’, *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 11(3), 2011.

resources to achieve gender equality objectives, because of the spread of corruption and domination of politics on official strategies.”<sup>356</sup>

Consequently, it could be argued<sup>357</sup> that authoritarian regimes, because of their struggle to survive, maintain a gender biased attitude against women, even those in positions of power, in order to appease the traditional and religious forces supporting those regimes. In other words, these regimes do not consider women’s real empowerment that disturbs the gender social roles and power relations a serious political objective. Manea (2012) argued that Yemen’s ruling elite’s constant struggle for survival, their need for the support of the religious and traditional powers, and the fact that the regime is authoritarian by nature, do not allow for a systematic progressive course for gender politics, whereby regimes even go as far as work against their previously declared commitments to women.<sup>358</sup> “At best, the political parties have treated women’s agendas as largely superfluous to wider party concerns, and, at worst, debates about the role of women within the partisan system have threatened the internal integrity of parties and their relationships with one another.”<sup>359</sup> A counter argument to this explanation was that twentieth century Middle Eastern states espoused feminism in state policy as a reaction to the traditional elite’s authority since the politicisation of gender “has usually been central to the legitimacy formulas of ruling elites in the modern Middle East.”<sup>360</sup> Although this might be true to Middle Eastern countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, and Tunisia, in the case of Yemen, since the ruling elite are usually part of the traditional system, this explanation does not fit.

That being said, authoritarian or undemocratic regimes have to fulfil their desire to belong to the global democracy, while maintaining good relations with the traditional forces that could internally destabilise them. Therefore, the political associations within the Yemeni political system are ephemeral in the sense that they are rapidly shifting

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<sup>356</sup> Women National Committee, *Altaqreer alwaṭani limustawa tanfeeth ‘i’alan wa minhaj ‘amal Beijing +20 [The national report for progress in implementing the declaration and platform of action Beijing+20]*, Supreme Council for Women, 2015, p. 16.

<sup>357</sup> Manea, op. cit., p. 116.

<sup>358</sup> Manea, ibid.

<sup>359</sup> Yadav & Clark, op. cit., p. 56.

<sup>360</sup> A. R. Norton, et. al., ‘Gender, politics and the state: What do Middle Eastern women want?’, *Middle East Policy*, 5 (3), 1997, p. 156.

according to political trends and interests,<sup>361</sup> and this continuous shifting impacts women's empowerment as the players keep changing. In a way, this means that the "Arab authoritarian state is neither liberal nor patriarchal in the way it pursues its gender politics. Rather, it is opportunistic, acting always in a Machiavellian manner."<sup>362</sup> Which, in itself could be seen as an opportunity for women's movement in Yemen since it is not against ideology per se, but rather based on political interests, or simply put, a power struggle. An indication of this was that during the civil war years between 1962 and 1970 in North Yemen, five different constitutions were promulgated, and each had a different position towards women's rights reflecting the fluctuating politics of the time.<sup>363</sup>

### **c) The design of gender policies in terms of redistribution of social power**

As explained earlier, Yemen as a state, finds itself in a conflicting reality between its conservative traditional nature and its attempt to present itself as a modern democracy that empowers women. Consequently, women's empowerment efforts by policy makers, while visibly publicised as gender equality initiatives in line with the country's portrayed democratic aspirations, reflect the policymakers' backgrounds and their predispositions towards social gender-power relations. Keeping in mind that they themselves, are part of the gender-power-relations system at the institutional level, and at the personal level in their private lives. This contradiction was reflected in the gender policies in terms of content and sustainability. Many of the women's empowerment projects in Yemen, as will be detailed in chapter IV, were development-based and aimed at achieving short term goals with measurable indicators, mostly relating to access to resources. Equally important, a measurement of policy success is directly relevant to how the policy objectives are translated into processes and action plans.<sup>364</sup> To this end, plans that were not based on an integrated approach of the issue in hand, were considered a failure or partially successful at best.

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<sup>361</sup> These trends depend not only on local factors but more so on international factors such as the war against terrorism and the consequences of the Arab Spring.

<sup>362</sup> Manea, op cit., p. 7.

<sup>363</sup> Manea, ibid.

<sup>364</sup> Newman, op. cit.

Simultaneously, while the state and its institutions internally<sup>365</sup> maintained a conservative attitude toward gender equality, Yemen's growing – yet still relatively weak - civil society, increasingly created pressure in the last two decades on the state to improve the situation of women.<sup>366</sup> Most of these nongovernmental organisations were supported by international donors who were concerned with Yemeni women's conditions. Those donors put pressure on the Yemeni state directly through its bilateral relations and indirectly by supporting change agents from within the country.<sup>367</sup> Consequently, the Yemeni state portrayed a positive position toward women's empowerment and gender equality by granting women political rights, signing international conventions and implementing national policies, and appointing women in positions of power. At the forefront of the women-related international conventions is the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which was ratified by south Yemen in 1984, and endorsed by the united Yemen in 1990. Yet the various reports on the country's implementation of any of the international agreements it ratifies, often indicate that there is lack of political support needed to truly implement those agreements and hence improve the situation of women in Yemen.<sup>368</sup>

Similarly, Article (6) of the Yemeni constitution states that: “The Republic of Yemen confirms its adherence to the UN Charter, the International Declaration of Human Rights, the Charter of the Arab League, and Principles of international Law, which are generally recognised. However, there have not been any real efforts to integrate

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<sup>365</sup> Internally refers to the local implications of laws and state related projects, compared to the internationally presented attitude towards women which is more modern and open.

<sup>366</sup> Freedom House, *Women's rights in the Middle East and North Africa 2010 - Yemen*, 3 March 2010, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4b99011b1a.html>, (accessed 7 November 2016).

<sup>367</sup> S. Carapico, 'Foreign aid for promoting democracy in the Arab World', *Middle East Journal*, 56(3), 2002, pp. 379-395; D. A. McMurray & A. Ufheil-Somers, *The Arab revolts: Dispatches on militant democracy in the Middle East*, Indiana University Press, 2013; M. Badran, *feminists, Islam, and nation: Gender and the making of modern Egypt*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1995; I. Jad, 'The NGO-isation of Arab women's movements', *International Development Studies Bulletin*, 35 (4), 2004, pp. 34–42.

<sup>368</sup> See for example: E. Verner, 'Child marriage in Yemen: A violation of international law', *Georgia Journal of International & Comparative Law*, 43(3), 2015, pp.759-783; K. Alaimo, 'Increased efforts by modern states to improve their reputations for enforcing women's Human Rights', *International Journal of Communication*, 10 (20), 2016, pp. 2481–2500; E. Strzelecka, 'Gender and Islam in development policy and practice in Yemen', *Arabian Humanities, International Journal of Archaeology and Social Sciences in the Arabian Peninsula*, 2013; Amnesty International, 'Yemen: Ratification Without Implementation : the State of Human Rights in Yemen', 1997.

international conventions in the national legal system from a practical perspective.<sup>369</sup> This was the case despite demands from NGOs advocating for equal citizenship,<sup>370</sup> as well as researchers and gender activists who emphasised that the government should conform national laws to international legislations supporting women, especially the CEDAW.<sup>371</sup>

The only declared governmental initiative<sup>372</sup> to do so, was in 2004 when the cabinet issued the Prime Minister's decree No. (29)/2004 to create a national committee whose task was to review Yemeni legislation and compare it with ratified international treaties. However, this committee was never created despite another official reminder five years later in November 2009 in a report<sup>373</sup> by Human Rights Ministry.

Moreover, the international donor community took it upon its responsibility to support the Yemeni government in achieving its development goals concerning women both technically and financially. For example, in order to improve women's access to economic opportunity, the government of the Netherlands in cooperation with International Labour Organisation created and funded a capacity building project on Decent Work and Gender Equality, as part of the Decent Work Country Programme (2008-2010) worth USD 7.7 mln,<sup>374</sup> for the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour in 2009. Another example was the training guide on gender responsive budgeting developed by Women National Committee with support from Oxfam and GIZ, and which was approved by the Ministry of Finance and included in the curricula of the Finance Institute in 2012.<sup>375</sup>

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<sup>369</sup> For example, the sixth periodic report on the government of Yemen's CEDAW implementation indicated concern that although Yemen ratified the Convention significant parts of the Yemeni legislation is contradictory to the Convention... and that this raises the question of Yemen's true commitment to the convention.

<sup>370</sup> Manea, E., 'Yemen', in S. Kelly & J. Breslin (eds.), *Women's rights in the Middle East and North Africa: progress amid resistance*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010.

<sup>371</sup> Basha, A. 'Yemen', in S. Nazir & L. Tomppert, *Women's rights in the Middle East and North Africa: citizenship and justice*, Freedom House, Oxford, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005, p. 341.

<sup>372</sup> The Women National Committee created its own team of legal consultants who reviewed Yemeni laws in terms of women's rights and gender issues comparing them to international conventions on women.

<sup>373</sup> Ministry of Human Rights, *Republic of Yemen's Report (17,18) on level of implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)*, November 2009, Government of Yemen.

<sup>374</sup> Republic of Yemen, *Decent Work Country Programme 2008-2010*, International Labour Organisation and Republic of Yemen, 2008.

<sup>375</sup> Decrees of the Supreme Council for Women's meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2012.

Similarly, in order to address the financing need of the Yemeni government to achieve the Education for All (Millennium Development Goal No. 2) by 2015, Yemen was selected to be in the first group of ten countries to receive financing from the Education For All Fast Track Initiative (FTI) Catalytic Fund.<sup>376</sup> Additionally, there were several projects aiming at improving the capacity of public servants working in women's health, and relevant projects were continuously funded by donors, especially the World Health Organisation that spent millions of dollars in the duration between 2006 and 2011 promoting women and reproductive health in joint projects with the Ministry of Health. It must be clarified that accurate estimations of the total foreign aid spent on women's health in Yemen does not exist since international organisations and embassies are not legally obliged to disclose their expenditure to the Yemeni government beyond the signing of intention protocols. Moreover, the Yemeni government did not keep updated records on its public spending due to political instability, lack of capacity, and lack of transparency, and therefore, much of the statistical data since 2006 are inconsistent and unreliable.<sup>377</sup>

In terms of technical support and identification of the legal barriers to women's empowerment, the UNFPA supported the Women National Committee through teams of experts to identify discriminatory articles against women in Yemeni laws. However, even though the laws were identified, only a few of them were actually amended, which indicated a strong resistance by the majority of Members of Parliament to eliminate discrimination against women in laws and regulations.

As such, there was never a shortage in pledged money to support Yemen's development. For example, the 2012 donors' conference pledged around USD 7.9 bln, and the previous donors' conference on Yemen in 2006 pledged USD 5.7 bln, yet little of this money was actually used. One of the Yemeni government's most recent efforts to deal with this issue was the creation of the Mutual Accountability Framework, which

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<sup>376</sup> International Bank of Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank and the Republic of Yemen, *Republic of Yemen, Education Status Report: Challenges and opportunities*, Middle East and North Africa Region, World Bank, 2010, p. 23.

<sup>377</sup> Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, *Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under articles 16 and 17 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Yemen*, United Nations Economic and Social Council, 2014.

emerged from the 2012 donors conference,<sup>378</sup> whereby both the Yemeni government and donors recognised the need for an independent technical body, later known as the Executive Bureau, to monitor government policy reforms and support its capacity building on the one hand, and monitor donors' pledges and their commitment to Yemen on the other.

Nevertheless, there is a difference between building a road that could improve women's access to markets and the increase in their agency at home, as the degree of empowerment through increased agency is highly dependent on context and norms that govern the gender relations both in public and private spheres.<sup>379</sup> This is to say that the daily practices in the society maintain gender norms, which in turn usually serve the best interests of the gender group that holds more power (in this case men),<sup>380</sup> even though there might be visible changes in the larger structures of the society through infrastructure and opportunities for men and women.

Furthermore, while agency manifested through choices is inherently subjective, it is dependent on opportunity structures and resources available, but equally important, it is subject to the prevalent norms that shape preferences. In conservative male dominated societies, "culturally produced dispositions, beliefs, and behaviors" operate as "constraining preferences."<sup>381</sup> Which in turn reflect the potential of a woman's failure or success given that the social structure favours men, reducing by that women's ability to utilise available opportunities. Content wise, therefore, although women's empowerment policies can be created and implemented, their success in empowering women becomes highly dependent on the extent these policies address the underlying causes of gender inequality.

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<sup>378</sup> Abo al-Asrar, F., *Myopic solutions to chronic problems: The need for aid effectiveness in Yemen*, Center on Democracy, Development & The Rule of Law Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, Stanford University, 2013.

<sup>379</sup> Muñoz Boudet, Petesch & Turk, op. cit., p. 37.

<sup>380</sup> Muñoz Boudet, Petesch & Turk, op. cit., p. 34

<sup>381</sup> V. Rao & M. Walton (eds.), *Culture and public action*, Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 2004, p. 15.

#### d) Political decision making and women's resistance

A dynamic of the Yemeni political culture is its relation to the pressures from stakeholders including social movements. As explained in the previous sections, the state is influenced by traditional forces such as tribes, religious groups, political parties, and to a smaller extent civil society. When it comes to gender equality, research<sup>382</sup> showed that post-political transition of democratisation processes, women's gains are sustainable only when women's movements are considerably strong. That there is a positive correlation between the quality of democracy and women's ability to push forward their feminism agenda within the political system.

Therefore, by comparison, the popularity of women's movement in Yemen and its success depends on the genuine political space the feminism cause has in the country. In return, the stronger the movement is in using political discursive strategies<sup>383</sup> to put pressure on decision makers, the more space it can gain in the political system. Moreover, as is the nature of social movements dictates, they are heavily dependent on community mobilisation and popular support for their mission, although their existence and success is dependent on a very complex mesh of factors.<sup>384</sup>

The problem with gender equality and women's empowerment in Yemen is that they are still controversial issues and hence, there is a visible disconnect between on the one hand, the women leaders and feminist pioneers – who represent the educated elite influenced by western movements<sup>385</sup> – and the majority of the Yemeni population including the average Yemeni woman on the other hand.<sup>386</sup> In a way, women's empowerment and gender equality in the broad sense are still considered foreign concepts. Many Yemeni female activists in the last two decades found themselves either forced to abandoned their feminine nature<sup>387</sup> in order to be taken seriously in the

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<sup>382</sup> Okeke–Ihejirika & Franceschet op. cit., p. 442.

<sup>383</sup> Okeke–Ihejirika, loc. cit.

<sup>384</sup> A. Escobar, *The making of social movements in Latin America: Identity, strategy, and democracy*, Routledge, 2018.

<sup>385</sup> P. Arenfeldt & N. A. Golley, *Mapping Arab women's movements: a century of transformations from within*, I.B. Tauris, 2012.

<sup>386</sup> A. M. Alsharjabi, A. M., 'Yemeni women's rights: a struggle between gender, Gulden and Genderma', *Assafir Alarabi*, May 29, 2013, <http://arabi.assafir.com/article.asp?aid=925>, (accessed 25 July 2016).

<sup>387</sup> The Yemeni culture attributes male characteristics to a strong achieving women, claiming by that the credit of a woman's achievement to the male gender. Many statements such as "She is as clever as a man," or "A woman equal to a thousand moustaches", are examples of this.

public life or alternatively disappear in the mainstream political world of men channelling their political contribution through the larger male-dominated political organisations they affiliate with. Women who choose a third alternative of celebrating their feminine nature and yet dare to be visible are perceived as scandalous and risk being rejected by the society.<sup>388</sup>

Additionally, Yemeni feminists, in their advocacy campaigns in the last two decades, focused on visible political and public participation of women especially the demand for a 30% quota in decision making positions.<sup>389</sup> Even with the visible participation of Yemeni women in the Arab Spring of 2011, protests including sit-in areas were highly organised, mostly controlled by men, and gender segregated to a large extent.<sup>390</sup>

Consequently, feminist pioneers find themselves fighting two battles; one with the political culture, and the other with the traditional community that requires its women to conform to established societal norms. Research indicated that in societies there is a reciprocal expectation of conformity<sup>391</sup> whereby individuals conform with dominant social norms while simultaneously expecting others to do the same. To this end, Bicchieri and Chavez<sup>392</sup>(2010) provide three conditions for social norms to become dominant: first, the belief that the norm is widely popular and is followed by a large segment of the society; second, reciprocal expectation of conformity which not only obliges the individual to conform but he or she expects others to conform as well; third, empirical and normative expectations are enforced by the society through approval of conformity and potential sanctioning of transgressors.

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<sup>388</sup> N. Alzubair, 'Siyasat iqsa' alnisa' min almawaqi' al'dariyah wa alsiyasiyah: Ro'yah saikalojiyah' [A psychological perspective on discrimination against women in political and managerial positions], *The Second and Third Democratic Forum: women and politics – Religious perspectives, problems and solutions*, organized by Sisters Arab Forum in Sana'a on September 14, 2004 and in Aden on December 23, 2004.

<sup>389</sup> B. AbuOsba, 'Takhseeş hişaş lilnisa' (alkota).. almafhoom, altajarub wa alishkaliyat' [The quota system: concept, examples and challenges], *The Second and Third Democratic Forum: women and politics – Religious perspectives, problems and solutions*, organized by Sisters Arab Forum in Sana'a on September 14, 2004 and in Aden on December 23, 2004.

<sup>390</sup> N. Al-Sakkaf, 'Yemen's women and the quest for change', *Political Participation after the Arab Revolution*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2012.

<sup>391</sup> C. Bicchieri, *The grammar of society: The nature and dynamics of social norms*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 15.

<sup>392</sup> Muñoz Boudet, Petesch & Turk, op. cit., p. 34.

This behavioural aspect of social relations is important for the understanding of gender roles and expectations as argued by feminist theorists.<sup>393</sup> It is understood that men are the socially dominant gender that creates and controls gender norms. Therefore, men's domination over women as a matter of control is not because they are different genders, but rather because of the power levels ascribed to those two genders. Carole Pateman (1988) claimed that the "patriarchal construction of the difference between masculinity and femininity is the political difference between freedom and subjection."<sup>394</sup> Therefore, women's movements in traditional societies are considered a form of resistance to this domination and a rejection of societal conformity. Allen<sup>395</sup> (1998) suggested that feminist empowerment theorists should describe women's resistance to men's domination as a form of empowerment. She defined resistance as "the ability of an individual actor to attain an end or series of ends that serve to subvert domination."<sup>396</sup> This form of empowerment is based on the power-to manifestation of power as in the ability to influence change. Women's resistance also includes another manifestation, which is the power-with in terms of solidarity. It is the form of collective power that binds women's movements, as a group of women work together to achieve a common goal concerning removing a form of male domination over women.<sup>397</sup> These acts of resistance can rise in the personal spheres where acts of insubordination and complaining about gender inequalities are considered "weapons of the weak."<sup>398</sup> Women learn from each other and resort to various tactics to bargain for more influence within the family.<sup>399</sup>

Nevertheless, the situation of Yemeni women's movement shows that it is weak and has many challenges<sup>400</sup> leaving women vulnerable to the political manipulations of the patriarchal system. Another compounding factor that weakens today's feminism in Yemen is that existing political women leaders seem to be disorganised in their work,

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<sup>393</sup> See Dworkin, *Pornography*, op. cit.; MacKinnon, op. cit.; Held, op. cit.; Okin, *Justice*, op. cit.

<sup>394</sup> Pateman, *The sexual contract*, op. cit. p. 207.

<sup>395</sup> Allen, op. cit., p. 34.

<sup>396</sup> Allen, op. cit., p. 35.

<sup>397</sup> Allen, loc. cit.

<sup>398</sup> J. C. Scott, *Weapons of the weak: Everyday forms of resistance*, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1985.

<sup>399</sup> B. Agarwal, "Bargaining' and gender relations: Within and beyond the household,' *Feminist Economics*, 3(1), 1997, p. 18.

<sup>400</sup> M. Badran, 'Unifying women: Feminist pasts and presents in Yemen', *Gender and History*, 10 (3), 1998, pp. 498–518.

Yadav & Janine, op. cit., p. 63.

therefore, their ability to create national alliances and networks falters. The general landscape of women's movement remains fragmented.<sup>401</sup> Consequently, Yemeni feminist pioneers find themselves preferring to work in the non-governmental sector away from the political system "that has valued their votes more than their voices...a choice that runs the risk of exacerbating some of the limits that they encounter under prevailing political conditions."<sup>402</sup>

Therefore, while at the surface the Yemeni political culture seems to provide space for women's empowerment and endorse gender equality, a significant challenge to achieving this comes from the society itself and its support - or lack thereof - for women's rights.

## **8. Yemeni women in the empowerment literature**

Based on the concepts described in this chapter and the literature described above on women and power, gender politics, and authoritarian state policies towards women, this thesis presents new findings and contributes to the literature of gender politics in countries such as Yemen. A review of existing research on Yemeni women's empowerment indicates a gap in the literature regarding qualitative research like the one in hand, through which I aim to provide new perspectives on the politics of women's empowerment policies in Yemen. Below, I present an overview of some of the prominent works available in the literature on Yemeni women's empowerment.

As it is, the issue of women's empowerment has long been one of the development priorities internationally, especially after the Beijing Conference in 1995 on women. Although, this was the United Nations' fourth world conference on women, what distinguished this conference was that it concluded with the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action,<sup>403</sup> which was endorsed by the United Nations' Assembly. Since

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<sup>401</sup> J. A. Raja, 'Yemeni women in transition: Challenges and opportunities', CDDRL Working Papers 140, Center on Democracy, Development, and The Rule of Law, Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, Stanford University, [https://cddrl.fsi.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/Number\\_140\\_Yemen.pdf](https://cddrl.fsi.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/Number_140_Yemen.pdf), (accessed 25 July 2017).

<sup>402</sup> Yadav & Clark, op. cit.

<sup>403</sup> Text of the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action:  
<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf>

then, the United Nations development agencies and other international organisations carried out women's empowerment projects around the world based on empirical research that focused on the many strategic objectives of the declaration. These strategic objectives included dealing with women and poverty, education, health, violence, power, environment, conflict, media, and even issues concerning young girls. Therefore, the bulk of empirical research done on Yemeni women's empowerment was driven by development objectives in order to provide measurable solutions to a complex problem.

To begin with, there were several statistical indicators created by development and specialised agencies in order to assess women's status and compare it to men. The Global Gender Gap Index designed by the World Economic Forum, which is used as a starting point in this thesis, is one of such indicators. The Economist Intelligence Unit created another indicator called 'The Women's Economic Opportunities Index'.<sup>404</sup> This index measured 26 indicators, and placed Yemen at number 112 among 113 countries. It also scored Yemeni women last in terms of level of income. Another similar index is the United Nations Development Programme's Gender Inequality Index introduced in 2010. In its 2017 report, the Gender Inequality Index for Yemen was 160, which was the highest in the list of countries. This index "measures gender inequalities in three important aspects of human development—reproductive health, measured by maternal mortality ratio and adolescent birth rates; empowerment, measured by proportion of parliamentary seats occupied by females and proportion of adult females and males aged 25 years and older with at least some secondary education; and economic status, expressed as labour market participation and measured by labour force participation rate of female and male populations aged 15 years and older."<sup>405</sup>

Similarly, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development designed the 'Social Institutions and Gender Index' in 2014, in which Yemen was described as a country with high prejudice against women,<sup>406</sup> in terms of discrimination by social

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<sup>404</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit, *Women's economic opportunity: A new global index and ranking*, Economist Intelligence Unit Publication, 2010.

<sup>405</sup> United Nations Development Programme, Gender Inequality Index, United Nations, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/gender-inequality-index-gii>, (accessed 16 August 2017).

<sup>406</sup> OECD Development Center, *Social Institutions and Gender: Country profile Yemen Index, 2014*, <http://www.genderindex.org/country/yemen>, (accessed 16 August 2017).

institutions including laws. In its 2019 update, Yemen's gender discrimination was reported to be worse as the country was categorised as "having very high levels of gender discrimination in social institutions."<sup>407</sup> The Social Institutions and Gender Index measured indicators relating to discrimination in the family code, restrictions in physical integrity such as violence and harassment, son bias which means intra-house treatment of boys compared to girls, restriction in accessing resources and assets, and finally, restrictions in civil liberties.

In addition to statistical indices, considerable quantitative research on Yemeni women was carried out. One of the earliest empirical analysis of the situation of women in the Arab world was that by Khoury & Moghadam<sup>408</sup> (1995) who focused on women's employment and contribution to national economic development. In this publication a chapter by Lackner<sup>409</sup> was dedicated to understanding the state's gender policies in North Yemen and South Yemen and predicted the direction of state policies in the united Yemen. It discussed a number of variables: political involvement, women's legal status, participation in the labour force, and access to education and healthcare. Using statistical indicators produced by the governments of south Yemen and north Yemen, she demonstrated that the status of women in the south is better than that in the north. Another research by Carapico<sup>410</sup> (1996) described the status of women not only in the context of social and political developments in the late 80s and early 90s but also as development of services such as electricity, roads, education started progressing in the Yemeni society.

Moreover, since Yemen is one of the least developed countries in the world, there have been several focused development-oriented studies on specific aspects of women's empowerment such as early marriage, sexual abuse, violence against women, and legal discrimination. For example, a 2010 violence-against-women country assessment<sup>411</sup>

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<sup>407</sup> OECD Development Center, *Social Institutions and Gender: Country profile Yemen Index, 2019*, <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/YE.pdf>, (accessed 30 January 2019).

<sup>408</sup> N. F. Khoury & V. M. Moghadam (eds.), 'Gender and development in the Arab world: women's economic participation: patterns and policies', United Nations University Press, 1995.

<sup>409</sup> H. Lackner, Women and development in the Republic of Yemen, in N. F. Khoury & V. M. Moghadam, *Gender and Development in the Arab World: Women's Economic Participation: Patterns and Policies*, United Nations University Press, 1995.

<sup>410</sup> S. Carapico, 'Gender and status inequalities in Yemen: honour, economics, and politics', in V. M. Moghadam, *Patriarchy and development: Women's positions at the end of the twentieth century*, Oxford University Press, 1996.

<sup>411</sup> UN, *Country assessment on violence against women: Case of Yemen*, United Nations, 2010.

reviewed government policies as well as empirical research and statistical indicators to determine the prevalence of violence against women in Yemen. The study concluded that in addition to discriminatory social norms, there are loopholes in at least 61 laws that should be amended to ensure women's rights. Similarly, respondents to a 2011 survey<sup>412</sup> on traditional gender roles confirmed existence of gender based discrimination in the private sphere, and the strong influence of traditions on the attitudes toward women.

Furthermore, in 2014, the World Bank published a report<sup>413</sup> on the status of Yemeni women drawing on human development, socio-economic, and legal indicators along with qualitative findings from 2011. The report indicated that despite some progress in the past decade, evidence of gender disparity remains. This report used statistical data on gender gaps in education, healthcare, economic participation, and legal barriers resulting from surveys since 2005 onwards. Another report<sup>414</sup> published in 2015, explained how the previous indicators for women have worsened because of the armed conflict since 2014. It included further empirical data on women's displacement, participation and leadership, violence, poverty, and urgent need for humanitarian assistance. One of the relevant findings in this study was that even humanitarian aid in many instances has to be channelled through male guardians. Another research<sup>415</sup> published in 2015, was conducted to examine Yemeni women's decision making processes in terms of cash and food transfer compared to women in Ecuador and Uganda, concluded that Yemeni women enjoyed a lesser space in joint decision-making processes when it came to cash compared to food based on their accepted gender responsibilities in the household; again stressing the importance of social norms on economic agency.

A 2015 statistical research<sup>416</sup> on women in the Middle East, which included a research on Yemeni women, addressed the issues of women's dependency on men indicating

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<sup>412</sup> E. Schlaffer, et. al., *Fair share in Yemen: Capacity building for achieving the Millennium Development Goals*, Women Without Borders, 2011.

<sup>413</sup> N. Krishnan, *The status of Yemeni women: From aspiration to opportunity*, World Bank, Washington, DC, 2014.

<sup>414</sup> Interagency Standing Committee: Reference Group on Gender in Humanitarian Action, *Humanitarian crises in Yemen: Gender Alert*, UN Women, July 2015.

<sup>415</sup> A. Peterman, et. al., *Measuring women's decisionmaking: indicator choice and survey design experiments from cash and food transfer evaluations in Ecuador, Uganda, and Yemen*, 8 August 2015, IFPRI Discussion paper 1453.

<sup>416</sup> F. Torabi & M. J. Abbasi-Shavazi, 'Women's human capital and economic growth in the Middle East and North Africa', *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 16(3), 2015, pp. 237-261.

that for Yemen, the figures are of the highest in the Arab region. That for Yemeni women, lack of infrastructure contributes to women's economic dependence on men as well as prevalence of patriarchal systems.<sup>417</sup> The study included Large-N analysis of education, economic, health, and political participation variables. It concluded that improving women's education and health positively impacts their economic growth, and the general economic growth consequently.

Furthermore, there were a number of studies on Yemeni women touching on some aspects of their empowerment. For example, in her research,<sup>418</sup> Hurst (2012) attempted to explain the complexities of Yemeni women's public participation in recent times, and their strategies to challenge the socio-political systems. She described how public and political participation, although advocated as a contributing factor to improving women's situation in the feminist literature, was not necessarily the case for Yemeni women. The author indicated this through findings from her own interviews as well as secondary data. Hurst's used data from a Gallup 2012 poll, which surveyed women's participation in the 2011 political apprising. The countrywide poll demonstrated that 68% of women and 53% of men believed in equal legal rights, however, the author argued that this finding is not a true indicative of social change. Another statistical survey<sup>419</sup> conducted in 2010 showed that the social understanding of a woman's lack-of-capacity to lead others drives the general attitude toward women and their political/public life participation. This concurred with the argument also stated in the aforementioned research; that public participation in Yemen, despite visibility, is superficial and does not change the social gender power relations in the Yemeni society. Similarly, a study on gender assessment<sup>420</sup> and development in Yemen conducted in 2013, researched women's access to education, health, political participation, economic empowerment, water, sanitation, and hygiene, and identified barriers to development opportunities. Findings from this empirical research indicated that political participation of women was "for show" and not truly meaningful. In terms of economy,

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<sup>417</sup> Torabi & Abbasi-Shavazi, op. cit., p7.

<sup>418</sup> M. Hurst, 'Beyond Change Square: Expanding Yemeni women's participation in public life', Masters' thesis, Center for Development and Emergency Practice School of the Built Environment, Oxford Brookes University, 2012.

<sup>419</sup> Yemen Polling Centre, *What do Yemenis know about the Parliament? Public Knowledge and Awareness*, 2010.

<sup>420</sup> Fortune-Greeley, H. et. al., *Yemen Gender Assessment*, USAID, 2014.

the study showed that “patriarchal attitudes and low knowledge, illiteracy and lack of education among women meant that they often do not exercise – or are prevented from exercising – their economic rights.”<sup>421</sup> Correspondently, in terms of education, the study emphasised the striking gender gaps in access and completion of education at the various levels. The same study revealed that even in terms of diseases, women bear a disproportionate burden and are very disadvantaged when it comes to healthcare and wellbeing.

All the above are examples of existing research done on Yemeni women or on the women from the Arab world including Yemen. What is lacking in the literature on Yemeni gender politics is a critical look into the existing policies and examining the reasons behind their failure to empower women. My hypothesis built on what feminist theorists continuously advocate for in terms of social power transformation as means to women’s empowerment rather than political representation. Through interviewing women leaders, I explored the social norms’ spill-over from the culture to the political systems and institutions. My analysis exposed the reality of women leaders as both subjects and objects of the empowerment policies and puts these policies in perspective.

I contribute to the existing scholarship on Yemeni women’s empowerment by going beyond available and mostly statistical data analyses. Specifically, my thesis takes a different direction, one which is usually ignored. I argue that data analysis of statistical national surveys do not provide in-depth information on how women’s empowerment are affected by norms, which resist change, holding back women and presenting a barrier against gender equality.<sup>422</sup>

I aim at producing an in-depth presentation of the context of women’s empowerment, one which has not been done before. I contribute to the literature by presenting a new perspective on the politics of Yemeni women’s empowerment by bringing insights from the women’s empowerment champions of the country who were/are leading the feminism agenda, and thus, providing unprecedented insights relating to the politics gender equality in Yemen.

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<sup>421</sup> Fortune-Greeley, et. al., op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>422</sup> Muñoz Boudet, Petesch & Turk, op. cit., p. 210.

## **Chapter III:**

### **Methodology**

#### **1. Introduction**

This chapter describes the methodological approach adopted in the thesis. It starts by reviewing the two main ontological paradigms of knowledge and provides a justification from the researcher's point of view for the choice of research philosophy. This is explained through a brief overview of the positivist-humanist approaches and the spaces in-between. The methodology of this research is then explained within the larger context of the various research methods, followed by a description of the mixed-methods choice using surveys analysed using quantitative descriptive statistics and in-depth qualitative interviews.

Since this research seeks to explain the failure of gender policies in Yemen, the next chapter (Chapter IV) is dedicated to providing an overview of the various gender policies in Yemen, including women's empowerment projects conducted between 2006 and 2014 in the fields of health, education, and the economy. Therefore, policy mapping, which is the method used to carry out this review is detailed in this chapter. A careful mapping of the gender policies was necessary for the subsequent explanation of why they have failed. Through this mapping, information on gender policies in the country and their impact on women's empowerment is gathered. The success of women's empowerment projects is then evaluated drawing on a four-dimensional policy evaluation model.

In order to answer the research question as to why women's empowerment policies failed in Yemen in the timeframe mentioned above, an empirical study targeting women leaders was conducted. Women leaders were chosen as the population of this research because of their direct involvement in women's empowerment policies as decision makers in government bodies responsible for women's empowerment strategies, as well as because of their insights as Yemeni women at the frontier of the gender equality struggle in the country. The methods of surveys and elite interviews used to collect this empirical data are hence described, along with sampling techniques. Subsequently, the

following section describes the how reflexivity was adopted in this research. Considering my personal involvement in the feminist movement in the country I am researching, and I being one of the women leaders in the country, I am forced to take reflexive measures while working on this research. Finally, this chapter concludes with a section highlighting the scope of this academic work.

## 2. The positivists vs. interpretivists debate

In essence, when contemplating the philosophical approach to any political research, one must acknowledge the debates<sup>423</sup> in social science research between the positivists and the interpretivists when it comes to approaches, and between the qualitative versus the quantitative when it comes to methods. From an ontological and an epistemological perspectives, positivists believe that there is one truth independent of us and that knowledge must be acquired and proven through science, whereas, humanists believe that everything is relative and subject to interpretation, and that the truth is a construct of our interaction with reality. Ontologically, our understanding of reality as human beings is either understood objectively, i.e. a fixed truth independent of us, or constructively, i.e. a relative construct of our interactions with reality. The positivist approach, which is the theoretical perspective linked with objectivism is centred on objectivity, whereas the humanist approach linked with constructivism is centred on relativity.<sup>424</sup>

Furthermore, the understanding of knowledge itself and how it is acquired has significantly evolved over the years since positivism was recommended – as early as the beginning of nineteenth century – as *the* credible research approach in the social sciences.<sup>425</sup> It is fair to state that by now researchers realise that “there is no neural knowledge - divisions between objectivity and subjectivity, private or public knowledge, scientific and emotional knowledge, [as] all are socially constructed.”<sup>426</sup>

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<sup>423</sup> J. W. Creswell, *Research design. Qualitative and quantitative approaches*, London, Sage, 1994.

<sup>424</sup> D. E. Gray, *Doing research in the real world*, Sage, 2013.

<sup>425</sup> P. Baert, ‘Philosophy of the social sciences: Towards pragmatism’, *Polity*, 2005.

<sup>426</sup> M. N. Hasan, ‘Positivism: to what extent does it aid our understanding of the contemporary social world?’, *Quality & Quantity*, 50(1), 2016, 317-325, p. 332.

In all cases, the problem is not the differences between the various approaches to social research, as this is in fact, an advantage considering the variety of topics and disciplines; it is rather the mistrust and or misunderstanding at best between the two groups. However, eventually, the choice of research method is dependent on the research question itself, or as Beck<sup>427</sup> (2006) put it, “whether our interest is in finding some general law like statements or in explaining a particular event.”

To this end, Tessler, Nachtwey and Banda<sup>428</sup> (1999) explain how positivist discipline researchers favour a general theoretical approach in political theory and comparative politics to that of humanist specialist areas who focus on the particular politics of the researched region using anthropological approaches. Each side argues in favour of their philosophy as positivist oriented politics scholars accuse humanists such as area scholars of lacking rigor, and that their work is not scientific, overly descriptive, “lacks analytical cumulativeness, and shows no interest in parsimony and generalisation.”<sup>429</sup> In return, the positivists have been “charged with faddishness and oversimplification, with engaging in sterile debates about conceptual and theoretical frameworks, and with constructing highly abstract models that provide little real insight into the complex behavior patterns or events they purport to explain.”<sup>430</sup>

The three main questions<sup>431</sup> that needed to be answered in order to define my research philosophy were related to: my understanding of the nature of the object of study (ontology), my understanding of how to acquire knowledge about this object (epistemology), and the tools I am to use in order to acquire this knowledge (methodology). My research is on the concept of women’s empowerment, which is a complex concept, but in my opinion nevertheless, can be measured and compared. Therefore, while I agree that empowerment is relative and individual, my understanding of it agrees with a positivist approach in the sense that it exists in reality and can be acquired or removed from a person or a group. However, I also agree with the interpretivists notion that it is much more complicated and quantifying empowerment

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<sup>427</sup> N. Beck, ‘Is causal-process observation an oxymoron?’ *Political Analysis*, 10, 2006, p. 3.

<sup>428</sup> M. A. Tessler, J. Nachtwey & A. Banda, *Area studies and social science: Strategies for understanding Middle East Politics*, Indiana University press, 1999.

<sup>429</sup> Tessler, *Ibid.*

<sup>430</sup> Tessler, *op. cit.*, p. ix.

<sup>431</sup> P. Corbetta, *Social research: Theory, methods and techniques*, London, Sage, 2003, p. 12.

is a crude over-simplistic way and therefore, my findings are dependent on my take on the matter because of my personal experiences and the nature of data that I have managed to obtain. Here is where the epistemological question in my research becomes more complicated. Epistemology addresses the issue of how we learn, and how knowledge is acquired including sources and restrictions.<sup>432</sup> In terms of reaching conclusions some social scientists of the positivist approach demand objective evidence similar to that derived through the ‘scientific method’ in natural sciences, whereas other scientists of the humanist approach argue that this is not the only way to achieve knowledge.<sup>433</sup>

The later argument is especially true for feminist researchers who claim that objectivity is a myth and that all researchers have bias; that instead of claiming objectivity, researchers must make clear their preconceptions and describe how their findings were shaped by their own interpretations and interests.<sup>434</sup> Since my research falls in the cross section of political science research and feminism studies, it is influenced by the feminist approach and I personally find that my experiences of Yemeni women’s empowerment influence the entire direction and framing of my thesis. Therefore, while I subscribe to the need for identifying correlations between variables and the notion of causality, it is challenging to prove the dynamics of a social concept. Hence, in the case of a social phenomena, such as empowerment, it is very subjective especially across cultures and different contexts. This is understandable as many authors who engage in a feminist discourses in political research have “frequently drawn upon theoretical literature developed within psychology, literary theory, film theory, sociology and philosophy.”<sup>435</sup> Moreover, the feminism discourse espouses to the search and

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<sup>432</sup> P. D. Klein, ‘Epistemology’, in Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy Online, 2005, [www.rep.routledge.com/article/P059](http://www.rep.routledge.com/article/P059), (accessed 27 September 2018).

<sup>433</sup> D. Della Porta & M. Keating (eds.), *Approaches and methodologies in the social sciences: A pluralist perspective*. Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 22.

<sup>434</sup> L. M. Alcoff, ‘Phenomenology, post-structuralism, and feminist theory on the concept of experience’, in L. Fisher & L. Embree (eds.), *Feminist Phenomenology*, Vol 40, Springer, 2000. Also, D. E. McNabb, *Research methods for political science: Quantitative and qualitative methods*, Routledge, 2015.

<sup>435</sup> J. Squires, *Gender in political theory*, John Wiley & Sons, 2013, p. 14.

understanding of exceptions not regularities, the search for uniqueness rather than the general.<sup>436</sup>

My predicament is not new to the social science debate especially in the modern era, and a spectrum of positions in between the extreme positivist and the extreme humanist is full with various degrees of a mix of both sides. Therefore, in terms of research philosophy I find myself inclined to adopt a post-positivist approach. Post-positivists adopt the probabilistic approach to findings, and accept a degree of uncertainty in that our knowledge is influenced by us as scholars.<sup>437</sup>

### **Quantitative vs. qualitative**

In terms of methods, the philosophical divide is manifested in the debates between those who subscribe to the scientific method usually using *large-N* statistical analysis and those who favour qualitative analysis. Although it must be clarified that both philosophical approaches utilise a range of qualitative and quantitative methods,<sup>438</sup> however, the difference appears in conceptualisation of theories and analysis of the data collected through either or both of the quantitative and qualitative tools. Mahoney and Geertz's<sup>439</sup> attempt to contrast the quantitative and qualitative approaches in social research describing them as debates between two different cultures and recommend creating 'cross-cultural' communication. As it stands, most research benefits from a complimentary approach, where best of 'both worlds' can be utilised in order to understand a phenomenon. Increasingly, scholars<sup>440</sup> encouraged a mixed-method approach in the social sciences, where quantitative methods were used to analyse

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<sup>436</sup> Feminism as a discipline of humanism which "sometimes means an abiding appreciation and search of the unique." Bernard, H. R. & Gravlee, C. C. (eds.), *Handbook of methods in cultural anthropology*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2014, p. 6.

<sup>437</sup> Della Porta, op. cit., p. 22.

<sup>438</sup> On interpretivists use of quantitative analysis see for example: S. Babones, 'Interpretive quantitative methods for the social sciences', *Sociology*, 50(3), 2016, pp.453-469.

<sup>439</sup> J. Mahoney & G. Geertz, 'A tale of two cultures: Contrasting quantitative and qualitative research', *Political Analysis*, 14(3), 2006.

<sup>440</sup> See for example, M. Humphreys & A. Jacobs, *Mixing methods: A Bayesian integration of qualitative and quantitative inferences*, Department of Political Science, Columbia University, 2014. Also, E. S. Leiber, 'Nested analysis as a mixed-method strategy for comparative research', *American Political Science Review* 99 (7), 2005. And A. N. Glynn & N. Ichino, 'Using qualitative information to improve causal inference', *American Journal of Political Science*, 59(4), 2015.

qualitative data, or qualitative methods were integrated in field experiments. Moreover, there is a close relation between those two techniques in the social sciences as “any quantitative approach is underpinned by qualitative considerations and vice versa.”<sup>441</sup>

Understating the complexity of gender equality policies in Yemen requires more than statistical analysis of Yemeni women’s empowerment indicators, which is an approach already taken by many international development organisations. Therefore, using a mixed-methods approach provided a more comprehensive picture of the issue of women’s empowerment in Yemen and was particularly helpful considering the complexity of the research topic. The use of a mixed-methods approach was helpful for this kind of research on four levels; firstly, the use of multiple methods provided a more holistic and encompassing understanding of the researched issue.<sup>442</sup> It helped give context to the cause and effect relationships especially ones where the line between cause and effect was not very clear and/or an iterative cycle of cause and effect exists. For example, when it came to women’s empowerment, increased agency/capacity is considered a contributing cause to women’s empowerment, however, strong personal capacity/agency in the sense of one’s ability to decide for one’s self could be considered as an outcome of empowerment. Collecting data using more than one method reduced confusion and helped create a larger picture showing the various relationships between the factors at play.

Secondly, the mixed method approach was advocated for by researchers<sup>443</sup> as it brings in the strengths from both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Quantitative methods such as regression and *large-N* analysis, or even descriptive statistics – such as in the case of this research – have stronger reliability and larger coverage in terms of the research sample. They are broader in their outreach than qualitative interviews. The latter however, provided in-depth knowledge and details that could not be derived through surveys. In my research, I analysed survey findings applying quantitative descriptive statistics to show overall trends for a much larger N than the interview

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<sup>441</sup> I. Dieronitou, ‘The ontological and epistemological foundations of qualitative and quantitative approaches to research’, *International Journal of Economics*, 2(10), 2014.

<sup>442</sup> T. D. Jick, ‘Mixing qualitative and quantitative methods: Triangulation in action’, *Administrative science quarterly*, 24(4), 1979, p. 603.

<sup>443</sup> A. J. Onwuegbuzie & N. L. Leech, ‘On becoming a pragmatic researcher: The importance of combining quantitative and qualitative research methodologies’, *International journal of social research methodology*, 8(5), 2005.

population. I then used interviews to provide a qualitative contextual explanation for the research puzzle. Furthermore, I analysed survey and interview findings back and forth during the analysis and discussion phase in order to fill in the gaps and understand the different dimensions to my researched factors.

Thirdly, the mixed methods approach was argued<sup>444</sup> as a useful technique for practicing researchers and hence, apt for this thesis considering that this thesis explores policy impact in practical applications. My research provided a unique opportunity to apply and test political theories in real life situations. Therefore, the partly quantitative feedback derived from surveys provided general trends for a much larger population than the interviews, which were then given context and examples of what works and what does not in women's empowerment efforts through the qualitative feedback from the interviews sample. Moreover, the recommendations from the research sample on what could be improved to empower Yemeni women provide input for new policies and theories in this field and a potentially follow-up research for this one.

Finally, using more than one method improved research validity<sup>445</sup> through triangulation<sup>446</sup> by cross checking results derived on the same phenomena using different data collection techniques. Utilising a range of data collection methods is favourable in applied policy research, such as this one, as it offers in-depth results that could be validated through triangulation and thus increases findings' reliability.<sup>447</sup> Triangulation was achieved through comparing and contrasting the findings from policy review with those from the survey and the elite interviews. For example, an encapsulating outline for both the surveys and the interviews was designed a priori based on the theoretical framework and research hypothesis. This meant that three categories of questions were designed as each category dealt with aspects of one of the proposed factors behind policy failures.

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<sup>444</sup> R. B. Johnson & A. J. Onwuegbuzie, 'Mixed methods research: A research paradigm whose time has come', *Educational researcher*, 33(7), 2004, p. 15.

<sup>445</sup> D. T. Campbell & D. W. Fiske, 'Convergent and discriminant validation by the multitrait- multimethod matrix'. *Psycho- logical Bulletin*, 56, 1959.

<sup>446</sup> N. K. Denzin, *The research act*, 2d ed, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1978, p. 291.

<sup>447</sup> R. Yin, *Case study research: design and methods*, Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage Publications, 2003.

That being said, most existing research on Yemeni women's empowerment relates to quantitative statistical issues<sup>448</sup> regarding the situation of Yemeni women through development indicators. There are, however, a few examples of qualitative studies relating to Yemeni women's empowerment. Yet these researches are also limited in the sense that they focus only on a certain element of empowerment such as health issues<sup>449</sup>, political rights<sup>450</sup>, microfinance,<sup>451</sup> education,<sup>452</sup> crises management,<sup>453</sup> social media,<sup>454</sup> gender discrimination,<sup>455</sup> rural development,<sup>456</sup> power dynamics,<sup>457</sup> to state a few. However, my research question is investigating the reasons contributing to the failure of women's empowerment policies in Yemen. It addresses gender politics at the highest levels of government and decision making, while taking into consideration socio-cultural contexts and social gender power relations.

### 3. Research design and sampling techniques

This research seeks to find answers as to why the situation of Yemeni women remained one of the worst worldwide, despite the implementation of various women's empowerment policies. In order to answer this research question, I applied three

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<sup>448</sup> See for example N. Krishnan, *The status of Yemeni women: From aspiration to opportunity*, World Bank, Washington, DC, 2014. And F. Torabi & M. J. Abbasi-Shavazi, 'Women's Human Capital and Economic Growth in the Middle East and North Africa', *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 16(3), 2015. And Fortune-Greeley, H. et. al., *Yemen Gender Assessment*, USAID, 2014.

<sup>449</sup> A. H. Ali et. al., 'Healthy women, healthy society: ICT and the need for women's empowerment in Yemen', in A. Webb & I. Buskens (eds.) *More praise for Women and ICT in Africa and the Middle East*, Zed Books, 2014.

<sup>450</sup> A. Muhanna-Matar, 'New trends of women's activism after the Arab uprisings: redefining women's leadership', *LSE Middle East Centre paper series*, 5, Middle East Centre, LSE, London, UK, 2014.

<sup>451</sup> For example see: D. Burjorjee & M. Jennings, *Microfinance gender study: A market study of women entrepreneurs in Yemen*, Social Fund for Development, Sana'a, 2008. And S. Z. Ahmad & S. R. Xavier, 'Preliminary investigation of Yemeni women entrepreneurs: some challenges for development and barriers to success', *International journal of entrepreneurship and small business*, 13(4), 2011, pp. 518-534.

<sup>452</sup> F. Roudi-Fahimi & V. M. Moghadam, 'Empowering women, developing society: Female education in the Middle East and North Africa', *Al-Raida Journal*, 2006.

<sup>453</sup> R. Heltberg et. al., 'Coping and resilience during the food, fuel, and financial crises', *The Journal of Development Studies*, 49(5), 2013, pp. 705-718.

<sup>454</sup> M. Odine, 'Role of social media in the empowerment of Arab women', *Global Media Journal*, 12(22), 2013.

<sup>455</sup> R. Trammell & T. Morris, 'The connection between stigma, power, and life chances: A qualitative examination of gender and sex crime in Yemen', *Sociological Focus*, 45(2), 2012.

<sup>456</sup> M. Malhotra, *Empowerment of women: Women in rural development*, Vol. 3, Gyan Publishing House, 2004.

<sup>457</sup> A. M. Muñoz Boudet, P. Petesch & C. Turk, *On norms and agency: Conversations about gender equality with women and men in 20 countries*. The World Bank, 2013.

research methods: policy mapping, surveys, and elite interviews. I started with policy mapping first, then surveys and finally the interviews.

### 3.1. Secondary data collection method: policy mapping

Policy mapping is concerned with identifying and analysing primary materials such as government documents and reports or statements and those of professional institutions relevant to the researched issue.<sup>458</sup> Despite the popular use of policy mapping in the social sciences, an agreed definition for this method does not exist. However, policy mapping could be considered a kin to the systematic reviews method, which entails identification and collection of secondary data, followed by a critical sorting mechanism based on a predefined research question and scope.<sup>459</sup> “Systematic reviews seek to collate all evidence that fits pre-specified eligibility criteria in order to address a specific research question...[and] aim to minimize bias by using explicit, systematic methods.”<sup>460</sup> At the same time, policy mapping is also relevant to framework analysis, which is a qualitative method also used in applied policy research but one where the data is filtered and thematically categorised. It involves five stages: “familiarization; identifying a thematic framework; indexing; charting; and mapping and interpretation.”<sup>461</sup> Framework Analysis is a matrix-based method where data is coded into predefined thematic categories.<sup>462</sup>

In the context of this research, policy mapping was used to sift through the vast literature (in Arabic and English both published and unpublished) of Yemeni gender policies and documents. These documents represent national policies and state efforts regarding gender equality and women’s empowerment such as legal and field-specific policies. These include the constitution, legal and judicial systems, political initiatives

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<sup>458</sup> S. Anderson et. al., ‘Asking the right questions: scoping studies in the commissioning of research on the organisation and delivery of health services’, *Health research policy and systems*, 6(1), 2008, p. 7.

<sup>459</sup> Adopted from the GET-IT, *systematic review*, GET-IT glossary, <http://getitglossary.org/term/systematic+review>, (accessed 28 September 2018). And from P. Hemingway & N. Brereton, *What is a systematic review? What is..? Series*, 2nd ed, 2009. And from the Centre for Reviews and Dissemination at the University of York, <https://subjectguides.york.ac.uk/systematic-review>, (accessed 28 September 2018).

<sup>460</sup> J. P. T. Higgins & S. Green eds, *Cochrane Handbook for systematic reviews of interventions*, Version 5.1.0, The Cochrane Collaboration, 2011, [www.handbook.cochrane.org](http://www.handbook.cochrane.org), (accessed 28 September 2018).

<sup>461</sup> A. Srivastava & S. B. Thomson, ‘Framework analysis: A qualitative methodology for applied policy research’, *Journal of Administration and Governance*, 72, 2009.

<sup>462</sup> M. Dixon-Woods, ‘Using framework-based synthesis for conducting reviews of qualitative studies’, *BMC medicine*, 9(1), 2011, p. 39.

by the state such as institutions, appointments, and quotas, and the government initiatives aiming at empowering women in the three studied domains: health, education, and the economy. The policies were accessed directly from the official web pages of the concerned authorities such as the Yemeni government or relevant international organisations, or through direct communication with policy makers and Yemeni stakeholders involved in these policies. My selection criteria covered national government strategies in the fields of health (relevant to reproductive health and maternal mortality), education (girls' education), and the economy<sup>463</sup> (women's economic participation in the workforce) that were implemented between 2006 and 2014. In order to identify policies relating to the politics I focused on political appointments and directives that related to women's political representation and presence in decision-making. The sampling technique for the policy mapping was through a web search with key words, secondary data derived from existing research on the issues, and chronological event tracing of efforts through following up on outcomes by either identifying progress reports, statistical indicators, or contacting relevant officials. Use was made of the gender research centres in both Sana'a and Aden Universities as well as other libraries in academic and research institutions.

In order to organise the body of documents first I sorted them according to the pre-defined themes (health, education, economy, and politics). Therefore, the method used for this purpose is more elaborate than a simple review and analysis of primary documents. Mapping of gender policies entails the identification of Yemen's official structures that government put in place to govern the rights and obligations of women in the society. These include the legal frameworks, national priorities and projects, as well as formal and informal women-related practices in the public sphere especially in state institutions. This also included a thorough scanning of national empowerment efforts conducted between 2006 and 2014 in the fields of health, education, and the economy. For these areas, it was easy to identify relevant efforts since the number of national strategies was limited, usually spans across several years, and is part of the national development 5-year agenda of the country. In order to ensure credibility of the researched strategies, the documents were obtained directly from the official ministries

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<sup>463</sup> These efforts were led by the Health, Education, Labour, and Industry and Trade Ministries.

and their executive offices. Cross checking was done through direct contact with the women leaders who worked during the researched period in these fields. Moreover, although there isn't a single method for measuring policy success, social scientists<sup>464</sup> agree that in general two main aspects of policy need to be evaluated: its' programme related achievements and its' political achievements. I have decided to draw on subsets of Newman's (2014)<sup>465</sup> four-dimensional framework for measuring policy success because of their relevance to the context of women's empowerment policies in Yemen and the complexities of gender equality as a concept. These evaluation dimensions are: process, goal attainment, distributional outcomes, and political consequences. The results from the policy mapping provided evidence to the statement that women's empowerment policies between 2006 and 2014 have failed in Yemen, and sets the scene for the empirical data collection targeting women leaders to provide an explanation for this failure.

### **3.2. Primary data collection methods: surveys and interviews**

Building on the systematic mapping of Yemen's gender policies, I sought to identify causes for the policy failure from the people responsible for implementing these policies themselves. I adopted a deductive approach for this research by starting with three hypotheses, which were then tested through empirical data. The hypotheses presented at the outset of this thesis provided three explanations for the failure of women's empowerment policies in Yemen: the implementers' lack of capacity, the economic and political instability nationally, and the lack of political support for these policies and the goal of gender equality in general. Furthermore, also as mentioned earlier, empirical data was collected from a sample of the women leaders population due to their direct involvement in the implementing of women's empowerment policies in Yemen. A review of the Yemeni women's presence in the public and political

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<sup>464</sup> See: A. McConnell, 'Policy success, policy failure and grey areas in-between', *Journal of Public Policy*, 30(3), 2010a; A. McConnell, *Understanding policy success: Rethinking public policy*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010b; M. Bovens, 'A comment on Marsh and McConnell: Towards a framework for establishing policy success', *Public Administration*, 88(2), 2010.

<sup>465</sup> J. Newman, 'Measuring policy success: Case studies from Canada and Australia', *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 73(2), 2014, p. 192.

spheres in the last two decades showed that they have been highly visible as appointed persons of authority in the various government institutions. It was also emphasised that the majority of women leaders were appointed in positions of power with their main responsibility as handling women's affairs in their relevant field, as will be elaborated in the next chapter on gender policies in Yemen. Therefore, they represent a highly valuable source of information to support or refute this research's hypotheses and provide context to the findings. The criteria for the survey sample selection focused mainly on women who held the position of department head and higher in the relevant state institutions. This was relatively easy since the number of women in such positions was limited and they are known. I reached them through personal and professional networks of Yemeni women leaders. However, I did expand this criteria to include women who were public figures on the national level even if they did not hold a government position. The identification of the latter women was more difficult than the main sample because it was not possible to do a national census and conclude nationally recognised female figures. In order to ensure their inclusion in the sample, I used my network with the known women leaders to recommend names. Also, as the nature of elite women groups dictate, these women were part of the focused networks of women leaders as it is. Consequently, 186 women leaders took interest and accessed the electronic survey, although only 65 women leaders eventually returned a complete response. Of the women leaders population, 12 women were chosen for the in-depth elite interviews. These were women who were politically influential in gender equality efforts in Yemen, as well as those at the highest level of office in health, education, and the economy between 2006 and 2014.

**a. Surveys:**

Social scientists apply surveys to identify a research sample's attitudes and practices regarding a specific issue and also to compare this against an original hypothesis if present.<sup>466</sup> Since my thesis starts with three hypotheses regarding the failure of women's empowerment policies in Yemen, I chose to start the empirical data collection using this technique. Moreover, surveys were easy to analyse since I was able to compare the answers from the different respondents and identify patterns and trends.

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<sup>466</sup> J. B. Johnson & H. T. Reynolds, *Political Science Research Methods*, CQ Press, 2005, p. 276.

The use of closed ended questions was especially useful in conducting statistical analysis of the data.<sup>467</sup> Moreover, the use of surveys as a technique is argued<sup>468</sup> to facilitate responses more than other methods when it comes to sensitive or personal issues, as some of the reluctant responders could be comforted by the lack of physical contact and feel more at ease typing in their answer than speaking face to face and watching the reaction to their input. Considering that the research topic discusses the social power gender relations in a conservative Yemeni society and the failure to empower women, this technique became an obvious choice. Gender discussions are, in general, a controversial matter in Yemen, but an additionally complicating factor was that the target sample of the research was the group of women leaders who were supposedly in charge of the women's empowerment activities. This required great sensitivity. Additionally, the survey was made anonymous in order to encourage a positive response from participants, and to prevent them from feeling attacked or directly criticised. Moreover, the questions were designed in a way that presented the hypothesised factors leading to the failure of policies in a sensitive way and allowed for respondents to provide alternatives and explain their answers.

The survey included 41 questions (in Arabic, the respondents' mother tongue) clustered into three categories each relating to one of the hypothesised factors. The questions provided a simple structure for the data to be collected so as to demonstrate the respondents' attitudes towards the three factors; to identify contradictions; highlight trends and patterns; and provide space for additional information that was not suggested in the given answer choices of the survey questions. Simple statistical indicators were used to measure the results such as percentages, rankings, and preferences. All of the survey questions – except one - were multiple choice with some allowing the choice of more than one option and others allowing only one option. The last question in the survey was a ranking or scales question whereby the respondents rank the three factors in terms of effect on women's empowerment policy success from highest to lowest in terms of explanatory power. All of the survey questions had an option for adding new information and comments either under the title 'other', or 'comments'. The multiple choices were designed to provide a range of potential answers within that sub-topic so

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<sup>467</sup> Johnson & Reynolds, *op. cit.*, p. 281.

<sup>468</sup> Johnson & Reynolds *op. cit.*, p. 276.

as to allow the respondents to choose the option that best represents their opinion. Several questions had a representation of the Likert scale,<sup>469</sup> where the respondents chose a degree of their answer ranging from Never to Always. In some cases it was a simple dichotomous Yes/No choice, however, many of the questions the choices were nominal data with labelled variables as options with no specific order or ranking. This was designed to provide qualitative feedback from the respondents regarding the proposed framework, the results of which guided the interview questions. This was particularly helpful when identifying the potential pathways or sub-mechanisms through which each of the three factors affected the success of women's empowerment policies. For example, question 35 asked the respondents to choose one of five options reflecting their opinion on whether the state's political culture on gender equality contributed to the failure of women's empowerment policies, or not. The choices were:

- No, the state's political culture strongly endorses gender equality and is not the reason behind the failure of policies;
- yes, the political culture supports gender equality but only superficially and does not deal with social causes of inequality;
- yes, the political culture is only concerned with donors and not real change in the gender power relations;
- yes, the politicians surrender to conservative traditional forces so as to stay in power;
- Other answer, please elaborate.

The use of nominal data in the multiple choice allowed a ranking measurement of which of the various mechanisms were considered by the respondents as more influential on policy failure. The findings chapter provides a detailed presentation and analysis of the survey results, and the survey questions are available as an annex at the end of this thesis.

In terms of sample selection, I used purposive sampling as a sampling technique, because as a researcher, I intentionally and strategically selected the units of analysis (in this case the category of the collective group of Yemeni women leaders) based on

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<sup>469</sup> I. E. Allen & C. A. Seaman, 'Likert scales and data analyses', *Quality progress*, 40(7), 2007.

their relevance to the research question.<sup>470</sup> This was also the sampling technique applied in the interviews, although here the selection was made specific to the persons by name, whereas in the surveys it was a category.

Purposive sampling is also called non-probability or judgement sampling as the researchers decide on the selection of cases, based on their knowledge and experience and not on an underlying theory.<sup>471</sup> Purposive sampling is usually used with a number of data collection tools such as surveys and interviews. In terms of access to the population, snowball sampling was used iteratively<sup>472</sup> whereby an informant recommends another,<sup>473</sup> and many times multiple snowballs were thrown in different directions to cast a wider net and ensure variety and coverage. This technique is used when studying a specific cultural domain and the knowledgeable researcher's bias adds to efficiency and robustness of the method.<sup>474</sup> Even the informants when used to aid the sample selection, must have adequate knowledge of the research topic. In this case, they are Yemeni women leaders individually and social groups of women leaders, Yemeni women organisations and state institutions, and researchers on gender in Yemen. Iterative sampling was also used since there were aspects of the research topic that unfolded as the research developed. The findings were reviewed and compared to reflect relevant theories and create a larger understanding of the researched topic and its various complexities.

These sampling methods were appropriate for my research as I have a unique predefined research sample who is chosen specifically and not randomly. The research sample is narrow in the sense that it is limited to Yemeni women who have had a high ranking government position or were influential on the national level between 2006 and 2014. Using snowballing allowed easier access to these women as they were usually working together or in similar environments and most of them knew each other. The

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<sup>470</sup> Bryman, op. cit., p. 408.

<sup>471</sup> M. D. Tongco, 'Purposive sampling as a tool for informant selection', *Ethnobotany Research and applications*, 31 (5), 2007.

<sup>472</sup> An iterative process of sampling continued throughout the research as the scope and angles expand.

<sup>473</sup> R. Atkinson & J. Flint, 'Accessing hidden and hard-to-reach populations: Snowball research strategies', *Social research update*, 33(1), 2001.

<sup>474</sup> Tongco, *ibid.*

iterative element helped ensure wider coverage across generations of women leaders and geographic locations as well as disciplines.

Although there is no predefined acceptable number, the rule of thumb is that the sample size should be representative of the population. Since representativeness is usually achieved through random sampling, adopting a non-random sampling technique could pose as a disadvantage in this regard. Therefore, I made use of the limited size of my the research population and attempted to ensure representation by reaching to as many women leaders as possible through covering all the known<sup>475</sup> women leaders' networks and using multiple snowballs in different directions. The survey was generated electronically, because this was the most convenient method for reaching the research population considering their geographical spread and their busy schedules as there was an option to fill in the survey in parts and return to it later. The survey was written in Arabic to ensure that all of the respondents could understand it, since not all of them were necessarily fluent in English, however, they all had access to the internet and sufficient computer skills to fill in an online survey. I used eight months for the dissemination and collection of survey data starting March 2017 to October 2017. The survey is now closed.

Consequently, the survey's link was accessed by 186 Yemeni women leaders who presided over projects or took part in activities relating to women's empowerment since 2006. They hailed mostly from the public sector, and, to a smaller degree, from the private sector and civil society. Of the survey research population, 65 individuals replied with complete responses. These women held public positions ranging from project manager, or head of department, to minister. Also, it included women who worked in the private sector at the top of their businesses, and women who were involved in feminist campaigns and civil rights organisations. As it is, the Yemeni women leaders' group includes women from all backgrounds and orientations from conservative Islamises to westernised liberals and anything in between. Their common characteristic was that they all worked actively on issues pertaining to women's

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<sup>475</sup> Being a member of the women leaders networks myself enabled me to reach them and ensure wide coverage. The nature of Yemen dictates that there are a limited number of women leaders as it is, and they know each other.

empowerment in Yemen at least since 2006, many of whom had been working on this cause since much earlier in various capacities.

### **b. Elite Interviews**

The surveys were followed by in-depth elite interviewing<sup>476</sup> with three leading women in politics and in education, healthcare, and the economy. A generic definition of interviews is that they are an interchange of opinions between two people or more on a topic of interest. It emphasise exchange of knowledge through human interaction on a social grounding.<sup>477</sup> Interviews are a qualitative data collection technique that allow the researcher to dig deep into the research issue in a way that no other data collection technique can, and is the most popular method in qualitative research.<sup>478</sup> Interviews allow the researcher to zoom in on the investigated topic and gather information interactively, facilitating achievement of the specific research objectives.<sup>479</sup> Furthermore, interviews could be structured, semi-structured or unstructured in the way they are designed.

Structured interviews are the most rigid type with closed-ended questions that resemble questionnaires. They are also known as standardised interviews in the sense that “all respondents are asked the same questions with the same wording and in the same sequence.”<sup>480</sup> Semi structured interviews are relatively more flexible in the sense that the researcher has a predefined list of questions or themes but has the freedom to relatively change them depending on how the interview goes. The researcher can probe the interviewee’s responses using the list of key themes, while being open minded to exploring new themes if they arise and prove relevant to the interview objective.<sup>481</sup> Unstructured interviews are also known as non-directive in that the interviewee is somewhat leading the course of the interview rather than the interviewer, who although

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<sup>476</sup> L. A. Dexter, *Elite and specialized interviewing*, ECPR Press, first published in 1970 by Northwestern University, 2006.

<sup>477</sup> D. Kvale, *Interviews*, London, SAGE Publications, 1996, p. 14.

<sup>478</sup> A. Bryman, *Social research methods*, 4th ed, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 552.

<sup>479</sup> O. Tansey, ‘Process tracing and elite interviewing: A Case for non-probability sampling’, *Political Science & Politics*, 40 no. 04, 2007, p. 771.

<sup>480</sup> P. Corbetta, *Social research theory, methods and techniques*, London, SAGE Publications, 2003, p. 269.

<sup>481</sup> M. Q. Patton, *Qualitative research and evaluation method*, London, SAGE Publications, 2000, p. 348.

has the objective of the research in mind, allows the interviewee to talk freely and openly.<sup>482</sup>

Among the various types of interviews, this research benefitted from the use of a semi-structured elite interviewing technique, also known as specialised interviewing,<sup>483</sup> considering that the interview sample by the nature of their work, were indeed the elite in the feminism discourse in Yemen.

Elite interviewing is a type of semi-structured interviews, however, considering the interviewees' authority on the interview matter and their actual power in them being people of influence, the interviewer has to be knowledgeable in the interview issue and present an interesting discussion partner for the elite being interviewed.<sup>484</sup> This was not a problem since I as the researcher am knowledgeable in both the research topic and the context.

The interviewed women were officials at the highest levels and/or persons of influence who were involved in women's empowerment projects between 2006 and 2014 in health, education, the economy, and politics. They were chosen for their roles in the gender equality agenda, and therefore, elite interviewing was chosen as a technique because it is known for its exploratory nature focusing on the interviewees' special knowledge and take on the researched issue.<sup>485</sup> It was easy to identify these women considering that they were few and known, the challenge was to secure their willingness to participate in this research, and their time. The identification mechanism was to start at the top of the executive ministerial ladder, which was the position of minister in the relevant ministries, and position of chairperson/director in the relevant state institutions. I had a predefined number of three interviews per field, therefore I selected the top three from each field. On the other hand, identifying the highest women leaders in the field of politics was the challenging part since a ministry of "politics" didn't exist. Therefore, I aimed at securing the participation of the head of the Women National Committee, which is the political government entity concerned with women.

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<sup>482</sup> D. E. Gray , *Doing research in the real world*, London, SAGE Publications, 2013, p. 217.

<sup>483</sup> Dexter, op. cit.

<sup>484</sup> Kvale, op. cit., p. 70.

<sup>485</sup> Johnson & Reynolds op. cit., p. 271.

Additionally, I secured the participation of a national political activist who presided over the Rights and Freedoms Committee in the National Dialogue Conference,<sup>486</sup> and who is also a former minister of culture. My third candidate was a feminist pioneer and political advocate who has represented Yemen and Yemeni women on high level international platforms such as the United Nations' General Assembly. Any person familiar with Yemen will immediately recognise these women as drivers at the forefront of the women's political empowerment movement in Yemen. The exploratory nature of elite interviews was particularly useful in this research as it enriched the initial research hypotheses. These interviews allowed the polishing of the research concepts and helped focus the research conclusions.

Through the interviews, the women leaders were prompted to tell their stories from their own perspective on how women's empowerment was addressed in the political spheres including an analysis of their surrounding dynamics of gender politics. They described how all this reflected on them professionally and personally, and what their contributions as leaders in the women's empowerment movement were. In this thesis, the interviewees' political biographies<sup>487</sup> as told by them were combined with a narration of their career journeys. When interviewing the women, a starting point was exploring the aspects of their political positions as leaders and the challenges they faced while trying to achieve their professional objective in their specific field of women's empowerment.

The interviewees were questioned on aspects relating to their daily lives as women in positions of power and how they pushed on – or not – to achieve their professional and personal goals in their institutions and professional environments. This included an investigation of the obstacles and limitations they faced in their careers because of them

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<sup>486</sup> The National Dialogue Conference is recognised as the single most important political event in Yemen's recent history and one that aimed at drawing the future constitution of the country.

<sup>487</sup> D. Mulinari & N. Rathzel, 'Politicizing biographies: The framing of transnational subjectivities as insiders outside', *Feminist Review*, 86, 2007.

being women, and their own interpretation of the reasons behind the failure of women's empowerment policies, if they agreed with this conclusion.<sup>488</sup>

In a way, the interviewed women were in the elite group of the women's empowerment pioneers in the country during the mentioned phase, or in other words they were the women who would have had the most exposure to, and influence over, policy-making in Yemen at the time in terms of women's empowerment in these fields. And hence, elite interviews as a technique, was only natural to be the selected technique for this part of the research. My previous position as minister of information in 2014 and before that as a political figure and a chief editor of an influential media establishment helped immensely in getting access and winning their trust and cooperation. Access to the interviewees was done through emails, Skype, WhatsApp, Viber, IMO, regular texts and phone calls and in person when possible. It must be emphasised here that I was unable to physically travel to Yemen and interview the women leaders there as it is too dangerous considering that it is a war zone currently.

The interviewees were briefed on my research topic and their written consent was acquired beforehand, although they had the choice to withdraw from the research at any time they liked. For each of the twelve interviewees there were at least three interview sessions done, so as to allow me to dig deeper into the information provided and also to allow the interviewee to reflect on what she said especially when presented with the draft notes of our interviews. For each interview an average of six hours of discussion across all communication platforms, materialised. Most of the communication was in Arabic, and English translation of field related terminology was confirmed when required. I started communicating with the women leaders as early as January 2017 in order to identify their availability and interest in participating in my research. I had a list of 20 women leaders with 12 preferred candidates considering their direct involvement in women's empowerment policies in the researched duration. I have continued to communicate and discuss with the women leaders even after availing their

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<sup>488</sup> As chapter V demonstrates, the interviewees agreed that the situation of Yemeni women is lacking, although they expressed varying degrees as to the failure of empowerment policies.

interviews as it was important to clarify any points during the writing of the discussion and conclusion chapters.

There may be some concerns regarding the safety of the interviewees, since they were discussed political and culturally sensitive issues. It was identified during the interviewing stage that one of the interviewees was concerned with this issue. Although she indeed provided her consent in writing to be interviewed and her opinions to be included in this thesis, I eventually opted to keep her identity anonymous and not share her profile or details, yet included her input when needed as indirect quotes. In all cases, the interview texts were shared with the interviewees, who in turn had the choice and chance to request amendments or clarifications, which again emphasised the iterative style of data collection. Moreover, some of the politically sensitive information provided by the interviewees was not detailed in the final text of this thesis, but was used as background information to support the analysis, while some anonymous extracts were used when appropriate.

#### **4. A note on reflexivity**

There is a great deal of reflexivity involved in understanding the social phenomena from a feminist perspective. As it is, since the philosophy adopted in this methodology is influenced by both post-positivists and interpretivists, I am encouraged to assume the constructivists argument and adopt reflective measures to understand and take into account how my input and values as the researcher have affected my work, rather than pretend that as a researcher, I had no effect on the studied social phenomena.<sup>489</sup>

Hammersley & Atkinson argue that this trend of embracing our bias as researchers is a result of the influence of feminism, post-structuralism and before that of critical theory and Marxism,<sup>490</sup> in a way that has significantly politicised social research. Although, feminist empiricists in the early stages of feminism adopted a realist attitude towards feminism research and insisted that while they did have inside knowledge of their

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<sup>489</sup> M. Hammersley, 'The issue of quality in qualitative research', *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 30(3), 2007.

<sup>490</sup> Hammersley & Atkinson, *ibid.*

research group, being women, they conduct research with scientific objectivity.<sup>491</sup> However, a contradictory ‘feminist standpoint theorists’ generation emerged at a later stage, asserting that “knowledge of society must always be from a position in it and that women are privileged epistemologically by being members of an oppressed group.”<sup>492</sup>

As a Yemeni women leader myself and being the first woman to become information minister in Yemen, I find myself relating to my research question of gender politics and consequently question my potential bias. As it stands, one of the main motivations for this research is a personal one: as this research presents an opportunity to complement my practical real life experience with solid theoretical academic knowledge. Having this unique position, as I am well placed as an insider who has an expansive network and access to information and people, has surely enriched my research. However, writing about my own country, my colleagues and potentially my own story while maintaining academic objectivity was challenging. Therefore, I was careful to choose methodologies that would take advantage of the positives of my experience and expertise, whilst also being able to filter and expose any unconscious bias that I may have in my data collection and analysis.

In a way, this research also includes an element of auto-ethnography as I reflect my findings from my personal experiences as well. Moreover, as I narrate the experiences of the women leaders from their interviews, I find myself questioning my own assumptions, such as the lack of political interest in gender equality and the explanations for the poor conditions of Yemeni women. As it is, narrative research is very much a subject of human construct and is both a manner of reasoning and representation.<sup>493</sup> Fisher describes narration as a theory of meaningful actions that have sequence for those “who live, create, or interpret them.”<sup>494</sup> Adams<sup>495</sup> adds that researchers when writing oral histories of others, they in a way control the representation of their life stories and here lies an essential question of narrative ethics.

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<sup>491</sup> S. Harding, ‘Rethinking standpoint epistemology: What is “strong objectivity”?’ , *The Centennial Review*, 36(3), 1992.

<sup>492</sup> D. Smith, *Institutional Ethnography: A sociology for people*, Lanham, MD, AltaMara Press, Rowan and Littlefield pub, 2005, p. 8.

<sup>493</sup> T. E. Adams, ‘A review of narrative ethics’, *Qualitative inquiry*, 14(2), 2008.

<sup>494</sup> W. R. Fisher, ‘Narration as a human communication paradigm’, in J. L. Lucaites, C. M. Condit & S. Caudill (eds.) *Contemporary rhetorical theory: A reader*, Guilford Press, 1999, p. 266.

<sup>495</sup> Adams, op. cit., p. 176.

And although in essence, I am not using oral histories here as a technique, I am still translating the interviewees' experiences, answers, and emotions into written text meshed with the theoretical background of my research and survey results from the larger sample.

Acknowledging the innate knowledge I have of the society I am researching, whilst keeping in mind biases and assumptions, was, in fact, an added value to this research. Nevertheless, this privilege must not be taken for granted as there are endless experiences of women that differ according to their circumstances and personalities and not one woman can claim that she can speak with an authority on behalf of all women leaders. This was a challenge that was recognised in this research and due diligence was carried out in the interviews and accounts to try to reflect the women's stories as they see them. This was done by committing to the exact terminology the women used and their ways of expressing themselves, and using semi-structured interviews that allowed the women to talk more freely and lead the discussion, without too much prompting or restrictive questioning by the interviewer.

In terms of accuracy and controlling my bias as a researcher, one method I used was to verify the concepts and reach standardised working definitions on two fronts: with the theories in the academic discipline on the one hand, and with the researched sample on the other. For example, my definition of empowerment had to be in line with the interviewed women's understanding as well as properly located in the theories and academic literature.

Furthermore, in qualitative research access to research fields is usually done through gate keepers or informants - those are people who facilitate the researcher's access to the participants in their natural environment. Sometimes those informants add their own understandings as they connect the researchers to the sample whether through translation or through interpretation. In this thesis, since I am local to the researched group and area I did not need to go through gatekeepers as my name and network opened doors for me. Although this is clearly an advantage, this may come with a price; the participants may provide me with the information which they think I want to hear, or I may land up with cases with similar backgrounds and lose diversity, a risk that I have been attentive to. A mechanism I used to mitigate this was to ensure the diversity

of the women leaders researched – so that they represent different political and cultural backgrounds, which improved the chances of various view-points and diversity. This diversity and the fact that these are strong women leaders decreased the risks of conformity whereby the women interviewed could have been pushed into agreeing with my unintended insinuations instead of being a genuine representation of their experiences and thoughts.

Another concern was that they may have feared letting me, a known person in their community, into their private experiences sharing with me information that might jeopardise them personally or their political careers. This concern was not new in the field of social science research, as it is a repeated question in qualitative research regarding the level of involvement with the researched group. I tackled this concern by assuring them that they have control over the final product to be used in this thesis, and gave them the option to be anonymous.

Therefore, while seeking answers to my research question and trying to acquire as much knowledge as possible on the research issue, I realised that I have a dual ethical responsibility; for on the one hand I have to accurately represent these women, and on the other not place them in any kind of risk. This was easier said than done since what was considered as ‘an ethical social researcher’ was less clear in political cultural studies (such as this one) than for example in the natural sciences. Zylinska argued that “in its questioning of inherited traditions and cultural prejudices and its interest in ‘marginal voices’, cultural studies develops precisely from a recognition of, and respect for, specificity, locatedness and what the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas has called ‘the infinite alterity of the other’.”<sup>496</sup>

The other ethical consideration, as mentioned earlier, was the safety of my sources. Researching the political process in a country such as the Republic of Yemen does not come without its risks, especially since I am researching the controversial issue of women’s empowerment. For example, decision makers who could be interpreted in this

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<sup>496</sup> J. Zylinska, *The ethics of cultural studies*, A & C Black, 2005, p. IX.

research as part of the structural barriers against women's empowerment might negatively react to this research and professionally harm my sources. Moreover, it is important to note that current political circumstances of the Republic of Yemen have made the country a hostile environment for critical political research such as this one. There has been an ongoing armed conflict initiated by a coup d'état<sup>497</sup> since 2014, where tens of thousands of Yemenis have been killed because of the fight over power. As is the case with armed conflicts, women's rights, as well as those of minorities, have taken a huge set back from the democratic achievements of the political transition just a year before the coup. For example, although women were celebrated as political leaders and a quota of 30% in both elected and non-elected decision making positions was agreed on in the draft constitution proposed in 2013, once the armed conflict started, women's agenda not only froze, but was sent back decades from where it was. The armed conflict had led to a rise of a rigid Islamic control over most areas of the country allowing very little space for women's and human rights in general. The women leaders who are still in Yemen and yet accepted to take part in this research took a risk by doing so.<sup>498</sup> In terms of the surveys, this issue was not of concern since the survey was anonymous by design. However, in terms of the interviews six out of the twelve interviewees are still residing in Yemen. To this end, all interviewees provided their consent to being interviewed and their approval of the final text was secured.

## 5. Research scope

This research addresses the failure of women's empowerment policies in Yemen between 2006 and 2014 through policy mapping, surveys, and interviews with Yemeni women leaders. It investigates three potential factors behind this failure: lack of capacity, instability, and the culture of political support for gender equality. It therefore, uncovers the political gender bargaining dynamics in the Republic of Yemen from the

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<sup>497</sup> For more information on the current war in Yemen: R. Popp, *War in Yemen: Revolution and Saudi Intervention*, CSS Analysis in Security Policy, ETH Zurich Research Collection, 175, 2015.

<sup>498</sup> One of the ways to mitigate this, is to take cases of women who are outside the country. For women who are still in Yemen, their identity will be obscured and some of their personal information will be altered. The eventual text of this research will not detail all the data gathered but everything collected will be used in the analysis and discussion. It is hoped that by the time this thesis is completed and made public that the situation of Yemen has improved.

standpoint of the women leaders involved in women's empowerment initiatives at the highest levels. It is therefore a mixed-method research with a strong qualitative angle contributing to filling a gap in the Yemeni women's empowerment literature. This research utilises my expertise and unique access to a range of Yemeni women leaders whose insight and feedback on the empowerment processes was not documented before in an academic inclusive framework as this one. The findings from this research present the opportunity to understand the gender policies in Yemen and their affect, in ways that previous research did not. This has the potential to ignite a discussion about future gender policies, their creation and application, both in Yemen, and other similar contexts.

This research does not cover determinants of Yemeni women's empowerment as specific demographic groups, e.g. rural vs. urban, or educated vs. uneducated, which were aspects covered by much of the statistical research as indicated in the beginning of this chapter. It also does not explore the history of Yemeni women's feminism movement, or compare between women's rights in the two 'Yemens' prior to unity in 1990, which were a topic frequently researched in the subject of Yemen women's empowerment. Furthermore, this research does not study women's empowerment during times of conflict and instability and does not discuss women leaders in peace building or making processes, as these topics require a separate line of inquiry that is not included in my research scope. Finally, although this research utilises descriptive statistical analysis of surveys, this is not a quantitative research in the sense that it does not include large N analysis or statistical enquiry.

## Chapter IV:

### Gender policies in Yemen

*Public policy is both programmatic and political.<sup>499</sup> The success of such is not only measured by achievement of policy goals and objectives, but more importantly; how it addresses inequalities and imbalances in the larger framework of societal power relations.<sup>500</sup>*

#### 1. Introduction

Chapter I provided an introduction to the central predicament of this research: why, despite governmental intervention, which was based in large to donor support, have Yemeni women continued to suffer from severe gender inequality? This chapter provides evidence in support of the notion that such efforts have failed. It does so through a mapping of relevant national policies, strategies, and projects conducted by the Yemeni government between 2006 and 2014, along with an evaluation of their success in the frame of contextual and historic backgrounds.

Research on gender politics tends to start by an examination of the state's policies towards women. In the case of the Republic of Yemen, a written policy or unified approach addressing gender issues in the various government institutions does not exist.<sup>501</sup> However, a study of laws and institutions relevant to women, and the related

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<sup>499</sup> M. A. Bovens, P. T'Hart & B. G. Peters (eds.), *Success and failure in public governance: A comparative analysis*. Edward Elgar Publishing, 2002, as mentioned in A. McConnell, 'Policy success, policy failure and grey areas in-between', *Journal of Public Policy*, 30(3), 2010, p. 349.

<sup>500</sup> F. Fischer, *Evaluating public policy*, Chicago, IL: Nelson-Hall Publishers, 1995. And: D. Taylor & S. Balloch (eds.), *The politics of evaluation: Participation and policy implementation*, Bristol: The Policy Press, 2005. And: R. Pawson, *Evidence-based policy: A realist perspective*, London: Sage, 2006.

<sup>501</sup> There is also a "limited capacity to promote gender equality reform from a "whole-of-government" perspective". MENA-OECD Governance Program, *Women in public life - Gender, Law and Policy in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)*, OECD Governance, 2014, <https://www.oecd.org/mena/governance/women-in-public-life-mena-brochure.pdf>, (accessed 4 Nov. 2016).

strategies employed in different fields provides an alternative. Consequently, the Yemeni state's gender policy<sup>502</sup> was considered in this chapter through a review of three interconnected areas: first, legally through an analysis of the constitution and the legal and judicial systems; second, politically through reviewing the political space women are given especially at the highest levels as well as the creation of women related establishments; and third, programmatically, by examining the various projects implemented by the government aimed at improving women's health, education, and economic participation.

This chapter begins with a review of the Republic of Yemen's gender policy and politics by analysing gender related themes in the constitution and laws, followed by a review of gender practices in the judiciary system. The section concludes by presenting gender related provisions in the draft constitution of 2015 pending referendum.

The next section discusses the state's attitude towards women manifested by the provision of political space for women, such as the quota system, political appointments of women to positions of power, the creation of state institutions for women's development, and the commission of national strategies and projects aimed at improving the situation of women in various fields of life. Examples of the main strategies implemented by the government to empower women in the fields of health, education, and the economy are therefore, discussed. Focus is on strategies specifically related to reducing mothers' mortality rates and improving women's reproductive health, girls' education, and women's economic participation in the workforce.

Consequently, drawing on the programmatic dimensions Newman's (2014)<sup>503</sup> evaluation model for measuring policy success, it will be demonstrated that gender

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<sup>502</sup> There is existing research on some aspects of the modern state's position on certain issues relevant to women since the 90s. For example, women in business (See, S. Z. Ahmad & S. R. Xavier, 'Preliminary investigation of Yemeni women entrepreneurs: some challenges for development and barriers to success', *International journal of entrepreneurship and small business*, 13(4), 2011.); Access to healthcare (See J. Chamberlain et. al., 'Women's perception of self-worth and access to health care', *International Journal of Gynaecology & Obstetrics*, 98(1), 2007.); citizenship rights (See S. Carapico & A. Wuerth, 'Passports and Passages: Tests of Yemeni Women's Citizenship Rights', in S. Joseph (ed), *Gender and Citizenship in the Middle East*, Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 2000.); culture (See S. Carapico, 'The Dialectics of Fashion: Gender and Politics in Yemen', in S. Joseph & S. Slyomovics (eds.), *Women and Power in the Middle East*, Philadelphia, PA: Uni of Pennsylvania, 2001.), religion (See E. Strzelecka, 'Gender and Islam in Development Policy and Practice in Yemen', *Arabian Humanities, Revue internationale d'archéologie et de sciences sociales sur la péninsule Arabique/International Journal of Archaeology and Social Sciences in the Arabian Peninsula*, 2013, 1.)

<sup>503</sup> J. Newman, 'Measuring policy success: Case studies from Canada and Australia', *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 73(2), 2014, p. 192.

strategies have predominantly failed to empower women. This was done through an analysis of their process design and achievement of goals. Their impact on redistribution of social power and political aspects are reviewed in chapter V.

The analysis shows that design-wise the policies focused on improving access to resources through temporary unsustainable solutions. That development goals were rarely achieved, and that the strategies failed to produce behavioural changes in the society's gender power relations in favour of women.

Overall, the aim of this chapter is to provide a contextual foundation for the findings and discussion chapters in this thesis by showing the state's attitude towards gender equality and how national empowerment strategies for women, while based on empirical studies and covering gender issues, failed to achieve a sustainable empowerment of women. Chapter V offers an explanation for this reality through the experiences of women leaders involved in implementing these efforts.

## 2. Republic of Yemen's gender policy: Legal and judicial analysis

### 2.1. Yemeni women in the legal system

Since articles of the constitution are translated into laws, which are then adhered to and implemented by the relevant authorities, a good starting point for determining the state's attitude towards gender and women's issues is the constitution and the legal system as it stands today.

On the surface, the “legal and constitutional framework of the ROY [Republic of Yemen] demonstrates a commitment to democratisation, the development of civil society and the protection of human rights.”<sup>504</sup> However, in reality, Yemen's progress towards being a liberal democracy could be described as a weak democracy<sup>505</sup> at best, making it one of the political “grey zone”<sup>506</sup> countries that are neither democratic nor fully authoritarian. Under the three-decade rule of former President Saleh, Yemen was also considered<sup>507</sup> a kleptocracy, where a privileged few would rule and benefit from the national resources at the expense of the wider public. Consequently, this contributed to depriving women of their social, economic, and citizenship rights as the government did not effectively enforce laws in favour of women.<sup>508</sup>

The first reference to women in the constitution is in Article (31), which states: “women are the sisters of men. They have rights and duties, which are guaranteed and assigned by Shari'ah [Islamic Jurisprudence] and stipulated by law.” This is an amendment of the 1991 unity constitution, in which Article (27) stated: “all citizens are equal before the law. They are equal in public rights and duties. There shall be no discrimination between them based on sex, colour, ethnic origin, language, occupation, social status, or religion.”<sup>509</sup> It could be argued<sup>510</sup> that the change from the 1991 to the current text in the constitution was a deterioration in terms of the state's attitude towards women.

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<sup>504</sup> M. Colburn, *The Republic of Yemen: Development challenges in the 21st Century*, CIIR, 2002, p. 55.

<sup>505</sup> For an elaborated description on adjectives of countries in terms of democracy see D. Collier & S. Levitsky, 'Democracy with adjectives: Conceptual innovation in comparative research', *World politics*, 49(03), 1997.

<sup>506</sup> T. Carothers, 'The end of the transition paradigm', *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 13, Issue 1, 2002.

<sup>507</sup> L. Etheredge, *Saudi Arabia and Yemen*, The Rosen Publishing Group, 2011, p. 137.

<sup>508</sup> A. Basha, 'Yemen', in S. Nazir & L. Tomppert (eds), *Women's rights in the Middle East and North Africa: citizenship and justice*, Freedom House, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005.

<sup>509</sup> Republic of Yemen Constitution 1991, posted by Yemen Parliament Watch, <http://www.yppwatch.org/page.php?id=48>, (accessed 5 November 2016).

<sup>510</sup> Freedom House, 'Yemen', *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa*, 3 March 2010, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4b99011b1a.html>, (accessed 7 November 2016).

This argument was based on the notion that in the current constitution, women are considered an affiliate (sisters) of men instead of positioned on the same standing. Moreover, there is the direct mention of Shari'ah as a base of gender rights and duties, which is controversial and ambiguous as it is highly dependent on the interpretation of the religious scholars of the country who are always men. Furthermore, this amendment had occurred immediately following the 1994 secession civil war between the traditional north and the liberal south, post their unity in 1990 to form the Republic of Yemen. Consequently, the outcome of the war, in which the conservative north won maintaining the united Republic of Yemen, largely determined the state's attitude towards women since.

## **2.2 Women's rights in the laws**

The above-mentioned article in the constitution “indicates a cultural attitude in which women are protected by their brothers and in which they are weaker and have less worth... [moreover] the Personal Status Law, the Penal Code, the Citizenship Law, the Evidence Law, and the Labour Law contain provisions discriminating on the basis of gender.”<sup>511</sup>

An interesting fact in Yemen's legal texts concerning women is that the current challenges are a result of the rise of conservative Islamists to power in the late nineties, specifically since the prevailing of the conservative north as mentioned in the section above. In particular, the Personal Status Law amendments of 1997 and 1999 were damaging to women's rights in the personal sphere.

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<sup>511</sup> OECD, Center of Arab Woman for Training and Research, *Women in public life: Gender, law and policy in the Middle East and North Africa*, OECD Publishing, 2014, p. 52.

The table below lists the some of the most significant articles in the laws as well as amendments relevant to women in the legal texts prior to 2006:<sup>512</sup>

Figure 2 Amended laws between 1994 and 2006 concerning women

Law	Description
The Crimes and Penalty Law No. (12) of 1994	<p><i>Discriminating article:</i> Article (42) of the law states that the blood money [financial compensation paid by the murderer to the deceased person’s family] due to a murdered woman’s family is half of that of a man. Similarly, compensation for her injury is equal to that of a man as long as it does not exceed the value of one third of a man’s blood money, if it does, then the injury compensation is negotiated as less than that of a man’s compensation money for the same injury.</p> <p><i>Discriminating article:</i> Article (232) permits the husband to kill his wife if he was to catch her in a state of adultery as well as kill the man with whom the act was committed. The punishment of such murder is a fine or imprisonment for a period no longer than one year.</p> <p><i>Discriminating article:</i> Article (233) Punishment of a male guardian for taking the life of his female relative (daughter/sister/mother) upon catching her in sexual intercourse or/and that of the man with whom the act was committed, is also a fine or imprisonment for a period no longer than three year.</p>
Social Protection Law No. (31) of 1996 amended by Law No. (17) of 1999	<p><i>Positive amendment:</i> Article (2) of the earlier version of the law granted a woman welfare benefits from the state if she could not work, had no means of support, and was either divorced, widowed or older than 30 years old and unmarried. The amended text of 1999 removes the condition of ability to work, which means a woman can receive state benefits regardless of her ability to work provided she has no means of income and is either divorced, widowed, or older than 30 years of age and unmarried.</p>

<sup>512</sup> Sources: Women National Committee, *National report on progress to date in the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women – Fifth periodic report*, Supreme Council for Women, 2001. N. Krishnan, *The status of Yemeni women: From aspiration to opportunity*, World Bank, Washington, DC, 2014. A. Würth, ‘Stalled reform: family law in post-unification Yemen’, *Islamic law and society*, Jan 1, 10(1), 2003. National Information Center, *Yemeni laws*, Republic of Yemen, <https://www.yemen-nic.info> (accessed July and August 2019). Also the collection of Yemeni laws between 1990 and 2004.

<p>Personal Status Law No. 27 of 1998 amendments from Law No. 20 of year 1992</p>	<p><i>Neutral amendment:</i> Article (4) was amended stating that if an engagement is cancelled due to force majeure the woman must return unused gifts she was granted by custom of engagement. In the previous text she did not have to return any gifts, used or unused.</p> <p><i>Negative amendment:</i> Article (5) was amended stating that if there was harm caused by cancelling the engagement, the person who cancelled it must compensate the other according to what the court states if they were to take the issue to court. The previous text said the person who cancelled the engagement compensates the other. No further specification was made.</p> <p><i>Negative amendment:</i> Article (12) removed some of the restrictions on polygamy. In addition to equal treatment of all wives and having the financial ability to support them all, the previous text preconditioned taking an additional wife to a legitimate interest and required informing his existing wife(ivs) of his interest. The new text maintains the conditions of equality and financial ability but requires only informing the new wife that he is already married and removes the condition of legitimate interest.<sup>513</sup></p> <p><i>Positive amendment:</i> Article (16) adds a condition of the woman's consent to the marriage agreement arranged by a guardian and gives her the ability to choose between various proposals in case there is more than one.</p> <p><i>Positive amendment:</i> Article (39) gives a wife the right to withhold marital relations if her dowry was not paid unless it was previously agreed to be postponed whether a whole or in part. The 1998 amendment conditions the wife's approval of the postponing of the dowry payment.</p> <p><i>Negative amendment:</i> Article (40) regarding a woman's duties to her husband included an amendment requiring her husband's permission before leaving the martial home unless it was for her work or regular socially accepted matters. The 1998 amendment added a clause on the wife's work that it should have been agreed on</p>
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<sup>513</sup> A legitimate interest is understood culturally as an acceptable reason for taking a new wife such as the first wife is unable to bear children or has some form of disability that affects their marriage. The law allows the husband with the consent of his first wife to take another.

	<p>with the husband and that it should be as per the Islamic jurisprudence.</p> <p><i>Positive amendment:</i> Article (42) was amended to give sister-wives the right to demand independent accommodation and to change their minds at any point should they have agreed to live together initially.</p> <p><i>Positive amendment:</i> A section in Article (52) was added giving the wife of an imprisoned man the right to divorce if his sentence was three years or more, but she has to wait for one year before exercising this right.</p> <p><i>Negative amendment:</i> Article (69) on divorce was amended to give the husband the right to reclaim his wife within the post-separation waiting period even if the divorce was initiated by her. The previous text only concerned the divorce initiated by the husband.</p> <p><i>Discriminating article:</i> Article (139) gives the divorced mother primary custody of her children until they are 9 years old if male and 12 years old if female, unless the judge decides otherwise. Beyond this age the father is given primary custody of the children.</p> <p><i>Negative amendment:</i> Article (152) on alimony gave the husband the right to stop supporting his wife financially if she has a job, unless his objection to her work was unjust. The 1998 amendment gave the husband the option to stop financially supporting his working wife regardless of the circumstances of her work.</p>
<p>Personal Status Law No. 24 of 1999 amending Law No. (27) of 1998 and from Law No. 20 of year 1992</p>	<p><i>Negative amendment:</i> Article (15) which previously defined the minimum age of marriage at 15 years for both girls and boys was annulled to allow the marriage of a minor girl although conditioned consummation of the marriage to puberty. It allowed the marriage of a young boy provided there is a benefit<sup>514</sup> of such act.</p> <p><i>Negative amendment:</i> Article (71) of the 1992 Law was deleted by the 1999 amendment. This article gave the wife a right to financial compensation from her husband if he divorced her arbitrarily and caused her harm by this divorce.</p>

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<sup>514</sup> The word benefit [maslaha in Arabic] is one of the troubling terms in many Yemeni legal texts because of its vagueness. It allows the judge to interpret it as he sees fit according to his personal beliefs.

The Insurance and Pensions Law No. (25) of 1991 as amended by Law No.1 of 2000	<i>Positive amendment:</i> An additional article (No. 60 repeated) was added in the 2000 version to allow both husband or wife to claim the pension of their spouse if the spouse passed away, even if they had their own pension or salary.
Nationality law No. 24 for year 2003 adding an article (No. 10 repeated) to Nationality law No. 6 of 1990	<i>Positive amendment:</i> If a Yemeni woman was made responsible for supporting her children due to being divorced from her foreign husband, or due to his demise, incapacity or abandonment, her children are to be treated as Yemeni citizens until they are adults at which age they can choose between their mother's Yemeni nationality or that of their father.
The Civil Registry Law No. (23) of 1991 amended by Law No. (23) of 2003	<i>Positive amendment:</i> Article (21) of the 1991 was amended by giving both parents the right to register the birth of their child which was previously given to the father only, followed by male relatives and then female relatives (including the mother).
The Labour Code Law No. (5) of 1995 as amended by Law No. (25) of year 2003	<i>Positive amendment:</i> An additional article (No. 45 repeated) was added in the 2003 version requiring public and private institutions that employ at least 50 women to provide day care services for the employees' children.
Prison Regulations Law No. (26) for year (2003) amended by Law No. (48) for year 1991	<i>Positive amendment:</i> Article (27) in the 1991 version stated that the state should provide imprisoned pregnant women with adequate health and medical care before, during, and after delivery as per instructions of a competent authority and according to the international charter for civil rights. The 2003 amendment added that pregnant and nursing women should be provided with adequate nutrition and exempted from disciplinary measures.

Notwithstanding the above table, in terms of practice, a review of the legal amendments passed since 2006 indicated a slight improvement in women's rights in the legal system. This is partly credited to the slowly growing women's movement and increased

awareness of Yemeni civil society, which were strongly supported by donors and international organisations.<sup>515</sup>

In total, 90 national laws were identified as discriminatory against women.<sup>516</sup> The Women National Committee, which is the government authority on women directly headed by the Prime Minister, alongside women's activists and NGOs, lobbied the parliament to amend them. So far, only 18 legal texts located in nine different laws were amended.<sup>517</sup> Most of the discriminatory texts were found in the Personal Status Law, which is one of the primary legal mechanisms through which the gender power balance is maintained in favour of men, which is a natural characteristic of a male dominated society like Yemen. Discriminatory articles were relevant to marriage, divorce, custody of children, mobility, and credibility of character. For example, Article (7) of the Personal Status Law does not even require the presence of the bride before approving the marriage contract, and Article (23) allows a male guardian to simply marry off a woman under his 'custody' as he wishes. Similarly, a woman cannot marry without the consent of her male guardian, unless she is able to appeal to the court through a complicated and unfriendly process.

Since 2006, there have been several attempts, some of which were successful and some not, to amend the legal system in favour of women. At the forefront, an attempt to slightly improve the text of Article (31) of the constitution, which defines women as sisters of men, faced rejection by parliamentarians despite intensive discussions and lobbying in both legislative venues and civil society.<sup>518</sup> However, some amendments were passed in favour of women. For example, in 2008 two articles of the 1995 Labour Code were amended to increase paid maternity leave for new mothers from 60 days to 70 and introduced new measures for protection of pregnant women in the workplace. Another amendment that was successfully passed was in Article (61) of the Civic Law

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<sup>515</sup> G. E. Robinson, et. al., *Yemen corruption assessment*, ARD, Inc., Burlington, 2006, p. 54. Moreover, in dominant-power systems as described by Carothers, it falls on the civil society to skirmish with the government pushing it towards positive democratic change. See Carothers, op. cit., p. 12 & 13.

<sup>516</sup> Women National Committee, *Altaqreer alwaṭani limustawa tanfeeth "i'alan wa minhaj 'amal Beijing +20 [The national report for progress in implementing the declaration and platform of action Beijing+20]*, Supreme Council for Women, 2015, p.18.

<sup>517</sup> Women National Committee, Loc. cit.

<sup>518</sup> Women National Committee, *Seventh National Report on the Implementation of Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women CEDAW*, 2009, [http://wikigender.org/wp-content/uploads/files/The\\_7th\\_report\\_of\\_CEDAW.pdf](http://wikigender.org/wp-content/uploads/files/The_7th_report_of_CEDAW.pdf), (accessed 7 February 2017).

No. 14/2002. The article provides a testing mechanism for the maturity of a child in order to entrust capital or a business to them. Initially the text addressed only male children and the amendment added that the maturity of any child whether male or female can be tested using the same mechanism.<sup>519</sup>

A more significant breakthrough was that of the Nationality Law No. 6/1990. The 2009 amendment of Article (3) of the law allowed Yemeni women to pass on their Yemeni nationality to their children. However, despite the clear text of the amended law, the executive regulation under law No. (25) for year 2010 fell short, as it only gave this right to children of Yemeni mothers born after the issuing of the law on the 21<sup>st</sup> of November 2010. Children of a Yemeni woman and a non-Yemeni man who were born before that date were to be treated as Yemenis but not given the nationality, unless the father was proven dead, or incapable of providing for the family, or has abandoned the family.

Additionally, once the children reach 18 years old, they can demand to be given the Yemeni nationality but only if any of the circumstances above existed.<sup>520</sup> In all cases, Yemeni women who want to be married to a non-Yemeni must take permission from the Ministry of Interior<sup>521</sup> in the first place, and the Ministry has the right to decline or stall without an explanation. Meanwhile, Yemeni men who choose to marry non-Yemeni women do not have to get such permission. Furthermore, Non-Yemeni husbands of Yemeni women have to obtain permits to stay in the country, renewable every two years depending on the mood of the immigration officer handling the specific case. However, the non-Yemeni wife of a Yemeni obtains an automatically-renewable 5-year residency.<sup>522</sup>

Another positive legal text was in the Public Health Law No. (4) issued on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2009, and which included a section on women and child health stating that the Health

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<sup>519</sup> Although this amendment in spirit indicates that women can also be entrusted to run manage their own capital or run businesses – if proven mature – the text is very subjective as the decision for both the male or female child remains with the guardian who is influenced by social norms that favour men to women in this field.

<sup>520</sup> M. Bamabad, 'Interview on the nationality law with General Hisham Al-Farah head of legal affairs at the immigration and passports office in Aden', *14 October Newspaper*, issue 16011 on Sunday March 9, 2014, <http://www.14october.com/news.aspx?newsno=3067006>, (accessed 6 Feb 2017).

<sup>521</sup> A. Basha, op. cit.

<sup>522</sup> Public Prosecutor's Office, *Law No. (4) for year 1994 for the Executive Charter on foreigners entry and residency in Yemen*, The Republic of Yemen, 1994, [http://agoyemen.net/lib\\_details.php?id=41](http://agoyemen.net/lib_details.php?id=41), (accessed 30 January 2019).

Ministry must make healthcare for women and children a priority as part of its national strategy.<sup>523</sup> The law does not detail how this was to be done, but provided a general instruction, which again was subject to interpretation and the implementation processes.

One of the critical legal junctures in women's rights was the controversy surrounding the law for a minimum age for marriage; as half of Yemeni girls are married off before they are 18 years old,<sup>524</sup> with the average age at 15 years old.<sup>525</sup> The implications of this on their education and health are significant. Since year 2006, civil society organisations, the Women National Committee, and women leaders in the health sector joined forces in several advocacy campaigns demanding legal prohibition of child marriages. A breakthrough took place after the story of a nine-year-old girl married off to a 33-year-old man made international headlines,<sup>526</sup> and on 11<sup>th</sup> February 2009 the parliament approved 17 years old as the minimum age for marriage for both boys and girls. However, the following day, traditional conservative members of the parliament deemed the new law un-Islamic, found an administrative loophole, pleaded against the legality of the voting process, and consequently annulled the law.<sup>527</sup>

Moreover, there are some legal barriers to women's access to economic opportunities such as the legal requirement<sup>528</sup> of a married woman to obtain her husband's permission before working outside home, and that the work she pursues must not contradict Shari'ah rules or cause her neglecting her 'marital duties'<sup>529</sup> towards her husband. However, a number of laws relevant to women's labour were amended in 2008 as a

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<sup>523</sup> Republic of Yemen, *Public Health Law No. 4 for year 2009*, decreed by the Presidential Office after approval of the Parliament, <http://www.ypwatch.org/page.php?id=1142>, (accessed 7 February 2017).

<sup>524</sup> In effect, this figure has increased after 2014 to "More than two thirds of girls are married off before they reach 18, compared to 50 per cent before the conflict escalated." UNICEF, '*Falling through the cracks: The children of Yemen*', March 2017, [https://www.unicef.org/sites/default/files/press-releases/glo-media-Yemen\\_2\\_Years\\_-\\_children\\_falling\\_through\\_the\\_cracks\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/sites/default/files/press-releases/glo-media-Yemen_2_Years_-_children_falling_through_the_cracks_FINAL.pdf), (accessed 8 November 2018).

<sup>525</sup> UNdata, 'Minimum legal age for marriage without consent', <http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?q=marriage&d=GenderStat&f=inID:19>, (accessed 9 March 2017).

<sup>526</sup> The story of Nujood Ali was eventually turned into a book translated to many languages and a movie. See P. Newton, 'Child bride's nightmare after divorce', CNN International, 28 August 2008, <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/08/26/yemen.divorce/index.html?iref=hpmostpop>, (accessed 9 March 2017).

<sup>527</sup> H. Sweetland Edwards, 'Yemen's child bride backlash', *Foreign Policy*, 30 April 2010, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2010/04/30/yemens-child-bride-backlash/>, (accessed 9 March 2017).

<sup>528</sup> Law No. 40 of the Personal Status Code. This article was amended in 1998 of the original text in 1992 which said a woman can leave her home to her work even without her husband's permission.

<sup>529</sup> Definition of this term is left to the husband and mostly influenced by the socio-cultural background of the judge or mediators should the woman seek their help to convince her husband.

result of advocacy activities by the Women National Committee. Such as equating the retirement age with men to 60 years of age, social insurance provisions, and requiring institutions with 50 female employees or more to provide day care services for its female employees.<sup>530</sup> It could be argued that amendments that relating to the femininity of a women, such as increased maternity leave, day care for working mothers' children, nationality of the children of an abandoned mother, were easier to pass compared to those that aimed to portray women as equal citizens in their own right.

### 2.3 Access to the legal system

Since the legal system is closely linked with the judiciary system, it is not enough for the laws to reflect gender equality, as it is equally important that women can access the legal system without feeling intimidated or discriminated against. In general, the percentage of women in the judiciary system does not exceed 5%.<sup>531</sup> By 2008, compared to 953 male judges, the number of women judges reached 84,<sup>532</sup> most of whom were confined to administrative jobs. At the Ministry of Justice, the number of women judges employed was only three compared to 52 male judges. One explanation for this gender disparity is that women were not allowed to enrol in the Supreme Judiciary Institute, which is a gateway for appointment as a judge, until 2007, when it accepted a small number of female students. The first time that women graduated from the Supreme Justice Institute in the Republic of Yemen was in 2010, when five female judges graduated in a batch of 81 students. In the following three years the institute enrolled 256 students, among whom only 12 were women.<sup>533</sup> In the latest batch of 2016, among 226 students only 11 were women, indicating that women's share does not exceed 5% on average and showing no improvement for the last decade or more.

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<sup>530</sup> Some institutions resorted to employing a maximum of 49 women in order to avoid this obligation.

<sup>531</sup> WNC, *Beijing + 20*, *op. cit.*

<sup>532</sup> A. Alazraq & S. Aljawfi, 'Ḥuḍoor lafit lilmar'a khilal 'aqdain min alwihda alyamaniaya' [Distinguished presence for women's during the two decades since the Yemeni unity], *Saba News Agency*, 22 May 2010, <http://www.saba.ye/ar/news215061.htm>, (accessed 10 February 2017).

<sup>533</sup> In the report on student intake, it was mentioned that among the three batches there were 12 women and three Palestinians, which is an indirect indication that women are considered as foreign elements or at least exceptions in the judiciary system. See news report in Arabic: Y. Jaber 'Judicial reforms in the blessed unity era', *Saba News Agency*, 13 May 2010, <http://www.ysc.org.ye/body.asp?field=news&id=505>, (accessed 9 February 2017).

Furthermore, the low number of women working in the judiciary presents an inhibitor for the women population to access the judiciary system, especially because of the harsh nature of the court rooms and chambers with their over crowdedness and male domination. This structural characteristic presents another deterrent for women to access the judiciary system and hence they are inclined to resolve their issues through traditional means, which are very patriarchal and unfriendly towards women's rights.<sup>534</sup>

However, even if women were to access the judiciary system, there is a strong chance they would not be treated fairly, or at least equally to men. The basis of the judiciary is Islamic Jurisprudence (Shari'ah), which is interpreted by the presiding judges based on their background, education, and personal values.<sup>535</sup> Through this interpretation "an adult woman is not recognized as a full person before the court."<sup>536</sup> For example, her testimony is not accepted in adultery and retribution cases or in cases where a physical punishment is an option, and her testimony otherwise is accepted as half of that of a man.<sup>537</sup>

In general, the attitude towards women's rights in the judiciary and legal systems is more of a morality verdict of what is Islamic and what is non-Islamic according to the interpretation of the judge. This is especially true with the rise of political Islam even in the relatively more modern areas of the country such as the former socialist south.<sup>538</sup> For example, some judges who are originally from north Yemen continue to consider 'Khilwa' a crime even though it was removed from the current Penal Code. Khilwa was defined in the Penal Code of North Yemen as "the unjustified meeting between an adult male and an adult female who are not close relatives."<sup>539</sup> Another example is when judges, who preside over courts outside the main cities, rule against the law itself and

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<sup>534</sup> Basha, A. op. cit.

<sup>535</sup> N. J. Brown, *Arab judicial structures*, Program on Governance in the Arab Region (POGAR), United Nations Development Programme, New York, 2001.

<sup>536</sup> E. Manea, *Yemen*, in S. Kelly & J. Breslin (eds.), *Women's rights in the Middle East and North Africa: progress amid resistance*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010.

<sup>537</sup> Republic of Yemen, Article (45) of the Evidence Law No. (21) for year 1992, <http://alsiddiqlaw.yoo7.com/t35-topic>, (accessed 8 February 2017).

<sup>538</sup> S. Dahlgren, 'She brings up healthy children for the homeland: Morality discourses in Yemeni legal debates', *Family law in Islam: Divorce, marriage and women in the Muslim world*, 4, 13, 2012, p.18.

<sup>539</sup> Basha, A. op. cit. p. 339.

in favour of the discriminatory traditional norms against women such as deprivation from inheritance.<sup>540</sup>

The influence of culture including tribal norms on the judiciary and legal systems is not limited to the nature of ruling or the presence of women, but it also affects the institutional culture as many male judges still do not recognise the authority or the qualifications of their female colleagues,<sup>541</sup> and consequently this increases the challenges female judges face in their work. Even the women who are able to work as judges are usually limited to ruling in family dispute cases or traffic incidents.<sup>542</sup> Another example of the cultural spill over from social practices into the judicial system was in 2010, when a debate arose concerning whether a female judge should or should not wear a veil to cover her face, a debate that was started by the Justice Minister<sup>543</sup> and reached the parliament. Two years later, another debate over the veil emerged when the Higher Judiciary Institute<sup>544</sup> allegedly forced female students to wear the veil, while some of the conservative lecturers segregated male students from female students.<sup>545</sup>

The judicial system's gender policy is more difficult to identify since the judges act on their own accord and differ in their attitude towards women's rights according to their own understanding of the Shariah law. However, it is clear that both the judiciary and legal systems remain male dominated entities and that the "patriarchal social norms

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<sup>540</sup> Fatima Aloshabi described how a judge from Mahwait denied her the right to her inheritance which is ensured by the law under the excuse that traditions dictate that women do not inherit. Interview with Alawali, F., 'Daughters of Yemeni sheikhs', *Raseef*, 17 December 2015, <https://goo.gl/Tqci3X>, (accessed 8 February 2017).

<sup>541</sup> For example, Judge Abdul Malik Altaj spoke publically in a conference on women's modern issues in 2008 that a woman is not to work as a judge: 'Ḥukm tawali alnisa' lilqaḍa' fi al'aman' [The religious ruling on women's work as judges in Yemen], *Manbar Olama Alyaman*, 8 February 2011, <http://olamaa-yemen.net/Article/index/1218>, (accessed 7 February 2017). Yahya Alhashimi is another male judge who publically condemned women working as judges and who is member of the Appeals Court. He said that judiciary is a job for a complete person and a woman is "incomplete" see interview in Arabic by H. Alusta, 'Yamaniat fi silk alqaḍa' bain alta'eed wa alrafid' [Yemeni women in judiciary, between acceptance and rejection], *Mareb Press*, 21 August 2007, <http://marebpress.net/articles.php?id=2372>, (accessed 8 February 2017).

<sup>542</sup> Alusta, *ibid.*

<sup>543</sup> Justice Minister Ghazi Alaghbari issued a decree forcing female judges and female students in the Higher Judiciary Institute who want to work as judges to uncover their face while practicing, otherwise they will be allocated administrative duties. His argument was that a female judge's character is a public matter and for the public to trust her and her jurisdiction they need to know her. Conservative judges and conservative members of parliament rejected his decision stating that a woman's veil is a personal choice guaranteed by the constitution.

<sup>544</sup> There was a change in the institute management and indicating that gender issues are a matter of personal choice of the authority presiding over the institute rather than an institutional policy.

<sup>545</sup> Judiciary and Justice Committee, *The Yemeni Judiciary System 2012-2013*, Jabhat Inqathe Althawrah Alsilmiyah [Revolution Rescue Front], 2013.

continue to hinder women's access to the judicial system, and legal provisions still give them an inferior status".<sup>546</sup>

## 2.4 Pending legal reforms

It is important to note at this point that a draft constitution was proposed in 2015 based on the National Dialogue Conference's<sup>547</sup> outcomes. Overall, the draft constitution presented a more favourable attitude towards women, and even provided measures for positive discrimination.

For example, the minimum age for marriage was stated clearly in Article (124) as 18 years of age. Also, in terms of equal citizenship, this draft constitution was a visible improvement from the current one as it stated in Article (75) "Citizens shall have equal rights, freedoms and public duties without discrimination due to sex, skin colour, race, origin, religion, sect, belief, opinion, economic or social status, disability, political or geographical affiliation, occupation, birth, or any other considerations."<sup>548</sup> This article was immediately followed by Article (76), which reads: "To give effect to the principle of equal citizenship, the state shall enact legislation and take measures, to achieve effective political participation for women to ensure access to at least 30% in various authorities and bodies."<sup>549</sup>

Within the same draft constitution, there were several detailed measures to protect gender equality, such as "special guarantees and procedures for the protection of women during the pre-trial and trial stages."<sup>550</sup> In addition, Article (128) stated that "Women have full civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights without discrimination. The state shall be committed to empower women to exercise the rights

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<sup>546</sup> Freedom House, 2010, op. cit.

<sup>547</sup> The NDC carried out between March 2013 and January 2014, was a political event resulting from a power transition deal post Yemen's Arab Spring in 2011, when protestors demanded regime change. After almost a year of protests, former president Saleh of 33 years of rule, handed over power to his deputy who was supposed to lead a transition period of three years ending with elections. This transition included the NDC where women made up 30% of its participants and hence, had the chance to contribute to rewriting the constitution in order to address the country's long standing political, economic and social grievances.

<sup>548</sup> International IDEA, *Yemen: Draft constitution of 2015*, Unofficial translation carried out by the United Nations and reviewed by International IDEA, 2015, <http://www.constitutionnet.org/vl/item/yemen-draft-constitution-2015>, (accessed 7 November 2016).

<sup>549</sup> International IDEA, *ibid.*

<sup>550</sup> International IDEA, *ibid.*

of equal citizenship, and protect them from all forms of violence, all inhumane practices and enable them to reconcile between their family duties and the requirements of their jobs. Legislation shall be enacted accordingly to realize these aims.”<sup>551</sup>

Incidentally, out of the 17 members of the Constitution Drafting Committee responsible for the 2015 draft constitution, four were women, making a percentage of around 24%. This was the first time a woman participated in drafting a Yemeni constitution, which could be the reason why the draft constitution promoted gender equality the way it does. Out of the four female members, one was elected by the committee members as deputy chair. However, even within this committee, the women faced great challenges from their male colleagues as they pushed forward the gender equality points.<sup>552</sup>

That being the case, this text is on hold due to the current political instability, and in fact, indicators from the country’s current reality show that such a progressive document is unlikely to be adopted because of the domination of conservative traditional de-facto leadership in the country today.

In sum, the analysis of the Yemeni state’s attitude towards gender equality and women’s empowerment in the legal and judicial system shows clear bias against women. Not only were many of the texts in the constitution and laws, especially the Personal Status Law, discriminative against women, yet the application of the law in by relevant authorities posed as another obstacle against women’s empowerment.

### **3 Republic of Yemen’s gender policy: Women’s authority and political space**

Having examined the legal system, analysis now turns to the political sphere. Structurally, the highest point of executive authority in the Republic of Yemen is the president, followed by the prime minister and the cabinet. There is a small unit<sup>553</sup> within

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<sup>551</sup> International IDEA, *ibid.*

<sup>552</sup> N. Alawlaqi, ‘Dawr alnisa’ fi alḥawol alsiyasi fi aljumorh aliyamaniya, alḥadiyat wa almunjazat’ [Women’s role in political transformation in Yemen, challenges and achievements], a working paper presented in the *Women in MENA Politics Conference*, Nazra for Women Studies, 23 – 25 July 2015, Beirut.

<sup>553</sup> Personal communication with Ahmed Awadh bin Mubarak, who was Chief of Staff of the presidential office between July 2014 and March 2015.

the presidential office concerned with women's affairs, but it was merely symbolic and not essentially functional. Instead, when required, the president relied on input from unofficial advisors concerning issues related to women. However, in November 2012 President Hadi created the first official position for an Adviser at the President's Office on Women's Affairs.<sup>554</sup> Despite this appointment, due to the political instability the post was not efficiently used to the advantage of Yemeni women.

### 3.1 The quota controversy

Prior to President Hadi assuming power in November 2011,<sup>555</sup> across his 33 years of rule, former president Saleh had repeatedly issued public statements in favour of women's empowerment. These statements were viewed by women leaders as propaganda used for political purposes, namely as a demonstration of modernity and liberalism,<sup>556</sup> especially since many such promises never materialised. For example, in response to a women's rights campaign for a political quota, he announced in 2006 that his party, the General People's Congress (GPC), would dedicate 15% of its nominations to women in the local council elections that were due to be held later that same year. Saleh also called on politically independent women to nominate themselves, promising financial support from the state's budget, and he even called on their male rivals to step down and give women a greater chance.<sup>557</sup> However, "there is no evidence that independent candidates received any state funding or that the instruction to male GPC candidates was officially implemented, indeed evidence points to the contrary with reports of verbal intimidation and harassment of women candidates by the GPC on a broad scale. The GPC did not meet its benchmark of 15 per cent female candidates."<sup>558</sup> A report on women's political participation in the GPC claimed that the party approved a 15% quota of its nominations internally, 20% at the local council elections level, and

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<sup>554</sup> This presidential decree number 55 issued on 6 November 2012 was a response to the Women National Committee continuous pressure since 2006 to create a position for women's advisor at the presidential office and to upgrade the status of the committee to a ministerial level.

<sup>555</sup> President Hadi came to power through a transition political deal brokered by the UN and Gulf Countries – mainly Saudi Arabia – as a response to Yemen's Arab Spring and popular demands for former President Saleh to cede power. Hadi's rule was legitimised by a referendum on 25 Feb 2012, although this should have been a three-year term, due to the political instability he is legitimately the president since then.

<sup>556</sup> Personal interview with Hooria Mashour, former Chairperson of Women National Committee.

<sup>557</sup> European Union Election Observation Mission, *Final Report, Presidential and Local Elections 20 September 2006*, European Union, 2006, [http://www.eods.eu/library/FR%20YEMEN%202006\\_en.pdf](http://www.eods.eu/library/FR%20YEMEN%202006_en.pdf), (accessed 28 February 2017).

<sup>558</sup> European Union Election Observation Mission, op. cit., p. 27.

15% at the parliamentary elections level<sup>559</sup> for the parliamentary elections due in April 2009. However, no elections were held since 2006, and therefore, such measures could not be tested.<sup>560</sup>

As a matter of fact, a few months prior to the parliamentary elections scheduled to take place in April 2011 (and which were postponed from 2009), former president Saleh, in his party's general assembly for the preparation for the parliamentary elections, presented a number of constitutional amendments that were to be considered as an integrated package.<sup>561</sup> These amendments included adding 44 seats to parliament exclusively for women, to make women's representation 15% of the total seats, which were to become 345.<sup>562</sup> Additionally, it included another democratically positive amendment, which was to promote decentralisation by strengthening the powers of local authorities at the governorate level. However, the amendments also included one that allowed the president to run again despite him concluding his second – and legally final - term as president.<sup>563</sup>

Although opposition and independent parliamentarians (a total of 65 MPs) rejected the amendments and boycotted the parliamentary session where these amendments were presented for voting, the GPC, which held majority in the parliament (170 seats at 56%) accepted the amendments request and referred it to a special committee for review in preparation for voting on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2011,<sup>564</sup> prior to parliamentary elections scheduled on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2011. Not only was this move negatively received by Yemen's political opposition and civil society, but the international community was also reluctant to approve. For instance, the US Department of State warned the GPC against rushing into

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<sup>559</sup> F. Alkhatari, 'Almar'a fi hizb almo'tamar alsha'abi ala'am' [Women in the General People's Congress], a working paper presented to the Women in Politics Programme's consultative meeting 4-5 October 2016, Sana'a, Young Leadership Development Foundation and UN Women.

<sup>560</sup> Yadav, S. P., 'Segmented publics and Islamist women in Yemen: rethinking space and activism', *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 6(2), 1-30, 2010, p. 24.

<sup>561</sup> The bundling of women's issues in a complicated proposal has been a repeated practice by politicians and which had invariably lead to failure in passing laws supportive of women. Another example of this practice is the Safe Motherhood Law which was rejected because it included a ban on two controversial gender issues: Female Genital Mutilation and Child Marriages. Human Rights Watch, *Events of 2008: Yemen*, 2009.

<sup>562</sup> There were several debates on how to promote women's participation in the Parliament without taking away seats from the men and hence the expansion of the entire parliament presented an agreeable solution. In the theoretical chapter, this attitude is understood as zero-sum game in gender power theories.

<sup>563</sup> The Yemeni constitution stipulates that a president can only rule for a maximum of 14 years (two 7-year terms) and Saleh wanted to change the constitution to be able to run again for president.

<sup>564</sup> Which is two months post referral as per article 185 of the constitution. After approval of the amendments by the parliament there will be a public referendum to endorse the amendments.

a parliamentary action and advised the party to return to negotiation with opposition.<sup>565</sup> The constitutional amendments were not voted on because of the Arab Spring and opposition-led protests to remove Saleh, which were followed by a political transition phase, and which led to the current armed conflict. Evidently, since no elections had taken place in Yemen since 2006 and with the armed coup d'état in 2014, the entire democratic processes of the country are in a questionable position.

### 3.2 State institutions and political appointments

#### a) WNC, the driving force behind women's empowerment

Any analysis of Yemen's gender policies would be incomplete without a description of the most important government instrument concerned with women: The Woman National Committee (WNC). The WNC is the government's body responsible for designing, advocating for, and evaluating women's policies. Established in 1996, the Women National Committee had been the designated governmental body when it came to women's issues. Although financially and administratively independent of the government, the WNC was created under the patronage of the Prime Minister. In 2003, the committee's mandate was expanded<sup>566</sup> and it was made the executive, consultative, and administrative part of the Supreme Council for Women's Affairs. "Such proximity to the centre of government can facilitate visibility and high-level support for gender equality, yet in the absence of a minister for gender equality, gender issues may not be fully integrated into the mainstream decision-making process both in cabinet and across government departments."<sup>567</sup>

Among the attempts to mitigate this disconnect was the establishment of Women Departments in all ministries and government institutions in 1999. Additionally, in 2001, women's departments at the governorate levels were created, however, structurally they were under the Ministry of Local Administration. This created a duality, but the authority of the WNC surpassed the local administration units,

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<sup>565</sup> M. C. Toner, *Yemen parliamentary procedure*, US Department of State, 31<sup>st</sup> December 2010, PRN: 2010/1868, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2010/12/153810.htm>, (accessed 28 February 2017).

<sup>566</sup> As per Prime Minister's decree No. 68/2000.

<sup>567</sup> MENA-OECD Governance Program 2014, op. cit.

especially since the WNC mandate was much broader and its capacity was stronger, although at many times there were joint activities.<sup>568</sup>

Since 1999, WNC leadership pushed for upgrading its status to a ministerial level similar to other countries in the region, such as Palestine, Tunisia, and Morocco.<sup>569</sup> However, these efforts are yet to be realised. Nevertheless, leaders in the Women National Committee managed to convince the cabinet to increase its budget and it was successfully increased three-folds in 2008<sup>570</sup> and by 80% in 2012,<sup>571</sup> reaching 135.8 million Yemeni Riyals [equivalent to approximately \$619,479 US at the 2012 exchange rates].<sup>572</sup>

Through its mandate, the Women National Committee was the main driving force for gender mainstreaming in budgets, national plans, and legal amendments of discriminatory laws against women. It carried out regular progress reports of various ministries on their implementation of the gender component in their respective plans. For example, in its evaluation of the progress made by sectoral ministries in gender issues, the WNC's 2013 report on progress in implementing the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, indicated that there is an adherence to WNC recommendations regarding gender equality only between 5% and 20% in the various ministries.<sup>573</sup>

Moreover, the WNC worked closely with civil society organisations such as women's NGOs and gender research centres in order to advocate for women's rights and support changes in women's status in Yemen. For example, the Yemeni network for fighting violence against women (aka SHAIMA), including 17 civil society organisations as well as the WNC, headed by the Yemeni Women's Union, was created in 2003 to combat violence against women in the country. Members of the network collectively and independently carried out several projects aimed at preventing violence against

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<sup>568</sup> Personal interview with Hooria Mashour, op. cit.

<sup>569</sup> Personal Interview with Hooria Mashour, ibid.

<sup>570</sup> Personal interview with Hooria Mashour, former chairperson of the WNC. Initial annual budget in 2000 was 25 million Yemeni Riyals [= \$146,460 US at 2002 rates], which increased to 75 million in 2008 [= \$377,547 US at 2008 rates].

<sup>571</sup> Personal communication with Dr. Shafiqah Alwahsh chairperson of the WNC 2017, who negotiated a raise in the 2012 budget.

<sup>572</sup> It is important to note that the depreciation in the Yemeni Riyal's value affects the significance of this increase.

<sup>573</sup> WNC, Beijing +20, op. cit., p. 12.

women, with funding from donors such as Oxfam-GB and the Danish International Development Agency.<sup>574</sup> Another civil society network, the ‘New Yemen’s Women’, was established with the support of WNC in March 2012 to promote women’s empowerment through supporting the NDC process and eventual outcomes regarding women.

### **b) Political appointments of women**

In terms of Yemeni women’s visibility in the political space and in decision-making positions, the last two decades witnessed a strong trend of high-level appointments of women in positions of authority in various government institutions. The percentage of women in high-level government positions, such as department director and deputy minister, reached 14.46% in 2014,<sup>575</sup> compared to 9.5% in 2008. In 2008, the number of women holding appointed leadership positions were two ministers, two members of the Consultative (Shoura) Council, 27 diplomats serving in missions abroad, 16 deputy ministers, 37 judges, and 72 director generals.<sup>576</sup> The highest rank a woman achieved in the judiciary was in 2006, when a female judge was appointed as member of the Supreme Court.<sup>577</sup> In the same year, the Supreme National Authority for Combating Corruption was created and headed by a woman. Moreover, in 2012, a presidential decree appointed two women in the 9-member Supreme Committee for Elections and Referendum, which was the body that monitors elections in the country.

At the highest level, the number of women ministers increased in the 2011 Cabinet from two to three. In the Cabinet formed in 2014, there were four women ministers, one of whom was appointed to lead the Information Ministry, which is considered an important ‘sovereign’ ministry whose leadership was confined to men in the past.<sup>578</sup> This brought the percentage of women in the Cabinet to 11.4%, which is one of the

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<sup>574</sup> Violence Against Women Task Force, *Country assessment on violence against women: Yemen*, United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Women and Gender Equality, 2010.

<sup>575</sup> Women National Committee, *Almusharaka alsiyasiya lilmar’a: taqreer Beijing [Women’s political participation: Beijing report]*, Supreme Council for Women, 2014.

<sup>576</sup> Women National Committee, *The seventh progress report*, op. cit.

<sup>577</sup> However, the judicial system continued to be male dominated. Women National Committee, *the seventh National Report*, op. cit.

<sup>578</sup> I was the first female Minister of Information in Yemen.

highest percentages in the Middle East and North Africa region, where the average in 2016 was 10.1%.<sup>579</sup>

In sum, the progress of Yemeni women in the political field has improved significantly in the last two decades especially in terms of visibility in senior governmental positions, as well as in women-related state instruments and entities. In fact, the Yemeni women's movement has built on this progress in its demand for further achievements for Yemeni women in the political field, especially through their demand for a quota in elected and non-elected bodies.

#### **4. Republic of Yemen's gender policy: National women's strategies and empowerment projects**

Between 2006 and 2014, the cabinet approved a number of national strategies and decrees promoting women's empowerment. Some were general strategies, such as the National Strategy for Women Development (2006–2015), while others were specific to certain sectors, such as the National Strategy on Reproductive Health (2006-2010). Moreover, many of the national strategies in the last decade included a strong component on women's empowerment, such as the National Agriculture Strategy (2012-2016) and the National General Secondary Education Strategy (2007).

This trend was motivated by Yemen's commitment to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (2000-2015), which required the country to readjust its development strategies and plans with the MDGs. This trend was also endorsed by donors who required the Yemeni government to commit to a number of development targets in its national policies. One of the most recognised policies is the MDGs agreement, which Yemen committed to at the United Nations Millennium Summit in September 2000. The summit concluded with a declaration ratified by 189 member nations, in which the signatories resolved in point No. 20 of the declaration, to “promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease

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<sup>579</sup> World Bank, *Public Life and Decision Making indicator, the MENA average for women in ministerial positions*, Gender Data Portal 2016, <http://datatopics.worldbank.org/gender/country/middle-east-&-north-africa>, (accessed 3 March 2017).

and to stimulate development that is truly sustainable.”<sup>580</sup> From the wording of this statement, gender equality and women’s empowerment was seen as means to an end rather than a goal in its own right. Furthermore, the declaration was translated into the millennium development eight time-bound measurable goals, where each goal had specific targets and indicators to provide tools for measuring achievement.

While gender issues have been a cross-cutting theme in all the MDGs, two goals were specifically dedicated to women: Goal 3: to promote gender equality and empower women, and goal 5: to improve maternal health. The specific targets for the gender equality and women’s empowerment goal were to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015. In principle, there were several conceptual problems with the way this MDG described gender equality and women’s empowerment; the UN translated this goal into a very specific target related to education, and consequently, reducing gender equality and empowerment of women to merely eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education. This was a significant underestimation of what the concept of gender equality and women’s empowerment entails. The Millennium Project’s focus on education as an indicator of women’s empowerment was based on “strong evidence that investing in girls’ education yields high returns for girls themselves and high returns for development.”<sup>581</sup> Schultz’s<sup>582</sup> (2001) substantiated this argument by indicating that women’s education not only has a strong positive impact on women’s empowerment, but also on their children’s education and health, and on the larger economy as a whole. However, he too stressed the need for policy makers to consider the economic, social, and political conditions for gendered educational strategies to yield results. The latest national MDG progress report produced by the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation in 2010 showed that there was better progress in all other MDGs compared to the two concerning women – except for the MDG goal

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<sup>580</sup> United Nations General Assembly, *United Nations millennium declaration*, 2000, p.5, <http://www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.htm>, (accessed 3 March 2018).

<sup>581</sup> UN Millennium Project: Task Force on Education and Gender Equality, *Taking action: achieving gender equality and empowering women*, UN Millennium Project, New York, 2005.

<sup>582</sup> T. P. Schultz, ‘Why governments should invest more to educate girls’, *World Development*, 30(2), 2001, pp. 207–25.

on poverty, which was explained in the report as “poverty rates deteriorated since 2005 because of new domestic and global developments.”<sup>583</sup>

Paradoxically, at the Yemeni local and national policy-making levels, there were discussions relating to the cost and value of integrating the MDGs with the second Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper and the third Five Year Development Plan, which were already in motion and producing results.<sup>584</sup> Questions were raised during the needs assessment for achieving the MDGs, and whether they did indeed provide the answer to the country’s development needs, and specifically those of women, considering the enormity of costs the country required for the MDGs, money that was not available to start with, and the little that was available had to be pulled from other on-going development projects.<sup>585</sup>

To its credit, the Yemeni government did undertake efforts to mainstream gender in its strategies and plans including national budgets. A testimony of this is Cabinet Decree No. 107 for the year 2010,<sup>586</sup> which required all ministries to include representatives of the Women National Committee at both central and governorate levels in planning and budgeting operations. As a follow-up, the Minister of Finance issued Decree No. 108 for the year 2008 stipulating the inclusion of WNC representatives in the technical national budget committees. Consequently, one of the main successes of the WNC was integrating a women’s empowerment component in the National Plan for Socio-Economic Development and Poverty (2006-2010). This component included four main issues: combating violence against women, women’s political participation, economic empowerment for women, and amendments of discriminatory legal texts. Similarly, a women’s empowerment component was also included in the 4th 5-year socio-economic

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<sup>583</sup> A. Al-Arhabi, M. Al-Hawiri, M. & A. Al-Batuly, *Yemen report on the Millennium Development Goals*, Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation and the UNDP, 2010, <http://www.ye.undp.org/content/yemen/en/home/library/mdg/yemen---national-millennium-development-goals-report-.html> accessed 1st March 2017, p. 14.

<sup>584</sup> UNDAF, ‘MDG based third plan for sustainable development’, United Nations System and the Government of Yemen, 16 November 2004, [http://www.ye.undp.org/content/dam/yemen/MDGs/docs/Millennium\\_Joint\\_Project%20Yemen.pdf?download](http://www.ye.undp.org/content/dam/yemen/MDGs/docs/Millennium_Joint_Project%20Yemen.pdf?download), (accessed 11 August 2016).

<sup>585</sup> Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, *Millennium Development Goals needs assessment*, Government of Yemen, Sana’a, 2005, <http://www.arab-hdr.org/publications/other/undp/mdgr/yemen-nmdgr-05e.pdf>, (accessed 11 August 2016).

<sup>586</sup> WNC, Beijing +20, op. cit., p. 11.

development and poverty reduction national plan (2011-2015), also including the same four themes mentioned above.

Even during the political transition years between 2012 and 2014, which was also a time when the country was going through an economic crisis, gender mainstreaming was proclaimed as a priority, even if only in theory. For example, the transitional program for stability and development (2012-2014) “included a component on women’s empowerment in three main themes: social development (education - health - rights), economic empowerment, and political empowerment.”<sup>587</sup>

#### **4.1 Evaluation of women’s empowerment policies**

This section evaluated the government led strategies in maternal and reproductive health, girls’ education, and women’s economic participation between 2006 and 2014. The evaluation was done by drawing on the first two program-related dimensions of Newman’s<sup>588</sup> (2014) four-category policy evaluation as described in the figure below. The political-related dimensions of policy evaluation are discussed in the following chapter since these are subjective evaluations. The women leaders surveyed and interviewed shed light on the impact of empowerment policies on the larger women community in terms of sustainability and scale as well as the distribution of benefits on them as a target of the implemented policies. Similarly, the political consequences dimension will also be elaborated on by the women leaders who will describe in their words: whose political interests did these policies serve? And how was the public reaction to them?

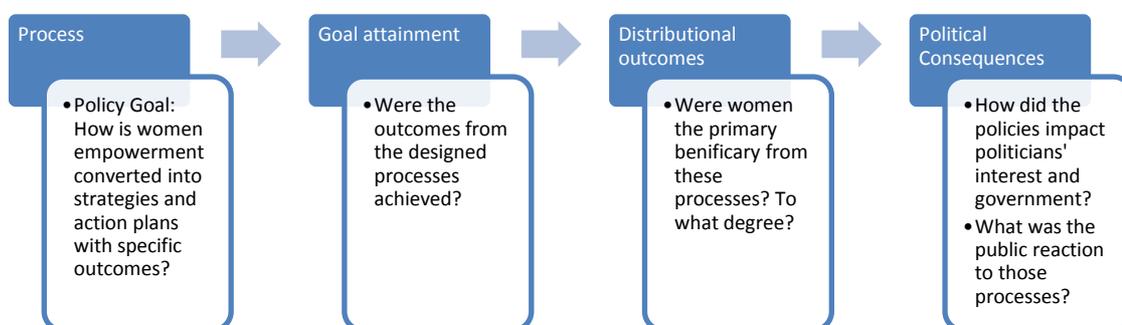
The following diagram illustrates the four dimensions in terms of women’s empowerment policies as addressed in this chapter. This chapter touches on the first two dimensions of this evaluation model, while the next chapter will address the political dimensions of this model.

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<sup>587</sup> WNC, Ibid.

<sup>588</sup> Newman, op. cit.

Figure 3 Applying Newman's four-categories of policy evaluation to women's empowerment policies



There were several reports by local and international organisations<sup>589</sup> detailing how the local laws, government efforts, and state institutions failed to promote gender equality. To this effect, a 2012 research survey<sup>590</sup> on Yemeni women measuring the gap between public policy and women's real empowerment, showed that the reality of Yemeni women leaves much to be desired in terms of education, health, and economic prosperity, whereas no general interest was recorded among the respondents regarding the improvement of political rights.

Similarly, despite the good intentions of the women leaders championing the National Strategy for Women Development, and the public display of the government's commitment to enhancing women's status, implementation reports suggested that the strategy did not have the desired impact, and its results were unsustainable.<sup>591</sup> After progress reports displayed negative results, the strategy was updated, as were many of the government's strategies, to be aligned with the Millennium Development Goals.

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<sup>589</sup> For example: UNICEF, 'Yemen: MENA gender equality profile', *Status of girls and women in the Middle East and North Africa*, New York, 2011.

<sup>590</sup> N. D. Gunter, 'Measuring women's status in Yemen', in *Women in Muslim Countries Study*, D3 Systems, Inc, 2012.

<sup>591</sup> See the Republic of Yemen, *National report on sustainable development*, presented at the Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, 20-22 June 2012, Rio de Janeiro. Also, the United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality's 2010 Country Assessment on Violence Against Women, op. cit.

Even with this update, the women's strategies continued to receive criticism especially regarding their inadequacy towards addressing the social barriers against women. "While relatively broad, the strategies tend to either focus narrowly on protecting women's status related to their maternal functions and reproductive roles, or lack specific gender equality standards, principles and objectives. Such approach risks narrowing women's role in the society, which may pose constraints for women's empowerment in economic and public life."<sup>592</sup>

There is evidence that "Yemeni women have constitutionally guaranteed rights based on the signing of CEDAW [the Convention on Eliminating all forms of Discrimination Against Women] in 1984, but are often overlooked due to the conservative nature of Islamic interpretations."<sup>593</sup> Furthermore, due to the nature of the Yemeni society, a real impact in women's empowerment needs to be achieved through a comprehensive translation of policy goals into processes that deal with the root causes of inequality.

#### **a) Women's health**

A review of the government's efforts concerning women's health showed that operationally, improving women's health was proclaimed as a national priority since Yemen committed to improving maternal health, which was goal number 5 of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG-5). This goal included two targets: "Target 5.A: Reduce by three quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio. And Target 5.B: Achieve, by 2015, universal access to reproductive health."<sup>594</sup> Moreover, improving women's health was also a component of the third Five Year Plan for Development and Poverty Alleviation (2006-2011), which included several objectives to improve women's health such as to "decrease maternity mortality from 366 deaths to 238 deaths [per 100,000 live births] by 2010; to increase childbirth under

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<sup>592</sup> MENA-OECD governance programme 2014, op. cit. p. 4.

<sup>593</sup> Gunter, op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>594</sup> A. Al-Arhabi, M. Al-Hawiri & A. Al-Batuly, *Yemen's report on the Millennium Development Goals*, Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation and the UNDP, 2010, p. 31, <http://www.ye.undp.org/content/yemen/en/home/library/mdg/yemen---national-millennium-development-goals-report-.html>, (accessed 1st March 2017).

medical supervision from 26 percent to 45 percent; and to increase the use of family planning from 13 to 35 percent.”<sup>595</sup>

To this end, a National Reproductive Health Strategy was developed in 2006, and revised in 2011. The strategy was jointly designed by the Ministry of Health and World Health Organisation with input from local and international consultants.<sup>596</sup> However, in terms of budgeting, the health sector’s allocation was only 5.2%<sup>597</sup> of the total public budget. “Women’s health allocation is unknown specifically, except what is provided within the Investment Program for the third Five Year Plan for 2008, from the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation and the Ministry of Health.”<sup>598</sup> Therefore, in order to support the Yemeni government to implement this strategy and achieve MDG-5, extensive training as well as funding was provided by the donor community. For example, in 2008, foreign funding for reproductive health projects exceeded 212 million Yemeni Riyals<sup>599</sup> (around \$1.07 million US at 2008 currency exchange rates). Another example was that the UNFPA program expenses on maternal health alone in 2014 exceeded two million dollars.<sup>600</sup> However, both the Yemeni government and international community concerned with women’s health admitted that Yemen was far behind its desired goals in this regard.<sup>601</sup> To the extent that indicators of 2015 show that Yemen’s maternal mortality was considered one of the highest in the world, at 385 deaths per every 100,000 live births, which is even higher than it was in 2008.<sup>602</sup> Consequently, the gaps between policy design and achievement of goals is evident. According to Newman’s<sup>603</sup> goal attainment dimension for measuring policy success, the further the results are from the stipulated goals, the less successful the policy is

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<sup>595</sup> Women National Committee, the seventh progress, op. cit., p. 33.

<sup>596</sup> World Health Organisation, *Yemen country page on reproductive health*, 2017, <http://www.emro.who.int/yem/programmes/reproductive-health.html>, (accessed 1st March 2017).

<sup>597</sup> This percentage has been relatively constant since 2006. However, it is worth mentioning that the state’s spending on military and political security is not disclosed and not included in the national budgeting process.

<sup>598</sup> Women National Committee, the seventh op.cit., p. 37.

<sup>599</sup> Women National Committee, the seventh, op. cit., p. 38.

<sup>600</sup> UNFPA, Yemen country data, 2017, <http://www.unfpa.org/transparency-portal/unfpa-republic-yemen>, (accessed 4 March 2017).

<sup>601</sup> The latest MDG progress report of 2010 on Yemen indicated that Yemen is unlikely to achieve its maternal health goal and that performance in this sector is weak, Al-Arhabi, op. cit.

<sup>602</sup> Other factors contributed to this increase such as the conflict, food insecurity and increased poverty, however, the point remains is that the programs and structures put in place since 2006, did not do much to help women overcome these adversities and improve their health. The main argument here – which will be supported by findings in chapter V – that efforts that focus on delivery of services alone without behavioural change risk being reversed at the slightest sign of instability.

<sup>603</sup> Newman op. cit.

deemed. This conclusion was indicated in the overall MDG's success evaluation report, which confirmed the "lack of success in achieving the stated objectives of the PRSP [Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper], with stagnant government spending shares allocated to basic social services (most importantly health and education)."<sup>604</sup> One of the explanations of why this was the case in terms of gender related policies was that more was needed to be learned in terms of how these objectives fit within the larger economic, social, cultural, and geographic contexts.<sup>605</sup> An elaboration of these aspects is provided in the findings in Chapter V.

Additionally, there were issues relating to the process dimension of policy evaluation as to the conversion of policies into action plans, since policy success could be partially measured by assessing the process of how policies were translated into action plans. As will be elaborated in the next chapter, the maternal health projects within this strategy were designed to provide services and increase the coverage of reproductive health care, while largely ignoring the need to increase popular awareness and demand of the importance of such services.

#### **b) Girls' education**

The Girls' Education sector at the Ministry of Education was created in 2007 and headed by a woman at the rank of a deputy minister, as the first governmental sector designed to specifically address women's issues in education. This was created in response to pressures from the Women National Committee to elevate the status of the women's departments created in 2001 at the various ministries and to strengthen the government's commitment to women's empowerment in general.<sup>606</sup> Similarly, a sector for Girls' Education and Training was created in 2009 at the Ministry of Technical Education and Vocational Training, which was also headed by a woman at the rank of a deputy minister. The third and last ministry concerned with education in Yemen is

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<sup>604</sup> Al-Arhabi, op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>605</sup> S. Aikman & E. Unterhalter, *Beyond access: Transforming policy and practice for gender equality in education*, Oxfam, 2005.

<sup>606</sup> Personal interview with Hooria Mashour, former Chairperson of Women National Committee.

the Ministry of Higher Education and this, however, does not have a girls' education sector, but has a women's department.

Similar to women's health, one of the strong motivations for improving women's education at the relevant ministries was Republic of Yemen's announced commitment to the Millennium Development Goals, specifically MDG No. 2 on achieving universal primary education, which is up to ninth grade. Specifically, this goal aimed to "ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling."<sup>607</sup>

Consequently, the National Strategy for Development of Basic Education, which included a strong component on girls' education,<sup>608</sup> was designed in 2003 and was evaluated regularly in the following years. This strategy included a family incentive program - such as providing food to families in rural areas in return for them enrolling their girls in schools; inclusive development of schools, which included both increasing the number of female teachers and improving quality of teaching; and an infrastructure program - such as equipping schools with girls' toilets and fences in rural areas as the lack of these were concluded as barriers against girls' enrolment. In 2004, girls' enrolment in primary education was at 61.5%,<sup>609</sup> which was a 35% increase from 2001.<sup>610</sup> Continued efforts increased girls' enrolment in basic education to 75.3% by 2012, and the women's illiteracy in general decreased from 76% in 1994 to 60% in 2010.<sup>611</sup>

Similarly, the lack of female teachers was identified in 2005 as the main reason why 17% of girls in rural areas did not enrol in basic education.<sup>612</sup> It was found that retention of girls in basic education nearly doubles if at least 50% of the teachers were female.<sup>613</sup> The 2007 governmental statistics showed that the percentage of women working in

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<sup>607</sup> Al-Arhabi, op. cit., p. 13.

<sup>608</sup> The girls' education component aimed at achieving a 95 percent of the 6–14 year olds enrolment in Yemen by 2015. International Bank of Reconstruction and Development, The World Bank & The Republic of Yemen, *Republic of Yemen, Education status report: Challenges and opportunities*, Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Region, World Bank, 2010, p. 22.

<sup>609</sup> Al-Arhabi, loc. cit.

<sup>610</sup> Ministry of Human Rights, *The 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Reports on implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*, Republic of Yemen, 2009.

<sup>611</sup> WNC, Beijing +20, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>612</sup> International Bank of Reconstruction and Development, op. cit., p. 44.

<sup>613</sup> International Bank of Reconstruction and Development, loc. cit.

public primary and secondary education was only 23% of the total workforce in this sector.<sup>614</sup> Therefore, in 2010 a cabinet decree dedicated 30% of the government's new jobs in the education sector to female teachers in rural areas, which was an average of 400 new female teachers to be allocated every year to schools in rural areas.<sup>615</sup>

Moreover, the National Strategy on Secondary Education (2006-2015),<sup>616</sup> also with a strong girls' education element. And consequently, the percentage of girls enrolling in secondary education increased by 35%<sup>617</sup> from 2001 to 2008. Additionally, two more strategies were designed to improve education in Yemen in general and indirectly support improving women's education: the National Strategy on Vocational Education, developed in 2007, and the National Strategy on Higher Education, developed in 2006.

As for funding, the Yemeni government has allocated relatively substantial funds for education at around 14.3% of the public budget,<sup>618</sup> although the most reliable statistics date to 2007 at 231 billion Yemeni Riyals (around USD 1.8 bln at 2007 exchange rates), of which, YR 160.6 billion was allotted for public education.<sup>619</sup> The share of girls' education of this budget is not accurately known. Moreover, since Yemen was categorised as a Least Developed Country, it was a recipient of the Official Development Assistance (ODA) from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD),<sup>620</sup> and education projects in Yemen received<sup>621</sup> a large share of ODA funding to Yemen.<sup>622</sup>

Despite all this, Yemen was not able to reach nor even get close to meeting the MDG goal on basic education for 2015. It should be noted, however, that by 2010 the progress reports indicated that if the trend at the time continued, the gender gap in basic education was likely to be eliminated.<sup>623</sup> The political volatility the country faced since

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<sup>614</sup> Women National Committee, the seventh, op. cit. p. 25.

<sup>615</sup> WNC, Beijing +20, op. cit., p.21.

<sup>616</sup> Ministry of Education, *Yemen's strategic vision 2025*, <http://www.yemenmoe.net/SecondaryStratigy.aspx>, (accessed 9 June 2019)

<sup>617</sup> International Bank, *ibid*.

<sup>618</sup> Excluding military spending and intelligence.

<sup>619</sup> Women National Committee, the seventh, op. cit., p. 28.

<sup>620</sup> OECD is an intergovernmental body established in 1961 to promote economic progress globally, <http://www.oecd.org/>.

<sup>621</sup> Most external funding to Yemen's development has ceased since 2014 and been channelled to humanitarian relief and emergency projects due to the armed conflict.

<sup>622</sup> International Bank of Reconstruction, op. cit., p. 26.

<sup>623</sup> Al-Arhabi, op. cit.

then could be considered one of the main barriers to achieving this goal,<sup>624</sup> as projects for girls' education were among the first to be dropped by the government at the first sign of instability. Nevertheless, concerns regarding the quality and impact of education for girls therefore remained, regardless of the statistical indicators. Here the quality was measured by student learning achievements, teachers' capacity and availability, and curriculum, learning materials and facilities assessment.<sup>625</sup> Moreover, critiques of Yemen's education strategies include that there was a lack of coordination between them<sup>626</sup> and that they were unsustainable. For example, there were questions relating to the food incentive project (2003-2008) by the World Food Programme, which offered food rations to rural families in return for them sending their daughters regularly to school. A 2013 report by the WFP stated that the shortage in funding has resulted in the regression in the number of girls' who attended schools because of this project.<sup>627</sup>

It is important to note here, that to a large extent the successes of pre-conflict education projects and the increase in enrolment rates was reversed according to reports from the education offices, especially in rural areas. This is in large part because in light of the national economic deterioration a greater proportion of families lost their financial incentive to send their daughters to school,<sup>628</sup> preferring instead to use them as labourers in the farms or other types of unpaid labour. This point not only addresses the goal attainment point of the policy evaluation model, but also the process point, which questions the conversion of policy goals into implementable instruments. The methods used by the concerned authorities to close the education disparity gap were not sustainable.

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<sup>624</sup> Personal interview with Hooria Mashour, former chairperson WNC.

<sup>625</sup> International Bank of Reconstruction, op. cit., p. 51.

<sup>626</sup> International Bank, op. cit., p. 26.

<sup>627</sup> B. Came, 'Food keeps girls in school in Yemen', World Food Programme, 20 May 2013, <https://www.wfp.org/stories/food-gets-girls-school-yemen>, (accessed 30 January 2019).

<sup>628</sup> Interview with deputy minister for Girls Education: Eshraq Al-Hakimi. She explained that much of the effort to increase girls education was geared towards provision of access to schools without addressing the social barriers against girls' education.

### c) Women's economic participation

The first gender-specific strategy for women's economic empowerment was issued by the Ministry of Labour<sup>629</sup> under the title "National Women's Employment Strategy (2001-2011)".<sup>630</sup> The strategy was supported by the United Nations Development Fund for Women, the European Union, and the International Labour Organisation. The main objective of the strategy was to increase women's economic opportunities in both the public and private sectors. Several tools were stipulated to reach this objective such as improving women's qualifications and their employability, creating advocacy events to encourage business owners to employ women, improving the laws concerning working women, and encouraging women's presence in relevant syndicates and unions.

A second policy was also developed by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour under the title: "Promoting Decent Work and Gender Equality in Yemen" (2004-2008), which was funded by the Dutch government. The purpose of this policy was to support the implementation of the National Strategy for Women's Employment in terms of coordination, training, and advocacy, mainly in the health, education and agriculture sectors. However, it was only in 2007, when the Action Plan for the National Employment Strategy was developed by the ministry with support of the International Labour Organisation.<sup>631</sup> This action plan was further supported by the National Strategy for Women's Development (2006-2015), which in its 2008 expansion stipulated several economic targets for Yemeni women: reducing the percentage of poor women by 25% by 2010 and halving it by 2015, increase women's economic participation to 30% by 2010, and improving women's presence to 20% in natural resource management bodies.<sup>632</sup> As economic statistics of Yemeni women indicated, the outcomes of these policies were not achieved in totality and did not lead to the

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<sup>629</sup> At that time, the ministry was called Ministry of Labour and Technical Training. The ministry has since been renamed as Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour.

<sup>630</sup> Ministry of Labour, 'al"stratijiya alwaṭaniya li'amal almar"a 2001-2011' [National Strategy for Women's Employment 2001-2011], Republic of Yemen, 2001.

<sup>631</sup> Regional Office of Arab States, 'Country Brief 3: Promoting decent work and gender equality in Yemen', International Labour Organisation, 2009.

<sup>632</sup> Supreme Council for Women, 'National Strategy for Women's Development', Republic of Yemen, 2008, p. 19, <http://extwprlegs1.fao.org/docs/pdf/yem152622.pdf>, (accessed 31 January 2019).

desired impact in terms of women's economic empowerment. For example, by 2014, the percentage of women in the non-agriculture sector did not exceed 12%.<sup>633</sup>

In its final evaluation of the 'Promoting Decent Work and Gender Equality in Yemen' policy in 2009, the ILO concluded that awareness has been raised and media campaigns were implemented to promote more inclusion of women in the economic sector, however, sustainability of the outcomes were at risk because of the lack of funding. More so, integration of the gender equality measures was missing in the various state institutions relevant to the economy.<sup>634</sup>

The Ministry of Agriculture developed the Gender Strategy in Agriculture Development and Food Security (2006-2010), implementation of which was under the supervision of the women's department at the ministry, with support from the Dutch Government.<sup>635</sup> Yet, the situation of women in the agriculture sector was not improved despite availability of a strategy and funds. In another attempt in 2012, the Agriculture Ministry put forth the national agriculture sector strategy, in which it emphasised women's input in the agriculture sector and the challenges they face. Acknowledging that although "women perform 75% of cultivation activities in Yemen, they rarely have ownership rights to land, and commonly relinquish inherited land rights to male family members in exchange for promises of security."<sup>636</sup> The strategy had objectives relevant to improving rural women's access to land titles, access to credit, and training opportunities to improve their production. It even addressed the issue of gender equality, and changing the power structure at the macro level, stating that there is a need for "rural women to be empowered to the point where they can exert influence and participate in decision-making on issues that affect their lives. In fact, gender equity is impossible without women's empowerment."<sup>637</sup> The strategy included an action plan with activities and budgets in order to achieve its desired objectives. However,

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<sup>633</sup> World Economic Forum, 'The Global Gender Gap Report 2014', 2014.

<sup>634</sup> M. Khalidi, 'Promoting Decent Work and Gender Equality in Yemen evaluation', International Labour Organisation Regional Office for Arab States, 2009.

<sup>635</sup> In addition to financial resources, much of the support includes technical capacity training and provision of experts.

<sup>636</sup> Ministry of Agriculture, *A promising sector for diversified economy in Yemen: National Agriculture Sector Strategy 2012-2016*, 2012, Republic of Yemen and the UNDP, p. 56, [http://www.ye.undp.org/content/dam/yemen/PovRed/Docs/Yemen\\_National%20Agriculture%20Sector%20Strategy%202012-2016%20En.pdf](http://www.ye.undp.org/content/dam/yemen/PovRed/Docs/Yemen_National%20Agriculture%20Sector%20Strategy%202012-2016%20En.pdf), (accessed 7 March 2017).

<sup>637</sup> Ministry of Agriculture (2012) op. cit., p. 68.

implementation fell short, and the situation of Yemeni women in rural areas worsened over the years, and the role of the government in improving agriculture has been declining.<sup>638</sup> According to 2015 reports, Yemeni women's share of the formal labour force did not exceed 6%.<sup>639</sup>

In terms of economic development institutions, an important quasi-governmental tool used to empower women in the economic sector was the Social Fund for Development (SFD), established in 1997. This is a government funded yet privately managed institution aimed at contributing “to achieve, and align its programs with, goals of the national social and economic development plans for poverty reduction.”<sup>640</sup> The fund's strategy emphasised the importance of women's economic empowerment and by July 2010, through its microcredit program the SFD had provided 60,000 women with credit to start their own small and micro businesses since 2009. Moreover, women's share of SFD programs funding reached 54% by 2013.<sup>641</sup> Despite the relative success of these projects, they could barely create a dent in the dire economic situation in which the majority of Yemeni women live. Similarly, when it came to the private sector and civil society, the percentage of women in leadership positions did not exceed 9% of unions and syndicates relevant to the economic sector, according to the Yemeni Labourers Unions Association statistics of 2008. In March 2006, a number of businesswomen joined forces and established the Yemeni Businesswomen Council with five branches across the country. The purpose of this council was to empower businesswomen in the private sector and advocate for policies that would improve women's access to the economic sector in general.<sup>642</sup>

Considering the deteriorating economic conditions in the country as a whole in the last two decades, dedicating resources to improving women's economic situation was not considered a priority.<sup>643</sup> Despite the economic boost in 2009 when the country first

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<sup>638</sup> Food and Agriculture Organisation, *Country fact sheet on food and agriculture policy trends: Yemen*, Food and Agriculture Policy Decision Analysis, 2014, <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4127e.pdf>, (accessed 8 November 2018).

<sup>639</sup> International Labour Organization, 'Yemen Labour Force Survey 2013-14', Beirut: ILO Regional Office for Arab States, 2015, p. 7, [http://www.ilo.org/beirut/publications/WCMS\\_419016/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/beirut/publications/WCMS_419016/lang--en/index.htm), (accessed 1 January 2016).

<sup>640</sup> Social Fund For Development website: <http://www.sfd-yemen.org/content/1/42>

<sup>641</sup> WNC, Beijing + 20, op. cit., p. 30.

<sup>642</sup> Personal interview with Fawzia Nasher head of the Yemeni Businesswomen Council.

<sup>643</sup> Several reports from the World Bank advised the Yemeni government that it can mitigate the economic crises if it invested in increasing women's participation in the economic sector. However, the traditional attitude

started exporting liquefied natural gas, which was predicted to increase the GDP by about 7.6% in 2010,<sup>644</sup> the country's economy continued to deteriorate due to the fall of oil prices globally, and the political unrest of 2011 exasperated the problem. The overall situation affected women more severely than men since they were less equipped to resist economic crises due to their disadvantage in accessing resources. For example, compared to the 12.4% unemployment rate for men, women's unemployment reached 54.7% in 2013.<sup>645</sup> Although, USD 108 mln was dedicated for investment projects that prioritised women's empowerment in the Transitional Programme for Stability and Development (2012-2014),<sup>646</sup> yet during implementation, women's share of the funding was reallocated to more general directions.<sup>647</sup>

Generally, men were considered the main bread winners in Yemeni society, and hence the Yemeni society did not put emphasis on women's economic participation. "Strict gender norms limiting women's role and identity to domestic work, religious traditions, mobility restrictions and the practice of seclusion, time constraints, limited education, and concerns for women's honor and safety mean that women's economic activities are often in the private sphere of homes."<sup>648</sup> And even in the case of qualified women who were able to work, they often were limited to low-entry level positions in the private sector with low paying jobs.<sup>649</sup> Additionally, a study in 2008 on women's participation in the economic sector indicated that "the contribution of women in the labour force in various sectors does not comply with the state's policy towards the elimination of the gender gap and does not reflect equal opportunities and job distribution."<sup>650</sup> Even

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towards women and work prevailed. See for example: N. Krishnan, *The status of Yemeni women : From aspiration to opportunity*, World Bank, Washington, DC., 2014, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/18246>, (accessed 3 March 2017). And: World Bank, *Opening Doors : Gender equality and development in the Middle East and North Africa*, MENA Development Report, Washington, DC., 2013, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/12552>, (accessed 3 March 2017).

<sup>644</sup> Al-Arhabi, op. cit.

<sup>645</sup> World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2015: Country Profile: Yemen*, 2015, <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2015/economies/#economy=YEM>, (accessed 7 March 2017).

<sup>646</sup> WNC, Beijing +20, op. cit., p.32.

<sup>647</sup> Personal interview with Hooria Mashour op. cit.

<sup>648</sup> Krishnan, N., op. cit., p. 3.

<sup>649</sup> Women National Committee (WNC) (2009). Ibid P. 30

<sup>650</sup> Women National Committee (WNC) (2009). Ibid P. 30

within the public sector, the share of jobs held by women is only 6% as per 2013,<sup>651</sup> also mostly in lower levels and secretarial positions.

In sum, drawing on the evaluation framework suggested by Newman, the analysis shows that there is a flaw in the process element of policy design where the goal of gender equality was not adequately translated into objectives and activities that should have ultimately led to it. This was visible in the emphasis on the supply side of women's empowerment policies through provision of services and access, while ignoring the demand side, which was concerned with behavioural change and awareness. The other dimension relevant to goal attainment is straight forward in that the specific goals of strategies, policies, and action plans, as they stood, were rarely achieved.

## 5. Conclusion

From an institutional perspective, the creation of women-specific bodies – at the forefront, the Women National Committee – and appointing women in decision making positions of these bodies indicated that the Yemeni government viewed women's empowerment as an isolated objective that needed to be handed over to a gender related body. Responding to international pressure, especially relating to achieving the Millennium Development Goals, which influenced the design of the country's long-term development plans in their entirety, was one of the main drivers behind most women's empowerment actions sanctioned by the government both in terms of funding – mostly coming from donors – and human resources, which meant increasing women's presence in decision making positions.

However, despite the so-called integration of women's departments in the planning and budgeting of various national plans and strategies, national and international reports indicated that women's issues continued to receive marginalised attention in state policy, and even urgent priorities for women were not identified or addressed.<sup>652</sup>

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<sup>651</sup> F. Mehran, M. Hakki Ozel & T. Beycan, *Yemen Labour Force Survey 2013-2014*, International Labour Organisation, 2015, [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms\\_419016.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_419016.pdf), (accessed 3 March 2017).

<sup>652</sup> WNC, Beijing +20, p. 16.

Moreover, most of the implemented activities relevant to various strategies lacked coordination and sustainability. The issue of adequate funding directly dedicated to women's empowerment was highlighted as one of the obstacles that stood against implementing projects that would improve the situation of Yemeni women.

Notwithstanding proclaimed support for women's empowerment and the government's assertion that it promoted gender equality, the conditions for women in Yemen have remained exceedingly difficult, as indicated by the country's last-place rank in the global Gap Index for the last twelve years.<sup>653</sup> This chapter provided evidence to the gap between policy objectives and achievement of goals. In the following chapter, further explanation and context are presented through the narration of the women leaders involved in these policies between 2006 and 2014.

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<sup>653</sup> Gender Gap Index of 2018. This index is published annually by the World Economic Forum. Yemen ranked last at 149 out of 149 countries in 2018. And worst country every year since 2006.

## Chapter V:

### Illusory empowerment:

#### Why women's empowerment policies failed in Yemen

*“We need to learn more from the outcomes of initiatives to promote gender equality in particular economic, social, cultural, and geographical contexts. We need to consider what made them successful or unsuccessful, in order to develop policies and practices that will transform girls’ and women’s lives and thus contribute to achieving wide goals for gender equality.”<sup>654</sup>*

### 1. Introduction

The previous chapter on gender policy mapping presented the Yemeni state's attitude towards women's empowerment by researching political actions towards promoting gender equality. The chapter also provided a review of the various policies implemented in Yemen between 2006 and 2014 aimed at empowering women in the fields of health, education, and the economy. Policies' success was reviewed in terms of their attainment of programmatic goal. Additionally, it was important to consider how policy objectives were translated into projects and implementation instruments distributional outcomes, regarding who benefits from that policy. Findings of the policy mapping indicated that the Government of Yemen (GoY) had committed to a number of political and developmental targets in terms of women's empowerment, such as addressing gender discrimination in the legal texts in adherence to international conventions,<sup>655</sup> eliminating gender disparity in primary education,<sup>656</sup> and reducing by

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<sup>654</sup> S. Aikman & E. Unterhalter, *Beyond access: Transforming policy and practice for gender equality in education*, Oxfam, 2005, P. 2.

<sup>655</sup> Article (6) of the Yemeni constitutions states that: “The Republic of Yemen confirms its adherence to the UN Charter, the International Declaration of Human Rights, the Charter of the Arab League, and Principles of international Law, which are generally recognized.”

<sup>656</sup> A. Al-Arhabi, M. Al-Hawiri & A. Al-Batuly, *Yemen's report on the Millennium Development Goals*, Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation and the UNDP, 2010, p. 13  
<http://www.ye.undp.org/content/yemen/en/home/library/mdg/yemen---national-millennium-development-goals-report-.html>, (accessed 1 March 2017).

three quarters the maternal mortality ratio.<sup>657</sup> However, there was evidence that gender policies in terms of women's health, education, and economic empowerment, failed. The action plans and instruments of implementation did not reflect the essence of policy goals, and even when they did, in most cases the policies did not achieve their stipulated goals. In this chapter, findings from the interviews and surveys will provide further context of the Yemeni government's efforts to empower women, the benefit Yemeni women gained from the policies, and uncover aspects of the political gains made by the policy makers.

So far, it has been shown that Yemeni women's conditions, which are said to be the one of the worst in the world,<sup>658</sup> have not improved despite various governmental efforts. In order to research contributing factors leading to this result, a reasonable approach would be to seek answers from the people who were directly involved in these efforts. Therefore, the target population of this research were women leaders, who were the appointed officials involved in gender equality efforts, and who were also feminist pioneers in their own right.

This thesis addresses the reasons behind the failed women's empowerment policies in Yemen between 2006 and 2014 from the points of view of a sample of the women leaders involved, and in many cases, responsible for the designing and implementation of such policies. These policies include legal and political initiatives, as well as the various governmental strategies and action plans at the national level aimed at improving the situation of Yemeni women in the education, health, and the economy. These areas were selected based on feminist and development literature over their individual and collective importance for women's wellbeing.<sup>659</sup>

The motivation behind this work was the fact that Yemeni women's reality remains harsh despite the various policies aiming at improving their health, education, and economic participation. This is more puzzling in light of Yemeni women's political

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<sup>657</sup> Al-Arhabi op. cit., p. 31.

<sup>658</sup> L. Adams, 'The worst place to be a woman this year got even worse', *Huffington Post*, 18 August, 2016, [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/laurie-adams/yemen-worst-place-to-be-a-woman\\_b\\_8006268.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/laurie-adams/yemen-worst-place-to-be-a-woman_b_8006268.html), (accessed 13 January 2017).

<sup>659</sup> For instance, indicators covering those four fields are used in most of the internationally recognised indicators of empowerment. Examples of this are the Global Gender Gap Index designed by the World Economic Forum, the United Nations Development Programme's Gender Inequality Index and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development designed the Social Institutions and Gender Index.

presence in decision-making levels. In fact, the mere existence of women leaders – who are the main research population of this thesis - and their positions of authority in the state, especially in institutions relating to health, education, and the economy, are a testimony to their potential role in empowering women. This makes their perspective on the causes of failed women’s empowerment policies in these three domains crucially important.

One of the most valuable contributions this research adds to the literature on Yemeni women’s empowerment is the unprecedented access, and hence inclusion, of a substantial number of Yemeni women leaders. It is in fact the first research of its kind that surveys and interviews Yemeni women leaders at this scale, on gender policies using a predominantly qualitative-research approach. The research sample constitutes highly visible women who have been engaged in Yemen’s feminist agenda one way or another across the years. The participants in this study have held public and political positions ranging from ministers, deputy ministers, director generals, heads of departments, political advocates, heads of institutions, business leaders and national opinion shapers such as renowned journalists and feminist campaigners.

Their input provides an important contribution to understanding gender equality in Yemen, especially at the policy level. Consequently, this chapter attempts to examine the causes behind failed policies by presenting and analysing the findings of the surveys and elite interviews conducted as part of this integrated empirical study.

Additionally, the use of more than one research method provided a more inclusive<sup>660</sup> understanding of the research topic, and increased the validity of the findings through triangulating<sup>661</sup> results from the two methods. Surveys were used for their effectiveness<sup>662</sup> in identifying the research sample’s attitudes regarding the researched issue against three predefined hypotheses regarding causes of policy failure. Surveys are recognised<sup>663</sup> for their ability to solicit responses especially in sensitive and personal issues such as gender equality in traditional contexts. Therefore, a survey<sup>664</sup>

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<sup>660</sup> T. D. Jick, ‘Mixing qualitative and quantitative methods: Triangulation in action’, *Administrative science quarterly*, 24(4), 1979, p. 603.

<sup>661</sup> N. K. Denzin, *The research act*, 2d ed, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1978, p. 291.

<sup>662</sup> J. B. Johnson & H. T. Reynolds, *Political science research methods*, CQ Press, 2005, p. 276.

<sup>663</sup> Johnson & Reynolds op. cit., p. 276.

<sup>664</sup> Link to the survey: <http://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/nadiaPhD/>

of 65 Yemeni women leaders was conducted, followed by specialised/elite, semi-structured interviews with twelve key women leaders, three in each of fields of health, education, the economy, and politics. Elite interviewing<sup>665</sup> presented itself as the most suitable technique to obtain qualitative information from people who are in high level positions. Access to the participants was achieved through a multi-directional snow ball scheme via several Yemeni women leaders networks.

The objective of both the surveys and interviews was to identify, from the perspectives of the Yemeni women leaders, to what degree each of the following factors contributed to the failure of women's empowerment policies in Yemen: lack of capacity of implementers, national political and economic instability, and the culture of political support to gender equality. Lack of capacity was understood as that of the women leaders themselves as implementers of the policies. It included their technical qualification and education as well as their communication, management and networking skills. Moreover, a third dimension of capacity was identified in terms of their leadership and bravery to challenge patriarchy. The second factor, instability, referred to the political and economic crises the country had endured between 2006 and 2014, and which had an impact on the national efforts for women's empowerment. Instability was, likewise, reviewed through three dimensions or mechanisms: as a disruptive mechanism of national policies; as a direct threat to women leaders; and as a driver of empowerment opportunities for women. Finally, the culture of political support was examined as an inclusive concept that focused on gender-power dynamics at the decision-making level. This factor was reviewed through four mechanisms or dimensions: the influence of patriarchal culture on formal institutions; the attitude of authoritarian regimes towards gender equality; the design of gender policies in terms of redistribution of social power; and political decision making and women's resistance.

These three explanatory factors were derived from theories of empowerment as well as literature on women from Yemen and the region. The literature explains the influence of factors relating to agency and those relating to structure on the empowerment process. Factors relating to agency centre around the woman's ability to extract more

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<sup>665</sup> L. A. Dexter, *Elite and specialized interviewing*, ECPR Press, first published in 1970 by Northwestern University, 2006.

power on her own based on her personal capacity as a strong, confident, and capable woman. This means that, with more training and capacity building, a woman should be able to become more powerful in her existing environment.<sup>666</sup> Structural factors are more relevant to the environment itself; including laws, institutions, policies, and the professional working environment.<sup>667</sup> All of the structural factors could independently and collectively enable or disable women's empowerment.

In the surveys and interviews, respondents were given numerous opportunities to provide alternative explanations to the three stipulated causes. Most of the respondents agreed with the framing of the causes, yet some responders added factors relevant to social power relations and gender discrimination, which were considered elements of the culture of political support for women's empowerment.<sup>668</sup> These findings will be described in detail in this chapter.

The results from this empirical study demonstrated that from the perspective of Yemeni women leaders, out of the three factors, the culture of political support - or rather the lack of support for the women leaders and the gender equality agenda in general - had the most explanatory power to the failure of women's empowerment policies. Second to political support, instability was agreed on by the participants as a strong factor leading to this failure. The capacity of the women leaders as executors of women's empowerment policies had the least explanatory power of the three.

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<sup>666</sup> Development oriented researchers promote this approach by providing evidence that education and economic independence of a woman are means to her empowerment. See for example: R. Amin, S. Becker & A. Bayes, 'NGO-promoted microcredit programs and women's empowerment in rural Bangladesh: quantitative and qualitative evidence', *The Journal of Developing Areas*, (Winter 1998); M. Buvinic, 'Women's issues in third world poverty: a policy analysis', in M. Buvinic et. al. (eds.), *Women and poverty in the Third World*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983; S. Batliwala, 'The meaning of women's empowerment: new concepts from action', in G. Sen, A. Germain, & L. C. Chen (eds.), *Population policies reconsidered: health, empowerment, and rights*, Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies, Boston, 1994.

<sup>667</sup> Feminism researchers emphasise the importance of considering the external environment women exist in and its enabling or disabling factors of her empowerment. See for example, A. Malhotra, 'Conceptualizing and measuring women's empowerment as a variable in international development, a paper presented to the 2003 Measuring empowerment workshop, 4-5 February 2003, World Bank, Washington, 2002, <https://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTGENDER/Resources/MalhotraSchulerBoender.pdf>, (accessed 13 July 2018). And F. Afridi, 'Women's empowerment and the goal of parity between the sexes in schooling in India', *Population Studies*, 64:2, 2010.

<sup>668</sup> Some of the respondents described the social values - such as early marriage and lack of acknowledgement of a woman as an independent person - that discriminate against women as a cause behind the failure to improve women's situation. Structurally, such values have been addressed in this research as manifestation of the imbalances in the social gender power relations which should have been addressed by empowerment policies in order for such policies to be successful.

## 2. The empirics

The survey questionnaire was sent to 186 Yemeni women leaders and yielded 121 partial responses and 65 complete responses, resulting in a 35% response rate, which is high compared to the average of external surveys response rate (between 10-15%).<sup>669</sup> In terms of geographical spread, the survey responses represented 13 of the 21 governorates of the Republic of Yemen.<sup>670</sup> This geographical distribution is representative of the spread of women leaders as the areas not represented were remote underdeveloped regions that did not witness a comparable number of women in leadership positions. The respondents included prominent Yemeni women between 30 and 65 years old spanning across three generational cohorts in the history of Yemeni feminism. In terms of professional representation, over half of the survey respondents worked in the public sector, which understandably provided the largest space for leadership positions through political appointments. The second largest group worked in the NGO sector, which is relatively new and where Yemeni women activists are still navigating their place in the transition from charity-based work to development and rights-based civil society campaigning.<sup>671</sup> Only 12% of the respondents reported working in the private sector, and 14% with international organisations. To clarify, some of these professional disciplines overlap as many of the women leaders tend to work across sectors and not limit their professional careers and activism to one field.

For elite interviews, the twelve women leaders were purposefully selected for their direct involvement in the women's empowerment policies as the most senior-level women in decision-making positions and as persons of authority on the subject matter. It must be highlighted here that the inclusion of these women leaders in a single comprehensive study provided an unprecedented value to the academic literature on gender policies and women's empowerment in Yemen. The profiles of these women

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<sup>669</sup> A. Fryrear, 'What's a good survey response rate?', *Survey Gizmo*, 2015, para 5, <https://www.surveygizmo.com/resources/blog/survey-response-rates/>, (accessed 2 October 2018).

<sup>670</sup> See appendix B for the geographical map and chart.

<sup>671</sup> For more information on the milestones in Yemen's civil society see N. Al-Sakkaf, 'Yemen's relapse into tribalism' in *Beyond Islamists and autocrats*, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2016, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/BeyondIslamists-Yemen.pdf>, (accessed 13 July 2018).

are attached at the end of this thesis as an appendix. These women have held the following positions:

- d) Health: 1) deputy minister of health from 2008 to 2012, 2) president of the Higher Council for Motherhood and Childhood between 2001 and 2013 and former head of the Yemeni Coalition for Safe Motherhood, 3) a high level official at the Ministry of Health.<sup>672</sup>
- e) Education: 1) deputy minister of education since 2013 until now, 2) deputy minister of vocational training and technical education from 2009 to 2014, 3) professor of political sciences and gender at Sana'a University since 2004 and co-founder of AWAM Foundation for Cultural Development.
- f) Economic participation: 1) minister of social affairs and labour between 2006 and 2014, 2) advisor to the minister of industry and trade and former director general of the Working Women's Directorate at the Ministry of Industry and Trade between 2000 and 2018, 3) founder and chair of the Council for Yemeni Businesswomen since 2007.
- g) Politics: 1) minister of human rights from 2012 to 2014 and former chair of the Women National Committee, 2) minister of culture from 2014 to 2015 and chair of the Rights and Freedoms Committee at the National Dialogue Conference, 3) director of the Sisters' Arab Forum for Human Rights, lawyer and feminist pioneer.

In terms of design, the survey was divided mainly into three main sections, each including questions relevant to one of the potential factors contributing to policy failure. Similarly, the interview questions also targeted the three main areas but in a more detailed and interactive manner, giving the interviewees the opportunity to provide insight as to why they have answered the way they did.

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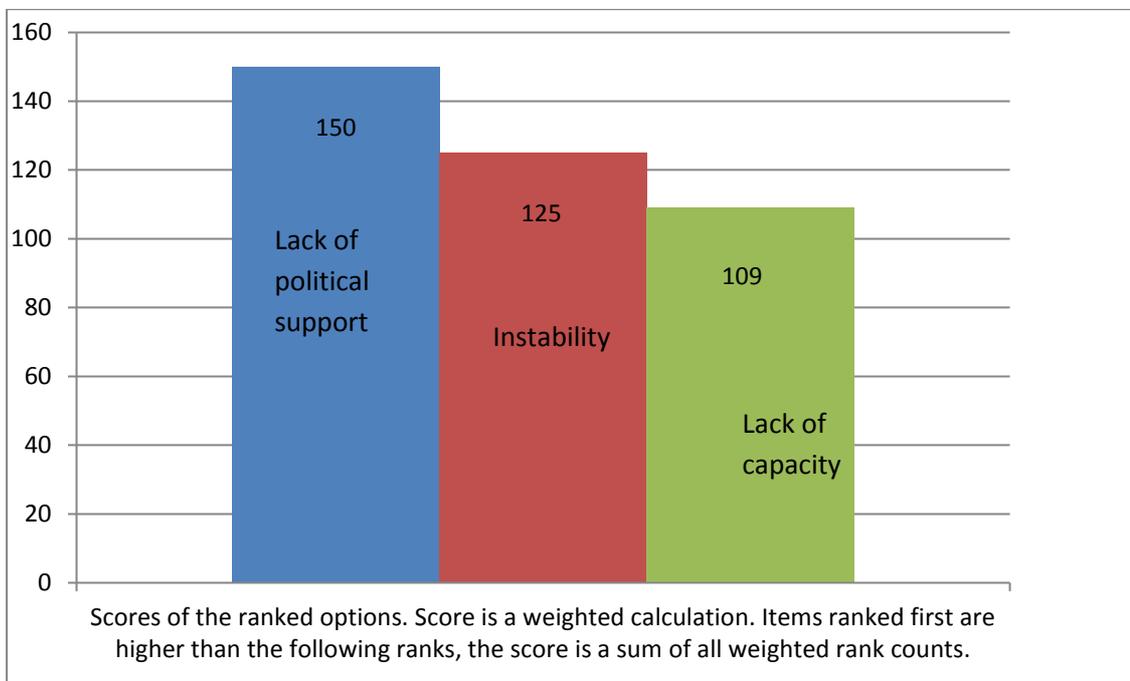
<sup>672</sup> This interviewee is currently living in Sana'a-Yemen, which is under the control of the rebel forces, and therefore, for her own safety her identity has been protected.

### 3. Findings and analysis:

#### Women’s empowerment between capacity, instability, and political support

Findings from the survey and interviews concurred with the research hypotheses that the three predefined factors did indeed contribute to the failure of women’s empowerment policies, although much more emphasis was placed on political support – or rather lack thereof – compared to the other two elements. The survey respondents ranked the three potential contributors as follows, giving the highest explanatory power to the culture of political support:

Figure 4 Which of the three factors below is the highest barrier to women’s empowerment?



The survey respondents were also given the option to add other potential factors that could have, from their point of view, affected Yemeni women’s empowerment’s efforts. Only 17 of the 65 respondents used this space to comment, and all of the relevant comments described symptoms relating to the patriarchal society and the injustice Yemeni women face. Some of these comments are described below.

One respondent commented that women could achieve much more if there was political will, and “a good example of this was in the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen

(South Yemen) where Yemeni women achieved much progress, especially as they were protected by the family law.”<sup>673</sup> Another respondent also alluded to the family law, saying “The Yemeni woman suffers greatly because she is married off at a young age and raised to think that as a woman she is less entitled than a man to many rights. The family laws are unjust towards women and she does not have her rights.”

Meanwhile, other respondents focused on the social perceptions of women in the workplace. “The Yemeni women are negatively affected by the closed environment and the inferior look towards them,” one woman leader wrote. “Even in her work place she is subjected to physical and verbal abuse, which prevents her from effective participation in the political, public, and even education fields.” Similarly, another respondent said that from her point of view, Yemeni women suffer from being perceived as less worthy by society, and that women-led development projects in Yemen have been attacked. “I am one of those women and see that my own society does not accept women’s leadership role in building the society, and the state and decision makers ignore this reality,” she said.

“The Yemeni woman has the ability and capacity to take leadership roles aiming at pushing forward the social development cycle, but we need a strong campaign to change the social and cultural heritage, and change the negative attitudes towards women in order to empower them,” another respondent said.

This feedback finds resonance in Yemeni literature on women’s empowerment where it is argued that the Yemeni “state’s promises to empower women and integrate them in the development process were not serious. It was a facade to present itself in better light in front of the others, and upgrade its political rhetoric to seem modern, as described by the women involved in implementing the women’s empowerment projects. This attitude towards women is one of discrimination and exclusion, and is a cultural problem in the first place.”<sup>674</sup>

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<sup>673</sup> The family law in the PDRY was considered one of the most advanced in the region. It granted women their rights on equal basis in the personal and social spheres as a wife and a mother. Women’s security in their families allowed them to thrive more in the outside circles.

<sup>674</sup> H. Alrazihi, ‘Waqi’ almara’a bain alhudhoor wa altaghieeb’ [Women’s reality between visibility and obscurity], a working paper presented at *the Yemeni women’s reality and the desired role conference*, 19 April 2014, Imam Zaid bin Ali Cultural Foundation, Sana’a.

The fact that respondents prioritised lack of political support to empower women over instability is especially notable given the country is currently in the midst of a protracted national conflict.<sup>675</sup> Although this research only examines the status of women in Yemen until 2014 when the coup d'état took place, and therefore does not address the issue of the current conflict, yet is probable that the participants' answers may have been influenced by their current suffering. Even then, their feedback prioritised lack of political support to any other factor, including political instability.

### **3.1. Women's empowerment and the capacity of women leaders**

The literature on women's empowerment converges<sup>676</sup> on a multi-dimensional framework of how empowerment occurs based on an interaction of agency elements with structures, also known as resources. Therefore, when hypothesising the potential factors that could contribute to women's empowerment, it was reasonable to build on existing theoretical research in the field. The literature review chapter described in detail the various concepts and frameworks of women's empowerment and specifically, their relevance to the socio-cultural structures. This is because women's empowerment was understood as fundamentally linked to social gender power relations.<sup>677</sup>

Therefore, the concept of agency was included in this research in terms of the women leaders' capacity to gain power and exercise choices to achieve results.<sup>678</sup> Capacity here, referred to that of the women leaders in charge of implementing women's empowerment policies at the top and middle levels. This included the capacity to design efficient action plans to achieve goals, and the ability to manage the projects. Capacity involved the professional expertise, as well as the confidence and ability to exercise authority over a given issue. It also included qualifications, the ability to network with stake holders and potential donors, and technical proficiency, or at least the ability to secure specialised expertise to provide it. The sound framing of strategies and action

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<sup>675</sup> It would be interesting to see if the results of this study would differ in times of peace. The respondents, being citizens of a country going through armed conflict today, are likely to be biased towards the impact of instability on women's empowerment.

<sup>676</sup> R. A. Richardson, 'Measuring women's empowerment: A critical review of current practices and recommendations for researchers', *Social Indicators Research*, 137(2), 2018, pp. 539-557.

<sup>677</sup> Malhotra, op. cit., p. 71.

<sup>678</sup> Kabeer, op. cit.

plans and their relevance to achieving desired outcomes was also considered part of policy-design capacity, as it was a testimony to the policy makers' strategic abilities. This applied to budgeting, target setting, stakeholders' involvement, monitoring and evaluation processes as part of the overall efforts to empower women.

The survey structure included 19 questions profiling the respondent as well as determining her capacity level. Indicators of capacity included: education, expertise, years of experience, awards and recognition, communication skills including languages and computer literacy, networks and outreach, exposure and awareness, training and development, ambition, and activism. Moreover, this section ended with a direct question on whether the respondent believed – from her own experience – that it was the lack of capacity that derailed women's empowerment in her given area. Interview questions were designed similarly, however since they were semi-structured they allowed for follow-up questions and clarifications based on the answers from the interviewees.

The results from the empirical research with regards to capacity and its relevance to the failure of women's empowerment policies generated three mechanisms or dimensions, through which capacity was seen to impact policy success. These are: technical and professional capacity; communication, networking and managerial capacity; and bravery and leadership capacity.

The general outlook of the findings from both surveys and interviews was that there was an abundance in the two first dimensions of capacity and a relative scarcity in the third.

#### ***a) Capacity in terms of technical and professional skills***

Around 94% of the women leaders have at least a university degree with approximately 59% holding postgraduate degrees. Of the interview sample, all of them have obtained at least a post-university high diploma. Furthermore, six of the interviewees are PhD holders, two are medical doctors, and two are lawyers. With regards to personal development and professional education opportunities, a sweeping 84% of surveyed women explained that they have had at least one capacity-building training in the last two years. This includes language and computer skills, and many more aspects of professional growth and training based on their specialisations. At least a third of the

surveyed sample explained that they personally sought the training and capacity building activities on their own, whereas 60% received training through their work.

“At the Social Affairs and Labour Ministry, the staff in the General Directorate for Working Women’s Development and its branches in the various governorates, which are specialised with women’s issues in the labour sector, go through continuous training,” said Dr. Amat Al-Razzak Ali Hummed – former minister of social affairs and labour. “They also avail support from international experts, especially from the International Labour Organisation, and the Arab Labour Organisation, which trained the staff on designing plans and strategies.” The ministry worked with other women’s departments and directorates on relevant issues, such as working mothers’ rights, integrating gender equality in business, work ethics, and working women’s unions. To this end, coordination was with various stakeholders such as the Federation of Chambers, the General Union for Labour Syndicates, the Women National Committee, and the Yemeni Women’s Union.

Dr. Nafisa Al-Jaifi, former head of the Higher Council for Motherhood and Childhood, said that some women leaders were appointed based on merit and they were competent and had a lot of capacity, while others were appointed based on their political affiliation, yet all of them received various high-level training sessions to build their capacity. Given their competency, once they left their government positions, some of these women were hired in leadership positions in international NGOs, some are working as international consultants, while others established their own NGOs and initiatives.

Similarly, Lamia Al-Eryani, former deputy minister of the Technical Education and Vocational Training Ministry agreed that there are ample women leaders with high capacities who are responsible for designing and foreseeing the implementation of women’s empowerment strategies at the Ministry. In fact, Al-Eryani perceived this level of capacity as the direct cause of the relative success the ministry had in increasing the number of women joining the vocational training field, even if this increase contextually did not create a substantive difference in the overall difference in Yemeni women’s education.<sup>679</sup>

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<sup>679</sup> Despite efforts, Yemeni women’s illiteracy rates remain one of the highest in the world with at least half of the women population aged 15 and above unable to read or write. World Bank, ‘Yemen - Literacy rate, adult female (% of females ages 15 and above)’, cited in Trading Economics [tradingeconomics.com],

Nevertheless, Al-Eryani explained that the increased technical capacity of the women working in the vocational education sector had resulted in an improvement in the enrolment rate of women in the various vocational training institutions affiliated with the Ministry, even in vocations that were not considered traditionally female oriented. “The improvement in capacity was not limited to the women – and men – working at the girls’ education sector at the ministry but also in related entities,” Al-Eryani said. “They received training in leadership, management, gender issues, and obviously specialised training on specific vocations.” She added that within the Ministry of Technical Education and Vocational Training there were certain policies that were implemented to facilitate women’s entry to this field, such as reducing entry requirements and enrolment conditions, which explains the increase in enrolment rates.

In general, the decade between 2000 and 2010 witnessed a surge of training and technical capacity events for women working in women’s departments or directorates. For example, this was the case in the Health Ministry, where director generals and department heads undertook intensive training on gender mainstreaming in health programmes and how to take into consideration women’s needs during planning and implementing health projects.

Moreover, the narratives of interviewed women leaders showed that their efforts to further develop their professional skills never stopped, as they were ‘achievers’ from a young age. “The women leaders were highly educated and continuously searched for ways to improve their capacities because they knew that they would have to prove their worth,” said Hooria Mashour former minister of human rights.

On another front, all of the interviewed women are authorities in their respective fields. In the larger sample of surveyed women leaders, results indicated that 14% of the respondents claimed that they are in fact among the foremost specialised authorities in their respective field in the region. A majority of 65% of the respondents considered themselves an expert in their field, while around 21% admitted that although they may not be experts, they are good at their jobs.

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<https://tradingeconomics.com/yemen/literacy-rate-adult-female-percent-of-females-ages-15-and-above-wb-data.html>, (accessed 1 January 2016).

### ***b) Capacity in terms of communication, networking and management skills***

Another mechanism by which capacity affects policy success is communication, networking, and management skills, as the women leaders used their diverse networks as well as communication skills to manage their teams and organise their work. The findings show that in terms of experience, all interviewed women had a minimum of 15 years of professional experience, and of the surveyed women, half of them had 15 years or more of experience. Moreover, most of the interviewed women represented Yemen on many prestigious international platforms and had received international awards in recognition for their outstanding work and high capacity, such as the Forbes Most Powerful Arab Women list,<sup>680</sup> Outstanding Arab Woman Takreem Award,<sup>681</sup> and the Alison Des Forges Award for Extraordinary Activism,<sup>682</sup> among others. Likewise, among the survey respondents, around 45% had received a local award, while 12.5% had received local or regional recognition, and three had received international awards.

“I was recognised as a successful pioneer businesswoman and was invited to conferences and events all over the world to share my experience,” said Fawzia Nasher, President of the Yemeni Businesswomen Council. “For example, in 2005 I became member of the Arab Women Investors Union representing Yemeni women.”

Dr. Bilkis AbuOsba, professor of politics and gender at Sana’a University and CEO of Awam Research Foundation, explained that there was an abundance of women academics/specialists, however, there were management and leadership challenges that would prevent the optimum utilisation of their skills. She recounted two particular projects she worked on that she deemed successful: a cooperation with a German university for gender and political studies in 2006, and a masters degree in gender and development through a cooperation with a Danish university that would result in qualified gender experts. “Unfortunately, in all cases there was no substantial impact

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<sup>680</sup> Forbes Middle East, ‘Most powerful Arab women in government’, Forbes, 2014, <https://www.forbesmiddleeast.com/en/list/200-most-powerful-arab-women-2014-government/item/33/>, and <https://www.forbesmiddleeast.com/en/list/200-most-powerful-arab-women-2014-government/item/36/>, (accessed 12 July 2018).

<sup>681</sup> Takreem, ‘Outstanding Arab woman laureate Amal Basha’, *Takreem*, 2014, <http://takreem.net/profile-details-56>, (accessed 12 July 2018).

<sup>682</sup> Human Rights Watch, ‘Rights activists honored’, *Alison Des Forges Award announcement*, 2014, Human Rights Watch, 16 September 2014, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/09/16/rights-activists-honored>, (accessed 12 July 2018).

of the Gender Research Centre affiliated with Sana'a University on the higher education's gender policies including the university of Sana'a where the centre was based, not for the lack of capacity or expertise, but rather because of bad management and the lack of desire at the top to gender-sensitise the higher education system.”

Dr. Jamela Al-Raiby, former deputy minister of health for the Population Sector, explained that “the technical support we received from donor countries and international organisations including UN agencies, was invaluable and helped me personally overcome many of the technical and organisational challenges I faced as I started working in reproductive health policy and advocacy.”

The role of international organisations in improving the capacity of women working in the government bodies was highlighted repeatedly. Dr. Nafisa Al-Jaifi, former head of the Higher Council for Motherhood and Childhood, said that after ratifying the CEDAW<sup>683</sup> and CRC<sup>684</sup> in Yemen, the Yemeni government established special governmental structures to promote the women/mothers and child rights' issues such as the National Women Committee and Higher Council of Motherhood and Childhood on the central and governorate levels. Consequently, general departments for women – and led by women – were created in most ministries to ensure that women's concerns were taken into consideration in the ministries' strategies. Also, the Yemeni Women Union, international organisations such as Oxfam, UN agencies, and other NGOs played a significant role in empowering women. The government used to appoint women to head the national, regional and international meetings focused on women and child rights issues as well as two of UN general assembly meetings. There was considerable progress in preparing national strategies and action plans to empower women in a variety of fields.

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<sup>683</sup> The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women

<sup>684</sup> The Child Rights Convention

***c) Capacity in terms of leadership and bravery***

This element relates directly to women's capacity to resist patriarchy and prove themselves as worthy leaders in traditional environments, which view women as the inferior gender.

In the words of the interviewees, many of whom were women who have held senior decision-making positions, the position of authority did not necessarily translate into power. The interviewees explained that in addition to the acknowledged elements of capacity, it also included the ability to create changes in the environment contributing towards achieving the end goals. In other words, even though a woman holds a leadership position, due to cultural values that dominate the society and dictate how people behave even in official institutions, her authority is not necessarily recognised by male colleagues or even subordinates. In order to contest this, some of the women leaders were able to harness their skills and address the gender-power struggles, albeit to a better extent than others.

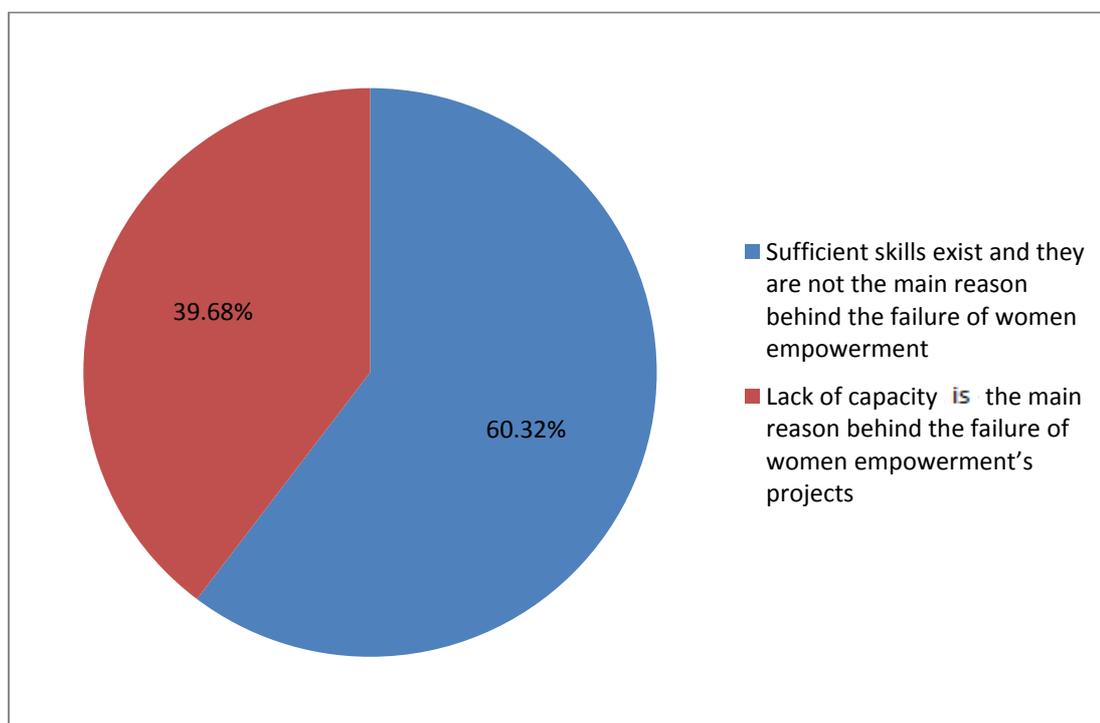
Dr. AbuOsba of Sana'a University, described women leaders' capacity in two ways; the professional and personal capacity on the one hand, and the leadership capacity on the other. There is a lack of capacity among Yemeni women leaders regarding the latter kind, she said. Noting that there are highly educated and remarkable women who do not take interest in the public sphere or do not engage in societal change even if they know this change is important. "Sometimes they are interested but don't know how to engage, and many times they would rather just go about their business and not get involved in matters beyond their job even if these matters affect their job one way or another."

This understanding of capacity was also highlighted by other interviewees. "If by capacity you mean the skills and qualifications, most if not all of the women in high positions are extremely qualified, on many occasions much more than their male colleagues," said Amal Basha, director of Sisters Arab Forum for Human Rights, adding that women often have to work twice as hard to prove their worth. "But then there are other factors that limit the success a woman in a position of authority can achieve in her work on gender equality, such as limited resources, a lack of support from her boss, a lack of support in her personal life, and logistical challenges such as

travelling or having to attend men’s meetings<sup>685</sup> to be in the loop. Only women who are able to conquer these challenges are able to be successful.”

When asked directly in the survey whether women leaders needed more capacity to be successful in their women’s empowerment efforts, 60.32% stated that sufficient skills exist, and this was not the main reason behind the failure of women’s empowerment policies in the respondents’ respective fields. However, 39.68% said that a lack of capacity amongst women in their fields contributed to the failure of women’s empowerment projects.

**Figure 5 Would women’s empowerment projects have been more successful had women leaders implementing those projects had better capacity?**



Further investigation into this finding with the interviewees shed light on the survey responses. To start with, it was readily apparent from the surveys and interviewed women’s profiles that Yemeni women leaders did not lack capacity in either of the first

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<sup>685</sup> In reference to the Qat sessions where business agreements are made or official matters are discussed in a men only social setting. Such as men’s clubs in the western world.

two dimensions. Most of them were experts in their fields, or at least were efficient in their professional responsibilities. Therefore, the issue of lacking capacity did not strike as significant explanation, when it comes to the failed women's empowerment policies. From the interviews, it was clear that all of the women interviewed had a high degree of expertise including academic qualifications and professional experience. They had, furthermore, secured their position after working their way up during many years in the public and private sectors and, in doing so, have overcome many personal and professional challenges. This is a testimony to their agency in terms of confidence, strength of character, and various technical and communication skills. This finding was expected as most Yemeni women who attain positions with decision-making responsibilities have displayed exemplary career history and/or are known figures in the community.

That being said, what explains the 40% responses in the survey who said that empowerment policies would have had a greater chance of success had women leaders had more capacity? When conducting the interviews, this result was shared with the subjects, who explained that the general know-how and professional training for Yemeni women leaders was not lacking. What was lacking was capacity in the sense of the ability to exercise power over others in the work place and be acknowledged as an authority figure.

For example, Arwa Othman, former minister of culture, said that women's capacity is not the issue, and in fact there are highly qualified women with degrees from the internationally recognised universities. "What good would high qualifications and capacity do if the entire system is flawed? The main issue is the state - or rather lack of state - as civic structures that truly enable progress don't exist." This argument relates to and supports the strong explanatory power of the culture of political support factor explained later in this chapter.

### ***Conclusion: capacity and women's empowerment policies***

In summary, this section reviewed feedback from survey respondents and interviewees on the relevance of women leaders' capacity to the success of the women's empowerment policies. The findings indicated three mechanisms or dimensions of

capacity: professional, managerial, and leadership. The results show that the women leaders were highly qualified in the first two dimensions and were challenged in the third especially if they worked in environments hostile to gender equality. The third dimension is closely linked to the structures surrounding women leaders and is affected by the culture of political support for gender equality in general. Putting together the findings from the three dimensions of capacity and its relevance to the success of women's empowerment policies, it can be concluded that women leaders' capacity, as such, has low explanatory power regarding the central question of why women's empowerment policies failed in Yemen.

### **3.2 Women's empowerment and instability**

Instability is the second plausible explanation for the failure of women's empowerment policies. In this context, the term instability does not refer to armed conflict and fragile states, rather it represents times and events of political dysfunction and economic recession that directly and indirectly impact the success of governmental efforts in general. Research confirms the relevance of conflict and instability to the breakdown of political and economic structures,<sup>686</sup> and this naturally includes national policies and development plans. Research also shows that countries prone to instability are likely to spiral into poverty and face a lack of development, which in turn leads to instability and so on in a vicious cycle.<sup>687</sup> Nevertheless, research<sup>688</sup> also shows that sometimes instability can present an "opportunity for women's empowerment due to changes in their traditional roles and new responsibilities that they must assume in the absence of

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<sup>686</sup> J. El-Bushra & E. P. Lopez, *Development in conflict: The gender dimension*, Oxfam GB, 1999.

<sup>687</sup> P. Collier, *The bottom billion: Why the poorest countries are failing and what can be done about it*, Oxford University Press, 2008.

<sup>688</sup> C. Y. O. Cruz, 'Empowerment of women during conflict and post-conflict phases and the role of humanitarian aid organizations in supporting women's newfound empowerment gained during conflict', Master thesis, University of Geneva, Geneva, 2016, p.2, [https://www.cerahgeneve.ch/files/3615/2180/3727/MAS\\_Dissertation\\_Constanza\\_Ortega\\_Dissertation\\_FINALupdated\\_for\\_website.pdf](https://www.cerahgeneve.ch/files/3615/2180/3727/MAS_Dissertation_Constanza_Ortega_Dissertation_FINALupdated_for_website.pdf), (accessed 17 November 2018).

men.” Furthermore, research on Yemen<sup>689</sup> shows that some women were able to break gender stereotypes especially in the economic sector during times of crises.

Consequently, the question of instability as a factor contributing to the failure of women’s empowerment policies has two facets; first, it examines the impact of instability on the nation as a whole and how this derailed women’s empowerment policies as part of the general national development agenda or whether women’s projects were specifically targeted. Second, it questions the impact of instability on women leaders, on their ability to do their work, and specifically their ability to implement policies aiming at creating positive change for women. Furthermore, instability was relevant to the empowerment framework in the sense that it was examined as a positively-disruptive structural element to social norms limiting women’s empowerment, especially in terms of economic participation.

Instability is unfortunately a common occurrence in Yemen. While all Yemenis are forced to find ways to cope with it and carry on with life, instability poses a greater obstacle for women since they are one of the most vulnerable groups of the society. For the period considered in this research, which is between 2006 and 2014, there were two distinct political instability events to consider: the 2011 uprising, which led to the removal of the former president from office after around 10 months of violent struggle, and the dysfunctional transitional government between 2012 and 2014 that resulted from the political agreement that ended the 2011 uprising. The operations of various governmental projects during those three years were highly dependent on individuals rather than institutions.

In order to obtain information on this aspect, the survey included questions focusing on instability and the women leaders’ work in gender equality. The survey participants were asked to evaluate themselves career-wise and personally before and after the instability; whether or not it negatively affected women’s empowerment projects, and how. Indicators of this included: effect of instability personally, effect of instability professionally, and its direct impact on women’s projects and policies. This issue was further examined through the interviews, which provided in-depth qualitative context

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<sup>689</sup> M. Heinze & M. Baabbad, *Women nowadays do anything. Women’s role in conflict, peace and security in Yemen*, Saferworld, 2017, <https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/1125-awomen-nowadays-do-anything-a-womenas-role-in-conflict-peace-and-security-in-yemen>, (accessed 17 November 2018).

and evidence of the explanatory power of instability as a contributor to the failure of women's empowerment policies.

To this end, the findings were analysed based on three dimensions through which instability could have impacted the success of women's empowerment policies in Yemen. These are: instability as a negative disruptive mechanism affecting national plans and resources; instability as a negative disruptive mechanism hindering the work of women leaders; and instability as a potentially positive disruptive mechanism reshaping the social norms.

#### ***a) Instability and national plans***

Findings from the surveys and interviews indicated that instability had impacted the success of women's empowerment policies mainly because of the lack of financial resources. This was in part because the Yemeni government did not consider women's empowerment as a priority in times of instability and, hence, did not dedicate financial resources to such projects. Equally important, this was also due to the fact that most of the women's empowerment work was financed by donors who pulled away funding during times of crises.

On many occasions, instability forced government institutions to stop their women's empowerment projects for reasons that were not only political or financial, but also logistical. Lamia Al-Eryani, former deputy minister of the Ministry of Technical Education and Vocational Training, explained that during the 2011 uprising, the teaching at many of the vocational training institutes stopped for both women and men. She said that the armed conflict<sup>690</sup> severely affected the progress in the education sector as a whole because the institutes themselves become part of the battle fields, and families would not risk sending their daughters – or their sons for that matter – to be educated.

A similar point of view was put forth by Dr. Amat Al-Razzak Ali Hummed, former minister of social affairs and labour, who said that “in a way, political instability was

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<sup>690</sup> Lamia's comment concerns the current armed conflict starting from 2014, which is out of the scope of this research however, the point about behavioural change through media campaigns is relevant and therefore this quote was included.

continuous since 2006, but it reached its peak in 2011 and the following years. Women were not the only group affected by instability. What helped our women-related projects was that we had some support from the International Labour Organisation to enable us to carry on some of the work.” However, the main struggle during times of instability was the discontinuity of other donors’ support and, hence, many initiatives and projects to empower women economically stopped. “We suffered nationally because of the shortage in government budget for women’s initiatives, which led the [Working Women’s] directorate to sometimes resort to [low cost] awareness activities only.”

Dr. Bilkis AbuOsba, gender and politics professor and CEO of Awam Research Foundation, explained that women’s issues in particular always took a step back during periods of instability, even among highly educated groups such as academics and political researchers. “It was as if women were not an important part of the Yemeni society and women’s empowerment was a luxury that would be attended to once the situation settled,” she said. “The Yemeni traditional society does not acknowledge women’s roles as part of the solution to instability, or the impact of instability on them.”

Amal Basha, director of Sisters Arab Forum for Human Rights (SAF), agreed that instability had always been present in one way or another in Yemeni society, but said this does not mean women’s development or progress had to stop. “Many businesses and other sectors of the government continue to make advances despite instability such as the oil industry, telecommunication, and even the health sector,” she said. “The problem in how the Yemeni state views women’s empowerment is that it sees it as an isolated issue that needs to be dealt with separate from other domains such as health, education, economics, and so on.”

Similarly, the interviews showed that on an individual level, the capacity of women to withstand the consequences of economic instability is generally much weaker than that of men. Despite the economic boost in 2009 by the first exports of liquefied natural gas, which was predicted to increase the GDP by about 7.6% in 2010,<sup>691</sup> the country’s economy continued to deteriorate because of the fall of global oil prices, even before the political unrest of 2011, which exasperated the problem. The overall situation had

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<sup>691</sup> Al-Arhabi, op. cit.

affected women more severely than men since they were less equipped to resist economic crises caused by political instability and armed conflict due to their disadvantage in accessing resources. For example, compared to the 12.4% unemployment rate for men, women's unemployment reached 54.7% in 2013.<sup>692</sup>

“Instability may be considered as a main obstacle in Yemeni women's economic empowerment especially since their businesses are often smaller in size and weaker in terms of the capacity to survive economic blows,” explained Fawzia Nasher, president of the Yemeni Businesswomen Council.

At a collective national level, the resources and structures supporting women were not prioritised even during times of peace, and they were often the first to collapse in times of instability. Despite international interest in helping the transitional Yemeni government (2012-2014), political tension within the government and sometimes the deliberate jeopardising of efforts by political rivals within the government exasperated the already complicated political situation. And this heavily impacted women's projects more than others. There were also tensions between Western and Gulf donors, especially when the Yemeni Executive Bureau responsible for monitoring donor financial support to Yemen during transitional years reported visible differences between pledging and actual allocation of resources.<sup>693</sup>

Jamela Al-Raiby, former deputy minister of health, explained that during the 2011 uprising international funding stopped and alternatively she could not secure government money for women related projects. She gave the example of requiring financial support for the transportation and distribution of family planning commodities from the central warehouses to health centres in rural areas around the country. She explained that although this should not have been a significant amount of money, her requests were declined as women's health was not a national priority.

This explanation was given by other interviewees as well. Similarly, Amal Basha, emphasised that it is harder for the women leaders working on the frontiers of the

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<sup>692</sup> World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2015: Country Profile: Yemen*, 2015, <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2015/economies/#economy=YEM>, (accessed 7 March 2017).

<sup>693</sup> R. Al-Akhali, phone and email communication on the Executive Bureau for the Acceleration of Aid Absorption and Implementation on his previous work as leader of the Policy Reforms team, 1st March 2017.

women's empowerment agenda. "We [women activists] have worked continuously in the past to push for gender integration and mainstreaming as a cross-cutting issue in all domains," she said. "But it has been challenging because until now, women's development is considered exclusively and not inclusively within the larger national agenda, and this is why it is severely affected by any kind of instability."

The instability had caused many donor-funded projects in the girls' education sector to be suspended, according to Eshraq Al-Hakimi, deputy minister of education. "They [donors] were wary about working with the ministry because they are not sure who was in power and who should have been," she said. "Until the political picture clears,<sup>694</sup> education remains at a standstill, which is a time bomb that will explode in our faces in the near future."

Likewise, Dr. Nafisa Al-Jaifi, former president of the Higher Council for Motherhood and Childhood, described how a World-Bank-funded project providing vouchers for pregnant women to access reproductive health services in an effort to reduce the high maternal mortality rate in Yemen, was stopped when the conflict of 2014 started. She said this put to waste all the efforts that had been put in the foundation stages for this project. She explained that almost all of the funding that was targeting development issues such as health was redirected to relief and humanitarian projects due to the instability and conflict.

#### ***b) Instability and women leaders***

In terms of the effect instability had on the women leaders themselves, the majority of survey respondents admitted that it has had a negative impact on their lives in one way or another. Of specific interest, was their feedback that they were subject to harsher challenges when working on their projects and the women's empowerment agenda in times of instability.

Dr. AbuOsba, explained that whenever she or her colleagues raised the issue of women in decision-making circles during difficult times, they were always told that it was not

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<sup>694</sup> She was referring to the current instability and political crises, although this also applies to previous instability events.

time for women. “The fact is that Yemen has always been going through difficult times since the country was founded, and so it seems to me that it is never the time for women to be a priority on the national agenda,” she exclaimed.

Concurring, it was revealed through the interviews that even during periods of relative stability, work on women’s empowerment was hindered. In the view of interviewees, this was mostly because the men in the government did not have confidence in women’s abilities, especially as they occupy far fewer decision-making positions compared to the men, and that as long as the numbers are imbalanced in favour of men, women’s issues will always face resistance.

An additional point concerning the relationship between instability and women’s empowerment was raised by Dr. AbuOsba who said that on many occasions, women leaders themselves took a back seat on their own because they were afraid of the consequences of challenging authority during turbulent times. “When the state itself is fragile and systems fail to protect citizens, women as a vulnerable social group, even if they are highly qualified and hold high positions, would rather step aside and not confront groups who could resort to any means to get their way in the absence of the rule of the law or accountability,” she said. And since Yemen as a state is often subject to such groups, it becomes more challenging for women to resist and demand their rights, especially in the absence of political support from above and grassroots’ support from below. Furthermore, Dr. AbuOsba explained that political instability also contributed to the failure of women’s empowerment policies in the higher education sector because with rise of new politicians to power, they bring-in their personal agenda, which is dependent on their interests and background and therefore there is no sustainability or continuity in the progress of women in the higher education sector. “As women leaders in the forefront of the women’s empowerment agenda, we find ourselves starting from zero every time a new leadership takes hold of power.”

Feedback from the interviewees showed that the women leaders were many times directly targeted as they are the main gatekeepers of the gender equality agenda. In this case their positions of authority would be threatened, or their projects cancelled as a way of limiting potential advances towards gender equality. Deputy minister of education Eshraq Al-Hakimi explained that in 2013, during the transitional government, girls’ education was targeted by senior officials in her ministry who, in an

effort to decrease costs, attempted to reduce the girls' education sector into a directorate. She furiously fought against this, and succeeded to preserve the sector, although she hopes it will not, she can't guarantee that this will not be attempted again in the future. "Girls' education in general is not considered a national priority, and the statistics that show significant improvement in the enrolment or completion rates of girls' education are inaccurate to say the least," she said. "And with the current conflict, gender equality as a right is much less a priority than it ever was. We are living in dark difficult times when it comes to women in education."

Al-Hakimi was concerned that there have been several armed conflicts in Yemen in the last decade, which heavily disrupted education across the country. She emphasised that it is girls' education that gets disrupted the most because due to matters related to honour, parents fear for their daughters' safety more than for their sons. Therefore, they are more reluctant to send them to schools when there is instability. There have also been several strikes across the country by teachers who have not received their salaries and, hence, even when students do go to schools they do not benefit. Moreover, during armed conflicts, many schools become homes for displaced persons or military bases for non-state armed groups,<sup>695</sup> which is another reason why efforts for girls' education are derailed.

Women leaders who advocate for gender equality explained that they have found themselves fighting a losing battle against the conservative society and its opportunistic politicians, who especially in times of instability, would rather get endorsement from the traditional forces than from the women leaders, even if the latter are in fact part of the political system itself and the government. Dr. Nafisa Al-Jaifi gave an example of this when the safe motherhood law got postponed until further notice in 2011, as the parliament and the political parties found that women issues were not a priority amidst the political tensions during the Arab Spring period.

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<sup>695</sup> Although the research time scope precedes the current armed conflict which the deputy minister is referring to, there have been some lesser armed conflicts in Yemen which were either tribal wars in tribal areas or local conflicts or insurgencies such with the insurgents in the north between 2004 and 2010.

### *c) Instability and social norms*

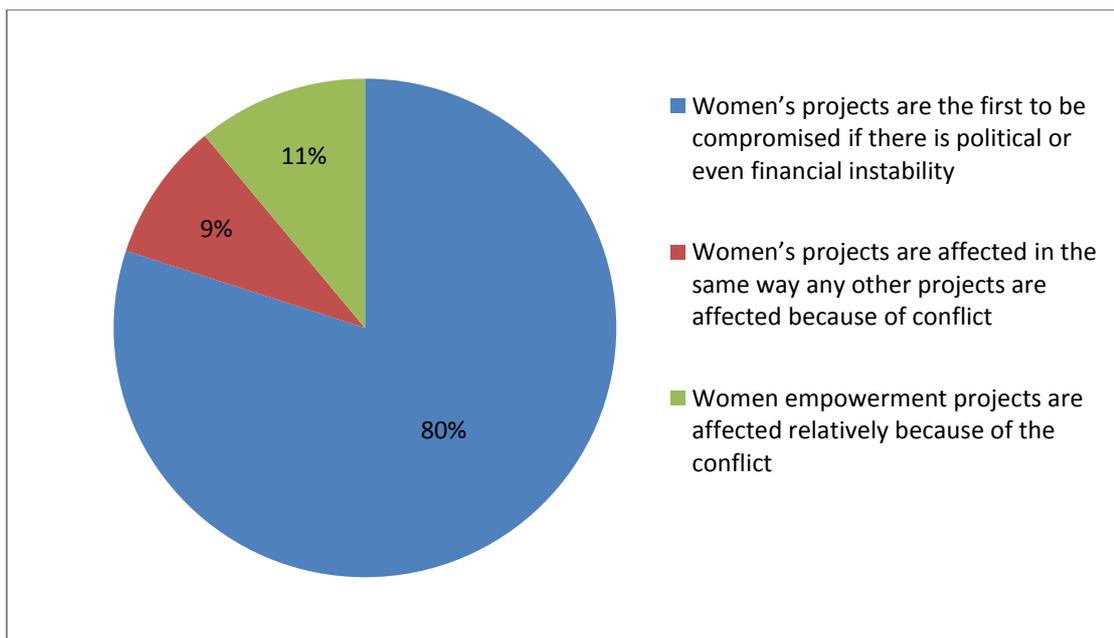
In terms of the impact of instability on the women leaders, around 29% said it has made them stronger and more determined personally, and around 21% said that they were more fortunate than others in the way they were affected by it. To this end, Dr. Bilkis AbuOsba said that sometimes instability provides an opportunity for women to break some of the social barriers and gain some freedoms that were not there during times of peace. “It is true that the national top-down policies for women’s empowerment were discontinued because the state was rendered paralysed during crises,” she said. “But sometimes, turbulent times reshape the social norms in a way that allows women to break from traditional restraints and take up new roles such as breadwinners.” Dr. AbuOsba recalled the events of the 2011 uprising when women’s presence in the public and political space was overwhelming and their voice was heard unlike any time before. However, she admitted that once the uprising was over, women, as a social group, returned to their homes and were excluded from the general public and political spaces. “It must be pointed that the 2011 events did lead to an enhanced presence of women in decision making positions, but this political empowerment was not representative of the reality of the majority of Yemeni women who returned back to the normalcy of traditional society after the political instability,” she explained. Dr. AbuOsba attributed this regression to the fact that behavioural change in the Yemeni society did not occur, and that what happened during and post 2011 was a temporary superficial change caused by sudden events that did not lead to sustainable changes. She added that similar opportunities occurred during instability and armed conflicts, when some of the women were forced to work and became the main source of income for the family due to the economic crises. Consequently, their authority in the home increased because of their financial contribution to the family. “However, Yemeni women’s agency and her value in the house remains resistant to change and tied to necessity and survival rather than considered an intrinsic human right,” she said.

The abilities of women to identify opportunities in times of instability was an aspect of an individual’s capacity and her resilience. Some women leaders had to resort to means outside their institutions during times of instability in order to keep women-related activities going. Wafa Awadh, advisor to the minister of trade and industry, said that when she was director general of the Working Women’s Directorate, there would not

be any funding from the Ministry of Industry and Trade during times of instability, yet, she managed to raise funds from the private sector and charities and carried out events to help women be more resilient economically. However, this meant that she had acted in her individual capacity as an activist and not a public official.

The most revealing question in the survey was whether the respondents believed that during periods of instability, women's projects were the ones most affected negatively. More than 80% of the respondents agreed that women's projects were the first to be compromised if there was political or financial instability. Only a little over 9% reported that women's projects were affected in the same way as other national projects because of the instability.

Figure 6 How are women's empowerment projects affected by conflict and instability?



In terms of the direct question on whether instability is the main reason behind the lack of progress in women's empowerment, around 66% of the surveyed women leaders said that instability did affect women's projects more severely than other groups in the society because women's empowerment was not a priority even in times of peace. Around 34% said that conflict and instability put a stop to all kinds of development projects and not specifically those related to women.

### ***Conclusion: Instability and women's empowerment policies***

In sum, this section demonstrated the relevance of instability as a structural element of the agency-structure empowerment framework affecting women's empowerment. It sought to identify the explanatory power of instability as a contributing factor to the failure of women's empowerment policies in Yemen between 2006 and 2014. Considering the three dimensions above of how instability impacted the success of women's empowerment policies in Yemen, the explanatory power of instability as the main contributing factor to the failure of women's empowerment policies was concluded as relatively weak. Findings showed that instability was not the main reason why women's empowerment policies failed in Yemen between 2006 and 2014.

Although, instability was found to negatively affect the success of both women's empowerment policies and women leaders more than other policies, it was concluded not to be the main factor behind gender policy failure. This specific influence on policies was attributed to the nature of the Yemeni society and state, which does not consider gender equality a priority, and not because of the impact of stability per se. It was a contributing factor, but had there been supporting structures at the state level for improving women's resilience, the empowerment policies would have been relatively more successful.

Moreover, the significance and sustainability of social change created by women identifying opportunities in times of crises did not outweigh the challenges women faced as a result of instability, especially in terms of donor support to the women's empowerment agenda in the country.

### **3.3 The culture of political support**

This research aimed to identify explanations for the failure of women's empowerment policies in Yemen between 2006 and 2014 in the fields of health, education, and the economy. Chapter IV, which focused on policy mapping, showed that the Yemeni government exerted efforts to empower women by appointing women in decision-making positions in various government institutions, and tasking them with the

responsibility to implement projects relating to women's empowerment. However, development indicators – as demonstrated in chapter I and chapter IV, showed that these efforts were not successful. In order to explore the potential factors contributing to this failure, women leaders in distinct political positions and those involved in implementing women's empowerment policies in health, education, and the economy were surveyed and interviewed. Their feedback was sought against three hypotheses proposing potential explanations contributing to the failure of women's empowerment policies in Yemen. These explanations were: lack of capacity on behalf of the women leaders implementing the policies, instability both political and economic, and the culture of political support for the women's empowerment agenda.

The previous two sections in this chapter detailed findings regarding the first two factors; capacity and instability, and concluded that their explanatory powers were not strong. This section presents the findings regarding the third potential explanation, which is the culture of political support.

The literature on women's empowerment emphasised the importance of enabling structures for the empowerment process to be successful.<sup>696</sup> These included the socio-political environments where women leaders operate. Therefore, the factor of political support was understood in this research as the socio-political dynamics surrounding women leaders in their work place. This included the political leaders' direct support for women leaders and facilitation of their work, sincere political commitment to the gender equality cause through adoption of policies, and the dedication of resources geared toward changing the social gender power imbalances.

Consequently, four interrelated dimensions or mechanisms of the ways the culture of political support potentially affected policy success were deduced: the influence of the patriarchal culture on formal institutions; the attitude of authoritarian regimes toward gender equality; the design of gender policies in terms of redistribution of social power; and political decision making and women's resistance.

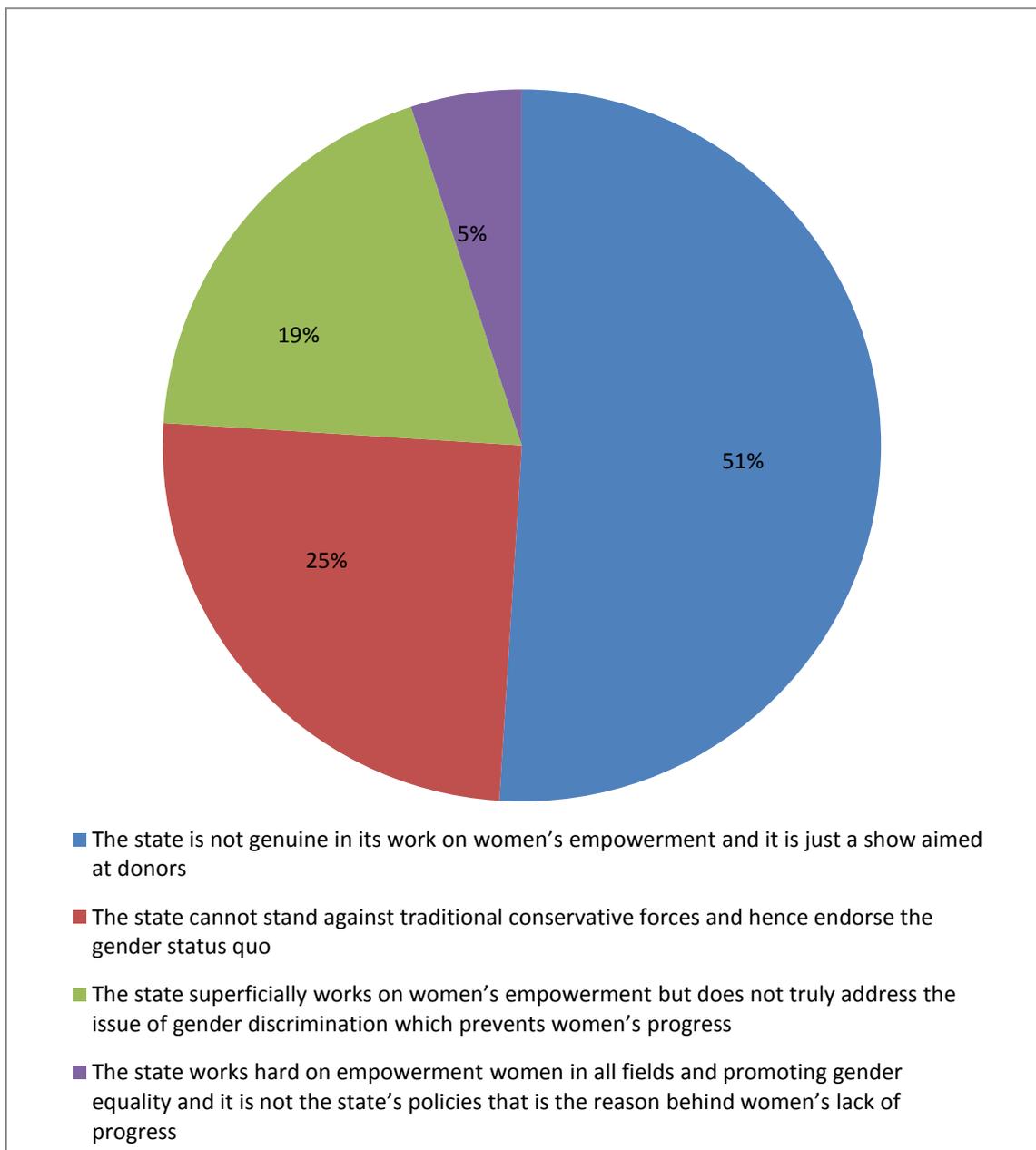
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<sup>696</sup> S. Ibrahim & S. Alkire, 'Agency and empowerment: A proposal for internationally comparable indicators', *Oxford development studies*, 35(4), 2007. And A. M. Muñoz Boudet, P. Petesch & C. Turk, *On norms and agency: Conversations about gender equality with women and men in 20 countries*. The World Bank, 2013, p. 22 & p. 140.

To this end, the survey included 15 questions on the factors related to women leaders and gender policies. It included several questions on the working environment and whether the women leaders had support from their direct supervisors and institution in general. Indicators of a supportive environment included: legal and technical resources; mentorship and guidance; support and career development; access to management; relationship with Human Resources, the Legal and the Finance Departments as three of the key sections in any institution; authority and control over their own projects and designated resources; professional achievement; political affiliation and involvement; and awareness of gender-related legal structures. Furthermore, the survey also included a direct question asking the respondents whether they believed that the state's political culture supported gender equality or was the reason behind the failure of Yemeni women's empowerment policies.

An outstanding 95% of the survey participants responded that there was a lack of political support for gender equality and this was manifested in several ways as follows: around 51% of respondents agreed that the state was not sincere in its work on women's empowerment and it was just a show aimed at appeasing or securing support from donors; 25% agreed that the state could not stand against traditional conservative forces and hence endorsed the social gender power imbalances; and 19% said that the state superficially worked on women's empowerment and did not truly address the issue of gender discrimination that prevented women's progress.

Figure 7 Are state policies the reason behind the lack of concrete progress in Yemeni women’s empowerment?



Only three of the 65 respondents said that the state worked hard to empower women in all fields and promoted gender equality, and that it was not the lack of political support that led to the failure of women’s empowerment policies.

These percentages reveal the strong explanatory power of the culture of political support as a leading contributor to the failure of women’s empowerment policies in Yemen. This result was strengthened further by feedback from the 12 elite interviewees, who agreed that the culture of political support – or lack thereof - was indeed the main

contributor to the failure of women's empowerment policies, more than instability and lack of capacity.

The following sub-sections examine in greater detail how the culture of political support had impacted the success of women's empowerment policies in Yemen, by providing an analysis of the four aforementioned mechanisms or pathways and their relevance to the failure of women's empowerment policies.

***a) The influence of the patriarchal culture on formal institutions***

This mechanism pertains to the cultural spill-over from the social domain to political institutions. Muñoz Boudet, Petesch & Turk (2013)<sup>697</sup> argued that formal structures and organisational cultures are influenced by dominant social traditions and values. As demonstrated in the literature review chapter, institutional regulations and informal rules are shaped by the belief systems of those in charge as well as the dominant majority in the work place.<sup>698</sup> The survey and interviews in this thesis, explored aspects of the professional environment where the women leaders work, in the sense of the level of support they received from the management and their relations with key departments. Additionally, the women were questioned about challenges they faced because of their gender.

Survey findings showed that institutionally, a majority of the respondents had good professional networks in the workplace and that they generally had neutral relations with the key sections in their organisations such as Legal, Finance and Human Resources. In the survey question on whether or not the women leaders had access to professional and emotional support, around 78% of the respondents explained that their support comes from various directions within and beyond the workplace, and that finding advice was not a problem. However, when it came to receiving direct support from the leadership of the institutions where they worked, the answers were less optimistic. Around 23% said that the management in their professional environment was hostile to their success, while 34% explained that their management was neutral and did not interact much with them. Only 15% said they felt that their bosses supported

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<sup>697</sup> Muñoz Boudet, op. cit.

<sup>698</sup> Appadurai, A., 'The capacity to aspire: Culture and terms of recognition', in V. Rao & M. Walton (eds.), *Culture and Public Action*, 2004.

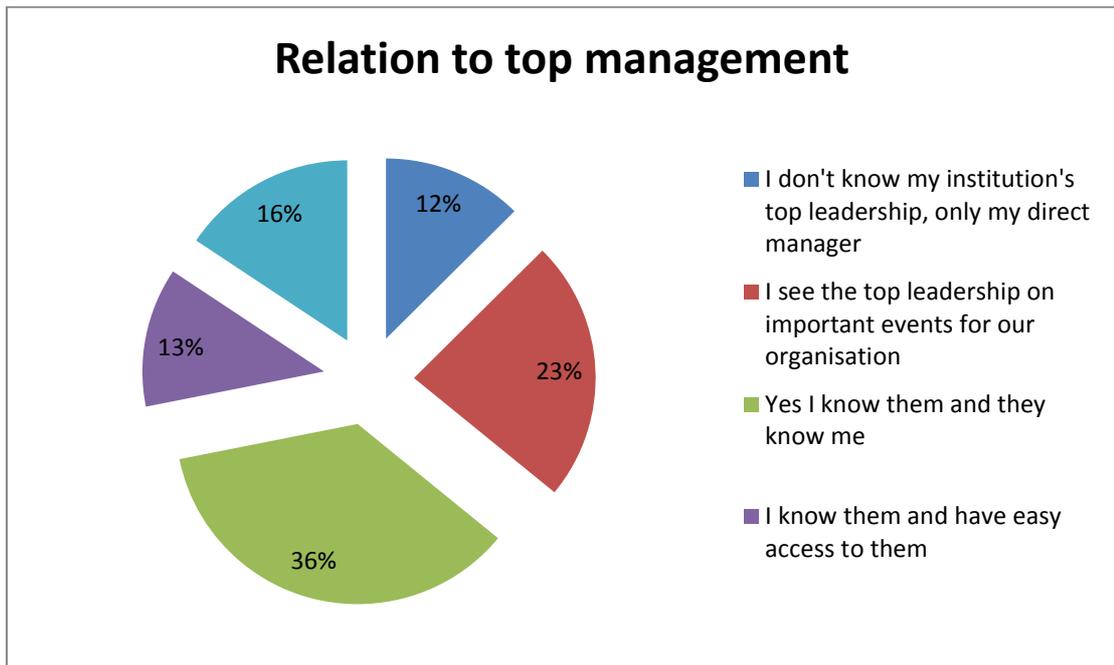
them and 20% said that the entire work environment was positive and they felt supported by both management and colleagues. The comments in the survey on this question shed light on the varied experiences amongst the respondents. For example, one comment said that “in the public sector the support for women is less than in international organisations”, while another respondent commented: “There is a systematic war against women leaders by decision makers, except for a very few.” One of the respondents explained that there wasn’t a general policy regarding women in the work place and that it depended on the leaders’ individual personalities and values toward women.

The interviewees agreed that the support they received was highly dependent on the nature and background of top leadership. Interviewees explained that having a male supporter at the top played a strong role in their success as women leaders. Lamia Al-Eryani, former deputy minister of the Technical Education and Vocational Training Ministry, explained that having a gender-sensitive minister, who understood and supported her mission to increase girls’ enrolment in the vocational training sector, immensely helped her succeed in her goal. “It was not a government strategy per se or a written policy, it was simply the initiative of the Girls’ Education Sector at the ministry, which received the endorsement of the minister,” she said. “It must be mentioned that we had a strong qualified team at the Girl’s Education Sector and we worked together to empower women in our field.”

Similarly, Wafa Awadh, former director general of the Working Women’s Directorate at the Ministry of Industry and Trade, agreed with this conclusion: “I owe the success of my work as director general, especially during its early years, to former Minister of Trade Dr. Yahya Al-Mutawakil, who was already gender sensitive and a modern thinking Yemeni man.”

Another relevant question in the survey was the respondents’ familiarity and access to top leadership in their institutions. Only 15.63% said that they had a good relationship and received support from the highest levels of management. The remaining respondents ranged from ‘I don’t know who they are’, to ‘I know them and have easy access’, as explained in the chart below:

Figure 8 How do you perceive your relation to top leadership in your institution in terms of access and support?



Nonetheless, aspects of institutional support to women leaders covered more than direct support through endorsement and recognition, as it also included the facilitation of success through dedication of resources. It is both emotional and material and the women leaders' experiences indicated that they faced more challenges in accessing resources than in being praised or recognised.

For example, Dr. Nafisa Al-Jaifi former president of the Higher Council for Motherhood and Childhood, explained that political leaders and decision makers portrayed a positive attitude toward projects that would improve women's health, such as supporting reproductive health projects, family planning, and health facilities targeting women's health needs. Yet, this was not accompanied by sufficient financial resources for the implementation. Also, there were not any tangible efforts to motivate trained health workers to work in rural areas, and there was a shortage in monitoring and evaluating the resources including human resources. "We had great written policies and strategies but they were not accompanied by enabling resources and were not sufficiently supported by the other stake holder government institutions such as civil services, security, transportation, among factors that affected the success of these strategies," she said. "It was not a multi-sectoral integrated holistic approach to

women's health." Moreover, she said that when the Ministry of Planning<sup>699</sup> got its basket of donor money, the distribution of funds to various projects was not fair, and that in the overall planning stage, there was a lack of support to a holistic approach to improving women's health at the districts' level in the governorates.

Furthermore, although the survey results provide a small indication of the structural and institutional challenges women leaders faced, the picture painted by the survey respondents was relatively better than that painted by the interviewees. Other than the fact that the support women leaders got from their institutions was highly dependent on the attitude the top leadership had toward gender equality, a more nuanced two-fold explanation was derived from the interviews. First, the support/resistance women leaders experienced was dependent on their level of authority or perceived power. Second, so long as the efforts to empower women did not pose as a critical threat to the social power gender relations, they and the women behind them were supported even if only superficially. This was because the "Yemeni cultural system is inherently biased against women especially in the rural areas, and this is reflected even in the government institutions and at the leadership level because it is influenced by the culture," according to Arwa Othman, former minister of culture. She emphasised the role of tribal bigotry and discriminatory traditions against women in shaping women's lives even at the highest levels. Furthermore, she explained that in Yemen, a woman was not considered an independent entity and her value came from the father she was born to or the husband she is married to or the son she brings to life.

Dr. Bilkis AbuOsba added that patriarchy was the main reason for hindering women's empowerment. "I would say that the most formidable challenge to women's empowerment are the social values that discriminate against women even at the highest decision-making levels," she said. "The Yemeni society presents itself as protector of women but in reality what it does is enforce constraints preventing women from attaining their rights or achieving their personal agencies."

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<sup>699</sup> Budgets for the various sectoral ministries was decided through a compromise between what these ministries asked for through their proposed budgets and what the Ministry of Planning and Ministry of Finance collectively granted.

This patriarchal attitude towards Yemeni women becomes more visible when the woman is perceived as a threat directly because of her position of authority, or because of the potential impact her work on women's empowerment can create in real life.

For example, Dr. Eshraq Al-Hakimi explained that during working in the education sector prior to her appointment as deputy minister of education, she assumed that by becoming deputy minister she would be able to better influence policy and improve the status of girls' education than through her previous less senior positions. Contrary to this assumption, she discovered that for Yemeni women it was harder to achieve results as a female senior official than it was for her at lower levels because of the strong resistance and dominance of patriarchy. "I feel alone as I see the male senior officials disrupting my efforts to improve girls' education. But still, I am not giving up and will continue to work to achieve my mission. Above all my desire to make a difference and improve education helps me go on," she said.

Commenting on this issue, Wafa Awadh, former director general of the Working Women's Directorate at the Industry and Trade Ministry, admitted that despite the presence of a seemingly supportive minister, she did face obstacles in the work place because of her gender not only in the ministry but also in the private sector with male stakeholders, who perceived the economic sector as a man's world<sup>700</sup> in which she was trespassing.

Similarly, Fawzia Nasher, president of the Yemeni Businesswomen Council, explained that as head of the women's section at the Chamber of Commerce, she and her female colleagues in the Chamber faced continuous harassment from both businessmen and male government administrators involved in the economic sector. On several occasions, Fawzia had to face criticism and threats not just for her work on women's economic empowerment but her very presence in top level circles was unwelcomed. She recalled many occasions when she was told by colleagues and government officials that a woman's place is at home and that she was crossing the line through her activism and demands to institutionalise gender equality in the economic sector. She explained that "the main hindrance was the lack of political will to truly empower Yemeni women

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<sup>700</sup> This may be considered as a global phenomenon and not just an aspect of the Yemeni society, however, the extent of discrimination against women in the economic sector in Yemen according to development indicators is much more severe compared to other countries.

economically and enable them to overcome the traditional and institutional discrimination against them in the economic sector.”

Additionally, sometimes the state’s attitude toward women leaders manifested itself indirectly through gender-biased subsidies/support or even lack of action. For example, as the Yemeni Businesswomen Council president, Fawzia Nasher, said that when the council tried to get government funding or subsidised rent for the council’s premises, as was the case with the businessmen’s council, they were refused and were told they should not consider themselves at par with the men and aspire to have their own place. She added that on many occasions the Businesswomen Council had to intervene in favour of women’s economic empowerment on matters where the state was the culprit or the authority that should have come to women’s rescue but did not. An example she provided was when a female farmer was prevented from selling her produce in the general market area despite the fact that she had paid rent for the market space, just like any other farmer. The person in charge of the market area blocked her loaded trucks of oranges from entering and ordered her to go home, saying that the market was not a place for a woman. She tried appealing to the municipality and the local authority with no use. She was then advised to seek the Businesswomen’s Council’s help, and indeed Fawzia pulled some strings and enabled the woman to sell her oranges in the market space she had originally paid for. Another example is when a private school was shut down by an official in the Education Ministry who did not approve of the idea that a woman should own such business ventures. The council lobbied for the businesswoman to reopen her school and succeeded. Similarly, before 2010, according to Fawzia, women were not accepted as financial guarantors for loan applicants - even when fulfilling the requirements - simply because of their gender. However, because of the council’s advocacy, the monetary institution’s policy changed, and since then, many women were able to get their loans and start their businesses consequently. “If it wasn’t for the council’s lobbying, such a discriminatory policy would not have changed. It is unfortunate how the social traditional values of Yemen’s patriarchal society dominate even the private sector’s institutions,” she said. Fawzia added that in general, the state did not do much to empower women economically, did not give subsidies or privileges to women as means of positive actions in order to empower them economically. For instance, it was known that state tenders can never go to a woman even if she was the

best candidate, as “there is no confidence by either the state or the private sector in a woman’s ability as a worthy participant in the country’s economy.”

This observation was not limited to women leaders working in the economic sector. Dr. Bilkis AbuOsba, professor of politics and gender and CEO of Awam Research Foundation, explained that even in terms of space for women to share the decision-making positions in the education or academic sectors there was high resistance against women’s natural promotion to become deans of colleges or heads of departments at the universities. “There would be many qualified women who deserved the promotion but either the higher leadership of the academic institution would not want to give them the space, or the women themselves would not be strong enough to demand and fight for their right to be promoted,” AbuOsba said. She recollected the resolution of the National Dialogue Conference<sup>701</sup> (NDC) in 2013 for a 30% women’s quota for decision-making positions, and how she and members of the NDC who were also in academia decided to push for an implementation of this quota in higher education. However, they faced resistance from the management as well as from the women candidates who were discouraged from putting themselves out there or present themselves as deserving of this quota.

“We discovered that there was no genuine political will to implement the 30% quota, and with the NDC outcomes not being translated into an approved constitution, this does not give us the legal standing to demand this quota even if we found the women who were willing to nominate themselves,” she explained.

Amal Basha, director of Sisters Arab Forum for Human Rights (SAF), agreed with this conclusion, stating that pervasive negative cultural conceptions of women as less capable than men remains a challenge for women and a barrier to attain higher senior positions. “Unfortunately, only cosmetic- minimal representation is allowed, and even then it is confined to women affiliating to the ruling political party/ies,” she said.

Consequently, despite the progress made to increase women’s presence in public and political spheres, the narration of the women leaders in positions of authority explained that authority does not directly translate into power, as many of those women leaders

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<sup>701</sup> The National Dialogue Conference is a significant political event that lasted between March 2013 to January 2014 and resulted in a framework as basis for the new constitution which is still a draft today because of the war. See Wikipedia entry on the NDC at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National\\_Dialogue\\_Conference](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Dialogue_Conference).

found themselves negotiating their roles with male colleagues and even subordinates who defied their orders.

Dr. Eshraq Al-Hakimi, deputy minister of education for the Girls Education Sector, gave an example of the curricula committee, which she is a member of. She noticed a trend in the official meetings where it would seem that her male colleagues were in agreement with her ideas, but when the books were finally printed, she would discover that her comments were completely disregarded.

Hooria Mashour, former minister of human rights, explained that the state's commitment was not always genuine and decision makers were often influenced by the traditional social power groups. "It was a very hard struggle because we [gender equality advocates] were working against the tide," she said. "Even when we managed to pass laws or strategies in support of women, there would be a problem with implementation either because of lack of political commitment or dedicated budget."

Likewise, Jamela Al-Raiby, former deputy minister of health, admitted that on many occasions, the director of the finance department, who is hierarchically below her, often discarded her instructions even though they were in line with her role and authority. "This finance director was a very traditional man who was also a preacher in a mosque. I soon realised that he was not very happy with me being a woman in a senior position or even with the concept of women working in public in general. And the word gender to him was synonym with the devil himself," she said.

In conclusion, when investigating the influence patriarchal values had on formal institutions as a dimension of the culture of political support for women leaders, empirical evidence indicated that the support women leaders received from their management and working environment was dependent on four interrelated elements: the individual personality and background of the decision maker, the women leader's perceived level of authority, the potential impact of the women's empowerment effort on gender equality (more on this is presented in the fourth dimension of political support, which is section C on gender policies and the redistribution of social power), and the strength of support the woman has internally and collectively from her female colleagues in the workplace.

The interviewees explained that throughout their work they struggled to implement the agreed strategies and action plans because of resistance within their own institutions. This resistance manifested itself in discrimination when it comes to financial and administrative resources, or lack of coordination with other stakeholders, or logistical exclusion from decision-making events. It also manifested itself in the insubordination of the men in lower ranks, and the lack of action from the management toward this insubordination. Moreover, many experienced a visible hostility by the traditional colleagues, especially when the woman leader had the capacity and desire to resist the patriarchy. Finally, women leaders explained that they felt weaker within their own organisations and outnumbered especially when other women in the institution did not share the desire to challenge the status quo and demand equality.

### ***b) Gender politics of authoritarian regimes***

In her research on the state and gender politics, Manea (2012)<sup>702</sup> argued that for authoritarian regimes to survive, they need to strike a balance between their obligations to women as a part of their constituencies and a group of interest internationally, and their need to appease traditional forces that keep the politicians in power. In essence, the Yemeni state has been pressured by the international community – mostly western democracies – to promote gender equality as a part of human rights and democratisation initiatives.<sup>703</sup> This included a surge of donor-led development projects by international development organisations<sup>704</sup> aiming at improving women-related development indicators, to which the Yemeni state was a recipient of funds and an implementer.<sup>705</sup> The Yemeni government readily welcomed these interventions, not because of its

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<sup>702</sup> E. Manea, *The Arab state and women's rights: The trap of authoritarian governance*, Taylor & Francis, 2012, p. 116.

<sup>703</sup> A. Sreberny, 'Television, gender, and democratization in the Middle East', *De-Westernizing media studies*, 2000, p. 57.

<sup>704</sup> Also, many of the development organisations and international agencies mere existence depends on development projects especially those concerning women. S. Carapico, 'Foreign Aid for Promoting Democracy in the Arab World', *Middle East Journal*, 56(3), 2002.

<sup>705</sup> D. A. McMurray & A. Ufheil-Somers, *The Arab revolts: Dispatches on militant democracy in the Middle East*, Indiana University Press, 2013. And, M. Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996; I. Jad, 'The NGO-isation of Arab Women's Movements', *International Development Studies Bulletin*, vol. 35, no. 4, 2004. Also, W. Shakir, 'Al"ishkaliyat wa aljadal hawal altamkeen alsiyasi lilmar"aa" [Controversy and debate around political empowerment of women], a working paper presented to the *Second and Third Democratic Forum: women and politics – Religious perspectives, problems and solutions*, organized by Sisters Arab Forum, Sana'a, 14 September 2004, and Aden, 23 December 2004.

political position toward gender equality as such, but rather, it pursued gender politics in an opportunistic manner.<sup>706</sup>

Therefore, despite the state's policy of appointing women in visible political positions, the women leaders – whose mere existence in authority was a credit to the state – explained that this trend is superficial low-cost response to donor pressure to promote gender equality. More than half of the surveyed sample said that the state's gender policies were not genuine in creating a difference in women's lives but were directed towards the donors to give them a shallow image of Yemeni women's progress.

Concurringly, Dr. Bilkis AbuOsba said that in the higher education sector most of the appointments of women in decision-making positions were for show. "The political leaders appointed women in some positions of power so that it is said women were given space in the leadership circles. But in truth, it was not real empowerment and these women were not truly recognised as authority figures or had real influence," she said. "In some cases it was the fault of the woman herself who despite being in a position of power, did not have the strength to prove herself and demand the authority that came with her position. To be fair, this was a very hard struggle especially when there was lack of political support from their institutions, or from the women's movement in the larger public space."

Similarly, Dr. Nafisa Al-Jaifi, former president of the Higher Council for Motherhood and Childhood, said that prior to 2011, women were not engaged in serious political roles such as country-level decision making, parliament and *Shoura* [consultative] council. Neither the society nor the government were open to the idea of having females in senior political positions. Any opportunities given to women were exclusive to specific ministries such as the Human Rights Ministry and the Social Affairs and Labour Ministry. In the Ministry of Health, opportunities given to women were exclusive to the Reproductive Health and Population Sector. From 2011 to 2014, there was a change on the theoretical level but not on the execution level. For instance, despite the protestors' demands for women's empowerment and despite the fact that the National Dialogue Conference highlighted women's issues and resulted in a decree for a 30% women quota, the political map for nominations remained unchanged.

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<sup>706</sup> Manea, *The Arab*, op. cit., p. 7.

Similarly, in 2014 women were not given political roles in the negotiations between the parties to the conflict. And even when women were given rare opportunities to be part of influential delegations, they were not granted genuine decision power.

Accordingly, former minister of culture Arwa Othman explained that “political instability and changes in governments and parties were a façade and Yemen’s reality, the one which the average man and women is affected by, remained the same regardless of the changes in governments or the political instabilities.” In her view, the reason why women’s development or that of the country as a whole was derailed, was because of the absence of a real state in the first place. “Without a civil state we cannot talk about stability or democracy, and women’s empowerment is part of their society’s empowerment,” she exclaimed. “Consider the parliament for example, it has always been led by the leader of the strongest tribe and the members represent the tribal system and not the citizens. Affiliation is to the tribe not the people or the state.”

Furthermore, interviewees said that the creation of the women directorates and departments at the various government institutions was a response to pressures from United Nations agencies. However, once these entities were officially created, the Yemeni government did not fulfil its part in terms of providing adequate furnishing, logistical support, or even operational budgets. In their view, the establishment of women entities in the ministries was for the sake of propaganda or publicity; to show that the government had indeed created women departments, when in reality the departments were hardly functional.

Findings showed that the extent of the Yemeni government’s involvement in promoting gender equality was limited to creating women-related entities as well as signing women’s empowerment partnerships funded by the donors. By their nature, donor-led projects tended to focus on short term results and development-oriented projects, while the responsibility of creating long term policies that aimed at behavioural change should have been the responsibility of the national government. However, this was not the case in Yemen, which meant that women’s empowerment efforts were dependent on donors and international organisations. To this end, Lamia Al-Eryani, former deputy minister of the Technical Education and Vocational Training Ministry explained that the support from international organisations and donors such as GIZ, Intersos, Injaz, UNICEF, and the Turkish and Chinese governments for girls’ education in the vocational training

sector was vital to the success of the women's empowerment initiatives in this field. "The relationship of the Girls' Education Sector with the donors and the diplomatic missions was good and instrumental in the success we achieved," she said. "In fact, the mere existence of the Girls' Education Sector could be attributed to the pressures from the international community, to which the Yemeni state submitted, and I don't think the political parties in charge were convinced of the importance of women's empowerment in this sector," Al-Eryani added. "Consequently, the budget for this sector from the national government was very small, and our main source of funding came from the donors and some of the private sector and quasi-government bodies such as the Social Development Fund."

Findings indicated that many of the policies implemented, either partially or fully, on many occasions were a show of support for gender equality aimed at the international community, and the donors in particular, rather than the Yemeni community. At the same time, the Yemeni government had continuously used its lack of resources as an excuse for not achieving the desired development objectives, especially when it came to women. Consequently, in order to address the financing needs of the Yemeni government to achieve the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) No. 2, Education for All, by 2015, Yemen was selected to be in the first group of ten countries to receive financing from the EFA Fast Track Initiative (FTI) Catalytic Fund.<sup>707</sup> Additionally, there were several projects aiming at improving the capacity of public servants working in women's health projects and relevant projects, all of which were continuously funded by donors. However, accurate estimations of the total foreign aid spent on women's health in Yemen is not available since international organisations and embassies are not legally obliged to disclose their expenditure to the Yemeni government beyond the signing of intention protocols. Moreover, the Yemeni government has not kept updated records on its public spending due to political instability, lack of capacity, and lack of transparency. Much of the statistical data since 2006 are, in fact, inconsistent and unreliable.<sup>708</sup>

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<sup>707</sup> International Bank of Reconstruction and Development, The World Bank & The Republic of Yemen, *Republic of Yemen, Education Status Report: Challenges and opportunities*, Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Region, World Bank, 2010, p. 23.

<sup>708</sup> UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), *Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant: concluding observations of the Committee on Economic, Social*

Furthermore, findings resonated with Manea's<sup>709</sup> explanation of authoritarian regimes, as around 22% of the survey responses said that the state cannot challenge the social forces that discriminate against women because of their ability to remove the politicians from power. According to Amal Basha, director of Sisters Arab Forum For Human Rights, in an authoritarian regime, such that which exists in Yemen, the gender concept is a suspicious one. It is perceived as a threat to the political structure of the state and moreover as an imported Western concept. "Traditional and conservative forces who are strong and gaining power over time are declaring Jihad against gender equality promoters," she said. "Female activists are in a real and serious battle with conservatives to achieve gender equality."

Former minister of human rights Hooria Mashour explained that sometimes she was appalled that she had to struggle to gain the support of highly educated officials for gender equality, some of whom have had their fair share of exposure and were even educated abroad. Behind closed doors, some of the friendlier officials explained that it came down to resource scarcity, as the country was already in a tight economic situation and there were other priorities. Moreover, she was told that promoting the cause of gender equality was against the culture and politicians risked angering the conservative forces who helped keep them in power.

Dr. Nafisa Al-Jaifi, former president of the Higher Council for Motherhood and Childhood explained that politicians are wary of being associated with projects or initiatives that visibly challenged the traditional gender values. Consequently, politicians would leave women leaders and activists to fend for themselves in the face of the backlash from conservative forces. "In the early marriage campaign, the female advocates for a law to ban child marriages were opposed and even attacked. They were labelled as infidels and accused of promoting a western agenda against Islamic principles," she said. "If the issue at hand deeply concerns the social traditional values of the Yemeni society especially regarding gender roles, it faces extreme resistance. The further the issue is from the gender power relations the more likely it is to pass without resistance."

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*and Cultural Rights : Yemen*, 22 June 2011, E/C.12/YEM/CO/2, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/52d673874.html>, (accessed 23 November 2018).

<sup>709</sup> Manea, *The Arab op. cit.*, p. 7.

To summarise, this section provided evidence for one of the strongest mechanisms through which the culture of political support was identified as a contributor to the failure of women's empowerment policies in Yemen. This mechanism is the Yemeni government's two-faced attitude toward gender equality, as it finds itself between the conservative forces who threaten the politicians' positions in power on the one hand, and the pressure from the donors to support gender equality on the other hand. As a low-cost yet visible response to this dilemma, the Yemeni government appointed women in high-level positions, created women-related entities, and signed projects and treaties seemingly promoting gender equality. Simultaneously, it did not dedicate the resources or provide political support for the women leaders or the efforts that would truly contribute to gender equality in the society through the redistribution of gender power. The following section on the redistribution of gender power elaborates on this issue.

### ***c) Gender policies and the redistribution of social power***

This dimension referred to the requirement that for women's empowerment policies to work, they should address the gender power imbalances in the society. Feminist theorists such as Dworkin<sup>710</sup> (1989), Moser<sup>711</sup> (1993), Malhotra and Schuler<sup>712</sup> (2002), and Phillips<sup>713</sup> (2003) argued that socially-endorsed inequality, especially in the personal sphere, was an intrinsic cause of women's lack of empowerment, and that without acknowledging and consequently addressing this inequality, any processes aiming at improving the situation of women would be inadequate. Since the very meaning of empowerment is essentially a change in power relations, whereby the less powerful gains more power,<sup>714</sup> it becomes reasonable to conclude that the entry point to women's empowerment in patriarchal societies, such as Yemen, would be to challenge, across all spaces of structural antagonism, existing social values that

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<sup>710</sup> A. Dworkin, *Men possessing women*, New York: Perigee. 1981, p. 13-14.

<sup>711</sup> C. O. N. Moser, *Gender planning and development: theory, practice and training*, London and New York, Routledge 1993, <http://www.polsci.chula.ac.th/pitch/urbansea12/moser1993.pdf>, (accessed 8 January 2016).

<sup>712</sup> Malhotra, *Measuring*, op. cit.

<sup>713</sup> S. U. Phillips, 'The power of gender ideologies in discourse', in J. Holmes & M. Meyerhoff, *The handbook of language and gender*, Blackwell Publishing, 2003.

<sup>714</sup> Kabeer, *resources*, op. cit.

consider women inferior to men and discriminate against them. Therefore, policy makers were expected to design policies to transform the social power balances in the society so as to remove gender disparities as means to achieving women's empowerment.

“Unfortunately, the concerns of gender planners have not always centred around women's empowerment and the transformation of gender relations.”<sup>715</sup> Consequently, oversimplification of complex gender relations in order to identify quantifiable targets had continuously been a drawback in many development projects or international policies addressing any of the various aspects of gender inequality. Moreover, according to the review of policies presented in Chapter IV, this was the main approach of the Yemeni government over the last two decades. Findings from the survey and elite interviews concurred with this conclusion, indicating that women leaders had to camouflage gender equality efforts as development projects, or abandon them altogether in favour of short-term development targets. For example, former minister of human rights, Hooria Mashour said that when she was working in the Women National Committee (WNC), she realised that her work was cut out for her as there was a huge resistance to the concept of gender equality in Yemen. It was considered a western-imposed controversial value that had to be fought by conservative religious groups. She and the WNC team decided to lobby for gender equality without confrontation and replaced the term with women's empowerment, which was less controversial. However, even using women's empowerment as an objective faced resistance by both government institutions and the public because of the dominance of patriarchal culture and a social power imbalance in favour of men.

In terms of empowerment efforts and social norms, both surveys and interviews indicated that the various women's empowerment efforts approved by the government between 2006 and 2014, although aimed at improving women's conditions, did not enjoy full support from the decision makers either in terms of financial resources – as indicated in the previous sections – or in the form of championship at the national level in a way that would have created a social impact. As described earlier, the chart in

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<sup>715</sup> S. Wieringa, 'Women's interests and empowerment: gender planning reconsidered', *Development and change*, 25(4), 1994; R. C. Das (ed.), *Handbook of Research on Microfinancial Impacts on Women's empowerment, Poverty, and Inequality*, IGI Global, 2018, p. 835.

figure 6 of this chapter showed that most of the respondents felt there was much to be improved on in terms of the state's handling of women's empowerment. That policies were superficial and aimed at donors rather than a serious attempt at addressing gender inequality.

Comments from the survey indicated that "interest in women's issues is superficial and not substantial," and that "the state's policies and laws were not supportive of women and there wasn't real political will to change the social attitude toward women or to change the many injustices in the local laws."

The results of the interviews agreed with this conclusion. Despite the various structural attempts, donor support, and evidence of staggering needs, Yemeni women's empowerment remained a low priority in the political agenda, and was especially ignored in recent years with the instability and armed conflict dominating the country today.

"The gender policies were shallow and were not accompanied by projects on the ground that aimed at creating behavioural change. Moreover, the approach to women's empowerment was not holistic or sustainable," said Amal Basha director of the Sisters Arab Forum for Human Rights.

Whereas said empowerment policies sought to achieve the ultimate goal of changing gender power relations in the society toward gender equality, several interviewees admitted that they had to change their objectives from achieving gender equality in their relevant field to improving women's conditions within the larger development agenda. This was not due to a lack of understanding of the importance of creating behavioural change in the society in order to achieve gender equality, but because the objective was considered too overwhelming to tackle especially with the lack of support from higher leadership.

"We often focused on the service delivery and not on the demand side. In many of our strategies we could have focused more on behavioural change," said Jamela Al-Raiby, former deputy minister of health. "We did do a media campaign on reproductive health, but I recognise that it was not enough to change attitudes. Our health policies also have weaknesses in baseline research, monitoring, and evaluation in order to see the impact we made."

Similarly, former culture minister Arwa Othman said that most of the proclaimed changes in women's conditions were temporary and easily reversible because they did not represent real change in the cultural values or societal norms. "You see it easily when there is any change in the political or economic situation or even when donors stop their projects," she said. "The so-called transformations or empowerment vanishes immediately." She added that the appointments of women to senior positions were merely decorative, and the women in authority found themselves victims of the very political system that supposedly empowered them. Consequently, the women leaders found themselves pushed to implement projects – funded by donors – that do not create a difference in reality because they were superficial and did not affect the cultural value system. "Women's empowerment has to come from within, and the donors can support the process of cultural change, but they are not responsible for it, nor can they do it."

Likewise, deputy minister of education Eshraq Al-Hakimi pointed out that girls' education was not really a national priority and this attitude stems from the larger social attitude towards women. Therefore, she said, the social values and backgrounds of many male decision-makers, despite being educated senior officials, who ostensibly believed in the importance of education, influence their official responsibilities. "They don't have a problem with me personally, they have a problem with any initiative that would enable women to have a stronger role in the society and improve her independence to become equal," Al-Hakimi said. "They [senior male officials at the ministry] do not want to challenge the status quo in the society. Knowing that education empowers women, they do not want to facilitate it."

This conclusion was also reflected in the survey results in terms of the respondents' views of their success, speaking as key change agents working on Yemeni women's empowerment. Around 19% explained that they do not consider their work in women's empowerment successful because of various challenges relating to the community and the institutions they work in. Around 25% said they managed to execute their women's empowerment projects but not to a satisfactory level. More than 25% of the respondents considered themselves successful in their women's empowerment work, and only 22% said that they were satisfied with their professional success and have been able to make a positive contribution to Yemeni women's empowerment through their work. The remaining 9% explained that there are other factors to be considered, such as the

instability or that they achieved a degree of success in the past but are not currently doing so.

Figure 9 Satisfaction in professional success relating to women’s empowerment



Furthermore, the resistance toward initiatives that would potentially challenge the social power relations was not limited to government institutions but included other stakeholders such as the private sector. Dr. Amat Al-Razzak Hummed, former minister of social affairs and labour, said that “one of the main obstacles against the Working Women’s Directorate in the ministry was the lack of cooperation from some of the private sector companies, which did not comply with the Dignified Working Conditions Policy’s recommendations and did not carry out supportive measures for working women,” she said. “We tried to change the businessmen’s attitudes toward women in the economic sector through awareness initiatives and lobbying through unions and syndicates. But in general, men usually have the highest salaries and leadership positions in the private sector, which is a reflection of gender discrimination in that sector.” Furthermore, research published by the Working Women Directorate showed a prevailing attitude in the Yemeni society that a woman’s place was at home, and that there were dominant cultural values that deprived women of equity and access to capital such as land ownership.

The findings from the survey and interviews indicated that there is consensus among the respondents – many of whom have played various roles in implementing women’s empowerment projects in education, healthcare, and the economy – that projects aimed at improving the situation of women in specific fields without addressing the socially-embedded causes of the gender gap in the first place do not have an effective or lasting impact on women’s empowerment.

Dr. Nafisa Al-Jaifi, stated that when it came to raising awareness about socially-sensitive issues, she learned that having male allies, in particular men with religious affiliations, was very influential on both the decision-makers and the society. From her experience, campaigns targeting the following three issues faced heavy resistance: female genital mutilation (FGM) or cutting, early marriage, and family planning and pre-marital screening tests. That was when she and her allies decided to also recruit the help of other religious scholars to fight back. She realised that the opposing groups would not accept arguments from activist women or even doctors, but they were more inclined to listen to men of religious authority. The results of her work proved that her intuition was right. She witnessed more success after working with religious leaders, including scholars from the Ministry of Endowment, to train male and female influential religious leaders. This included hosting workshops, sending individuals to attend regional and national conferences, and publishing guideline booklets. She explained that there was a partial success in raising awareness about the negative health consequence of FGM. However, this was not replicated in combating early marriage as the opposition was able to stop any attempts to ban marriages under any specified age. “For FGM, the issue was directly related to health and many individuals became convinced with the campaign despite the fact that we were not able to pass a legal ban against it,” she said. “However, early marriage was turned into a political debate and therefore was more at stake for the conservative opposition.” Dr. Al-Jaifi’s added that there was insufficient political support for women leaders to prepare legal reforms for a variety of women-related issues, including inheritance, divorce, and early marriage. She said that unfortunately, despite efforts, the religious political opposition was a serious obstacle that prevented the implementation of the reforms. For example, the campaign against early marriage (2009-2010) succeeded in gaining the approval of officials at various senior levels, including the president. However, the strong opposition from religious leaders was enough to discourage the government and higher

authorities from progressing with the reform as the government needed their political support during that period.

Survey responses concurred with this finding showing that the laws did not reflect the commitments the state made to Yemeni women or the international community. Around 44% of the respondents said that there was no equality between men and women in many laws, and 53% said that the laws were not the problem, it was in the implementation of the law. The issue of adapting the local laws to international women rights treaties, mainly the CEDAW,<sup>716</sup> was a controversial one in the Yemeni society precisely because of the dilemma authoritarian regimes face as described in the previous section. The women leaders who attained senior official positions, such as those in the interview sample, said they witnessed this dilemma personally. During her previous work in the Women National committee, Hooria Mashour explained that there were several efforts to help the Yemeni authorities identify the legal barriers against gender equality. However, even though the laws were identified, only a few of them were actually amended,<sup>717</sup> which indicated a strong resistance by the Parliament to eliminate discrimination against women in the legal texts.

“Had there been political will at the highest level to genuinely support women, this would not have been the case since the ruling party has a majority in the parliament and can easily pass any amendments it desires. This actually happened several times in the past regarding other matters unrelated to women,” Mashour said.

In order to improve the probability of their development projects succeeding, some women leaders were able to include awareness-raising initiatives to accompany the actual women’s empowerment projects. For example, Lamia Al-Eryani, former deputy minister of the Technical Education and Vocational Training Ministry, said that she and her team carried out media campaigns and awareness activities in order to change the dominant cultural stigma against girls’ education in the vocational sector. “The social challenges included both lack of awareness regarding the importance of girls’

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<sup>716</sup> United Nations General Assembly, *Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women*, UN, 1979, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>, (accessed 17 July 2018).

<sup>717</sup> Examples of these laws were detailed in the policy mapping chapter IV.

education, coupled with the stigma against girls' education and her work in the public domain," she explained.

Former minister of social affairs and labour, Dr. Amat Al-Razzak Hummed, similarly explained that the Working Women's Development General Directorate at the ministry implemented several campaigns to promote change in the society's attitude toward working women. These included endorsing dignified working conditions for women, working women's rights, women entrepreneurs, and advocating for policy change in the laws and institutional regulations. "One of the crucial projects was to conduct research on the conditions of women in the labour sector and what they face in the market especially in the private sector," she said. "We made sure this information was publicised so that many people were aware and become supportive of women in the economic sector."

In sum, this section described the challenges women leaders faced in terms of implementing initiatives that could contribute to a change in the gender-power relations in the society. Survey respondents and interviewees explained that the more the project challenged gender dynamics, the more resistance it faced from the society, and even more importantly the more disregard if not opposition these projects faced from decision makers. The women leaders indicated that there was a lack of political support for policies that would lead to behavioural change and even when awareness campaigns were implemented, they were short term and limited, despite the fact that they proved to yield good results.

#### ***d) Political culture and women's movement***

Okeke-Ihejirika & Franceschet (2002)<sup>718</sup> indicated that women's empowerment and the achievement of gender equality were directly proportional to the strength of democracy, which allowed for resilient women's movements in post pre-democracy political transitions. The argument here is that the stronger the feminist movement is,

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<sup>718</sup> P. E. Okeke-Ihejirika & S. Franceschet, 'Democratization and state feminism: Gender politics in Africa and Latin America', *Development and Change*, 33(3), 2002, p. 442.

the more capable it is in demanding women's rights and pushing gender equality up the agenda of political priorities. Simultaneously, the success of the women's movement as a social phenomenon is heavily dependent on popular support,<sup>719</sup> among other elements. Therefore, in communities where gender equality is not a popular concept – such as Yemen,<sup>720</sup> feminist pioneers experience a disconnect not only from the larger population, but more importantly, from women's groups, who are the primary stakeholders in this issue.

The struggle Yemeni women leaders faced as pioneers of the feminist movement in Yemen was clearly described through the interviews and survey responses. This was indicated by their comments on the disillusionment they faced in their professional environment, i.e. from the political leadership, as well as from their communities, including some women's groups and the women population in general.

As the nature of societies dictate, there is a push-pull relationship between those who govern and those who are governed. In the literature review chapter, it was demonstrated that social movements represented one of the pressure forces on a state. In the case of women's movements in traditionally male-dominated societies, this could be perceived as a form of resistance.<sup>721</sup> Simultaneously, women's resistance to patriarchy could be considered a form of empowerment.<sup>722</sup>

Findings from the survey indicated that more than half of the respondents worked<sup>723</sup> in the civil society sector, including nongovernmental organisations, research, and training. In their responses, a majority of the respondents considered themselves activists and human-rights defenders alongside their main job, which was mostly in the public sector. The chart below shows that 75% of the respondents identified themselves

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<sup>719</sup> A. Escobar, *The making of social movements in Latin America: Identity, strategy, and democracy*, Routledge, 2018.

<sup>720</sup> A. M. Alsharjabi, 'Ḥuqooq almar'ah alyamaniāh šira' bain aljandar wa algulden wa aljandarmah' [Yemeni women's rights: a struggle between gender, Gulden and Genderma], *Assafir Alarabi*, 29 May 2013, <http://assafirarabi.com>, (accessed 17 July 2018).

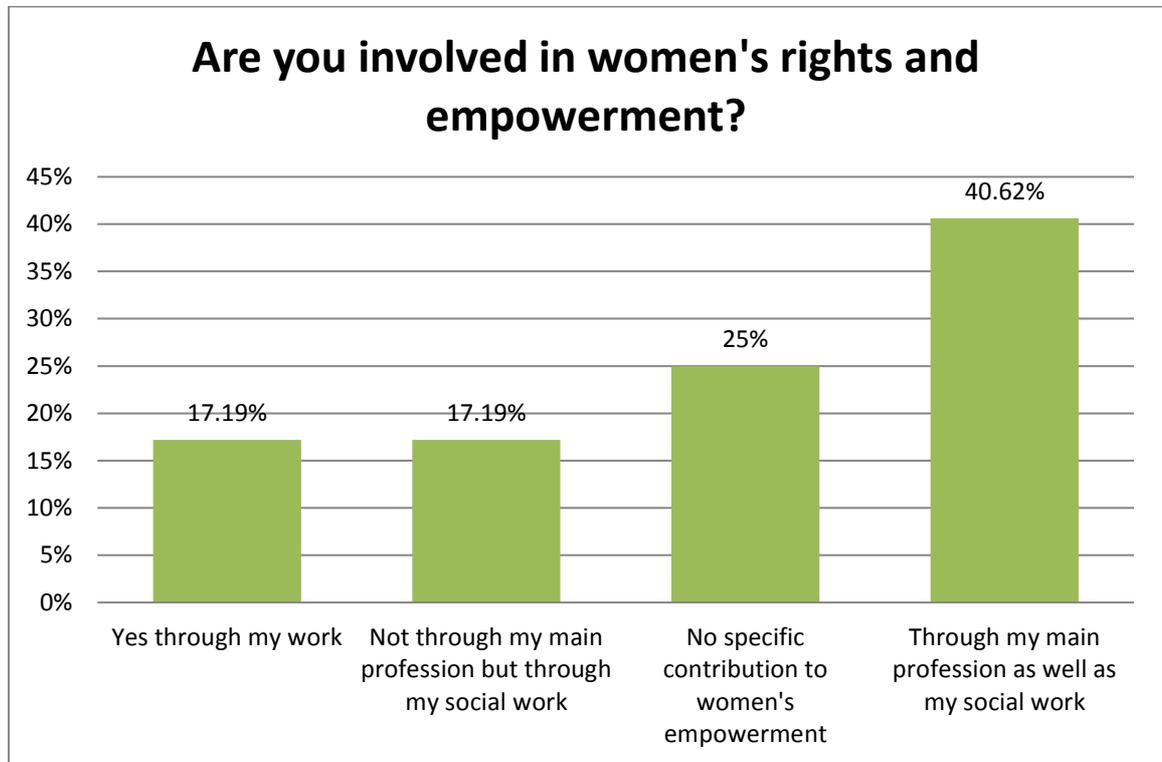
<sup>721</sup> See Dworkin, op. cit.; C. MacKinnon, *Feminism unmodified*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987; V. Held, *Feminist morality: Transforming culture, society, and politics*, University of Chicago Press, 1993. And S. M. Okin, *Justice, gender, and the family*, Basic Books, New York, 1989.

<sup>722</sup> A. Allen, 'Rethinking power', *Hypatia*, 13(1), 1998, p. 34.

<sup>723</sup> The survey question allowed the respondents multiple choices so as to indicate the overlapping between disciplines and the nature of women leaders' activities beyond their main profession.

as being directly active in women’s empowerment, around 58% of whom were engaged in women’s issues beyond their main profession.

Figure 10 Activism in women’s rights and the feminist agenda



In another question regarding the respondent’s network and circle of resources, 73% of the women leaders said they either have an extensive network of experts and contacts across many fields (20%) or have a wide circle of connections and through which they can reach others if needed (53%).

To this end, Fawzia Nasher, of the Businesswomen Council, said that she realised early on that strength was in numbers, and therefore, creating strong women networks was an early objective in her career. “The more women we have in the business sector, the stronger we are as an entity and so we can demand change and ensure its sustainability,” she said. “The problem was that the culture does not encourage women in the public sector and so women themselves shy away from opportunities because they are afraid of what they will lose socially, or of the challenges they will have to face by breaking the stereotypes.” This was why, in her own experience, Fawzia realised that the first step was to strengthen her position as a woman in the economic sector through associating with other businesswomen. She created the first database for Yemeni businesswomen and made sure that women among the general public, who had an

interest in becoming entrepreneurs or entering the economic sector, knew there was a body to support them. “We need to make the Yemeni society ready to accept women as empowered independent individuals equal to men,” she said. “Unless this happens, all our efforts will be incomplete.”

Similarly, Dr. Bilkis AbuOsba, of Sana’a University, explained that a part of the woman leader’s power comes from the support she receives from her female colleagues. “It is not only that a woman leader should have sufficient capacity or agency, but more so, to be taken seriously many times she has to have support from other women leaders, who have her back, and as a collective demand women’s rights,” she said. Dr. AbuOsba further explained that women’s individual capacity is not enough, the weakness of the Yemeni women’s movement greatly limits the impact a woman’s agency has in her workplace. However, Dr. AbuOsba, clarified that even highly qualified women such as university professors did not always support women’s empowerment or gender equality. “It was sad to see that women’s empowerment was not a priority even for educated women, such as academics or lecturers who would rather not be involved in any activity demanding social change or empowerment of women even if it was women’s empowerment in the education system, which they were part of,” she said. A ray of hope, she believed, could come through the Sana’a University’s Academic Women’s Forum, an entity that was founded in 2014 just before the current conflict started. She hopes that in the post-conflict period this entity could support the Yemeni women’s movement by spreading awareness and exerting pressure on decision makers to follow through on their commitments regarding gender equality. Dr. AbuOsba emphasised the role of civil society as more significant than any other sector to create change in the Yemeni society in favour of women.

Furthermore, when asked about potential explanations for the failure of women’s empowerment policies in Yemen, some of the survey respondents commented that the weakness of a women’s movement has contributed to this failure, as it was not strong enough to hold the politicians accountable to their promises to women. For example, a respondent commented: “in addition to those factors [capacity, instability, and culture of political support], the weak women’s movement and its fragmentation has added to the failure of women’s empowerment policies. This fragmentation in the civil society is actually a reflection of the disintegration of society as a whole.”

Findings from the interviews emphasised this point by explicitly mentioning the relation between the Yemeni women's movement and decision makers. Amal Basha, of the Sisters Arab Forum for Human Rights, explained that the voices of feminists and human rights activists were scattered and did not receive much grassroots support compared to the more traditional and conservative rhetoric. "Our impact was weak," she explained. "And we always faced defamation, opposition-campaigns, and protests against us and our demands... the women's organisations were also not mature enough nor were they sufficient in numbers."

Another aspect of the disintegration was apparent through the lack of coordination among various stakeholders in government institutions when it comes to women's empowerment initiatives. The interviewees explained that for many of the empowerment policies to succeed, an integrated approach at the highest level had to be managed, beyond their work at the sectoral level. However, in many cases this was not happening. Wafa Awadh, of the Ministry of Trade and Industry, explained that their work included joint assessments and policies with other relevant ministries such as the Ministry of Technical Education and Vocational Training, Ministry of Planning, Ministry of Fisheries, Ministry Agriculture, Ministry of Labour, and Ministry of Civil Services. "However, there was a problem in efficient coordination between the various women bodies at these entities because of the difference in levels, authorities, qualifications, and interest," she said.

In an attempt to win over the masses and create popular support for their causes, many of the women leaders devised awareness campaigns and sought to link the benefits of women's empowerment to the overall benefit of the family. For example, while she was leading an initiative to increase girls' enrolment in vocational institutes, Lamia Al-Eryani, of the Ministry of Technical Education and Vocational Training, implemented awareness campaigns advocating this message. "I could say that in the vocational education sector we had managed to influence the public's perception toward girls' education and their involvement in this field, especially since we used media campaigns and proved to the families that this was a good source of income for the whole family by linking the graduates to the job market," she said. Furthermore, Lamia and her team realised the importance of raising awareness and creating public support for this initiative, and they were able to carry out a media campaign that reached average

citizens and encouraged them to send their girls to study in this unconventional sector for women in Yemen. They were also able to connect the graduates of the vocational training institutes and the market through an open day and hence facilitated job opportunities for the graduating women.

Similarly, former deputy minister of health Jamela Al-Raiby, used positive messages from the religion and culture in her awareness campaigns on maternal health. Her strategy was to position the target of access to contraceptives as a matter of improving mothers' health and decreasing deaths rather than a matter of woman's personal right and control over her body. Through education and awareness projects that aimed at educating the masses on the risks of early and repeated pregnancies, she was able to gain grounds on acceptance of contraceptives. During her work at the Ministry of Health, she realised that Yemeni men, even those living in remote conservative areas can change their minds and will seriously consider changing their behaviours when presented with new information in a suitable, non-confrontational manner. One of the key strategies she used was not to use the word gender, which at the time was considered a foreign term used to impose western values into the Yemeni culture. Instead she used terms such as social justice and fairness, and used many Islamic principles to support her arguments. In fact, she solicited the help of religious preachers and mosques to help improve youth and women's access and use of reproductive health services including family planning services to promote the national objective of advocating for family planning. Using the media also helped, as a donor-funded weekly TV programme on reproductive health played a major role in raising awareness. She is now proud to announce that all methods of family planning are used in Yemen and midwives have a wide scope of work to provide family planning services in the rural areas.

However, there is a difference between interesting the public in an income generating opportunity or saving the lives of their wives and mothers on the one hand, and on the other changing popular attitudes towards women's worth in the society and her right to personal choices. Moreover, the media campaigns implemented by most of the women leaders aimed at promoting women's development as a means to bolster the overall development of the society rather than the concept of gender equality as a women's entitlement on its own right.

Another dimension of this issue was highlighted by Lamia Al-Eryani, who said that the political fragmentation at the top level often trickled down to middle and lower levels of management and women's empowerment was subject to the whims of the decision makers and their genuine interest – or lack thereof – in gender equality. “This was compounded by the lack of women's presence at the lower levels at the ministry, which were closer to the public, and which resulted in a disconnect between women's presence at the highest levels and that at the lower, almost grassroots levels,” Al-Eryani said. In her perspective, women's visibility across the ministry's various sections and levels was limited not because there weren't many qualified women, but rather because of the persistent traditional attitude against women's abilities that grew stronger the closer one gets to the general community.

In fact, findings showed that as the management ladder goes down, attitudes toward gender equality and women's empowerment tend to become more negative. Dr. Amat Al-Razzak Hummed said that it was not a problem with the top-level politicians per se, as there would be political commitment to women's empowerment through the creation<sup>724</sup> of the Women National Committee and its various women departments in all ministries, and the support of nongovernmental organisations such as the Yemeni Women's Union. As such, when women's issues were discussed at the senior leadership levels, there would be a positive response and interest in women's welfare, but the actual hindrance would come from the middle and lower levels at the implementation levels. “For example, when deciding the budgets at all departments of the ministry with the corresponding authority at the ministry of finance, a decision would be agreed on to a certain funding for women's issues,” she explained. “But when money is to be dispersed and the funding is to be made, the agreed amount reduces significantly.”

It could be argued at this point that had the top-level leadership sincerely believed in the cause of women's empowerment, they would have ensured that their directives were followed through. However, as discussed in the earlier sections, politicians find themselves reluctant to live to their commitments to gender equality efforts in fear of the backlash from conservative forces, as well as for some, their lack of genuine interest

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<sup>724</sup> Although the mere creation of women entities did not truly empower women – especially as explained earlier that it was not accompanied by adequate resources – many women working in the public sector hold on to this achievement as a step in the right direction towards gender equality.

in gender equality because of their personal beliefs. However, in this section, the lack of a strong women's movement that could have held the politicians accountable and could have rivalled the pressure politicians faced from traditional powers contributed to the explanatory power of the culture of political support – or lack thereof – to the failure of women's empowerment policies in Yemen.

Dr. Nafisa Al-Jaifi gave a supporting testimony to this end. She explained that after she was elected as a board member in the Global White Ribbon Head Alliance for Safe Motherhood, which aims at decreasing maternal and newborns' mortality globally, she was inspired to initiate the National Safe Motherhood Alliance (NSMA) in Yemen. She believed that supporting the health of mothers and newborns relies on creating holistic efforts across various sectors and stakeholders. Initially, all parties were active and excited about the alliance and were keen to work together toward supporting mothers and newborns. However, down the road, Dr. Nafisa found that the other parties were under the impression that being part of the alliance was a source of financial gain and refused to contribute without directly being paid.<sup>725</sup> Therefore, diminished funding<sup>726</sup> from donors led to the lack of cooperation from the stakeholders.

Moreover, findings revealed that the collective support for gender equality even among the women themselves was highly relevant to their direct involvement in the women's empowerment work especially at the highest levels. This means that in the case of most Yemeni women, unless their professional interests were aligned with the gender equality cause, they would not be motivated to support women's empowerment efforts or the women/people behind them. As the interviews revealed, the concept of gender equality was not a popular one not only with the male dominated political circles but even among the population of Yemeni women themselves. Amal Basha said that “many of the women who were not in decision-making positions did not really support women's empowerment ... and did not adopt women's causes.” She added that the sheer number of modern thinkers was minimal compared to traditional conservatives

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<sup>725</sup> Even though the work they were tasked with was a part of their official mandate as public servants and during official working hours.

<sup>726</sup> As most of the donor led initiatives dictate, donors support the national government at the initial stage and phase out gradually allowing the local authorities to take over and continue the effort. However, as the case of almost all women related projects in Yemen, once the donors were out, the women's empowerment projects were discontinued.

and this meant that culturally, the Yemeni society may not have been ready to be supportive of feminist pioneers.

Additionally, Dr. Bilkis AbuOsba explained that until there is a strong women's movement made of relentless women who demanded their rights and had the courage to be at the forefront of the resistance to patriarchy, women's empowerment will always be incomplete and reversible. She recalled an example in Sana'a University when there was a vacancy in the political studies department. The best candidate was a woman, but the department's management wanted to appoint a man instead. When Dr. AbuOsba and some of her female colleagues stood up and demanded that the woman candidate get the job as she was clearly more deserving, the management relented, and the woman was given the position.

Arwa Othman agreed. "Change can only occur if there is a strategic vision that builds civil society and creates an environment for development and progress," she said. Othman added that the education system endorses the cultural biases and does not encourage creativity and individuality. "We should not expect much from the masses because they are not given the education that would create a strong civil society or a strong women's movement," she said. "Unless there is change at the strategic level that builds a country that uplifts the entire society, we should not expect a real improvement in women's conditions."

To conclude, this section discussed the relation between the women's movement and decision makers as a dimension of the culture of political support for women's empowerment. The findings from both surveys and elite interviews emphasised the importance of having a strong women's movement to hold the political leaders accountable to their promises to women and rival the pressure the politicians face from conservative forces working against gender equality. However, as the findings demonstrated, the women's movement in Yemen was weak not only in terms of numbers but also in terms of coordination between the women's groups even those working in government institutions. Moreover, it was discovered through the feedback from the research sample that the interest in women's empowerment was relative to the authority-position level and type of work, in that women occupying higher positions

were more concerned with women's empowerment than those at lower levels, and women whose careers were not directly linked to women's empowerment – even if they held a senior position – did not consider gender equality or women's empowerment a cause for which they would fight. Finally, the interviewees also narrated a number of advocacy and awareness-raising processes they implemented during their work in order to gain more popular support for the cause of women's empowerment. However, they admitted that in order to achieve results, they had to use different terminology and relate their demands to the welfare of the society as a whole.

***Conclusion: The culture of political support and women's empowerment policies***

This section detailed findings on the element of the culture of political support as a contributing factor to the failure of women's empowerment policies in Yemen. The findings indicated that this factor had the highest explanatory factor in explaining this failure. The culture of political support refers to the dynamics concerning women leaders' socio-political professional environments, such as emotional and material support for the women leaders and establishing enabling structures in their institutions.

Findings indicated that the culture of political support impacted women's empowerment policies' success through four inter-related dimensions: the influence of the patriarchal culture on formal institutions; the attitude of authoritarian regimes towards gender equality; the design of gender policies in terms of redistribution of social power; and political decision making and women's movements.

In the first dimension, results from the survey and interviews showed that the social values of the decision makers and male employees – who are usually the majority in terms of numbers – negatively influenced the internal organisational culture of state institutions. The organisational culture tended to be male dominated and discriminatory towards the women leaders' and the gender equality efforts in general. Findings on the second dimension relevant to authoritarian regimes and gender equality indicated that the Yemeni state found itself between the pressure to empower women by the international community and to a lesser extent the feminist leaders in the country on the one hand, and between the conservative traditional forces, who were instrumental in keeping the politicians in power, and who opposed gender equality on the other. As

a low-cost solution, the political leaders resorted to appointing women in visible authoritative – yet devoid of power – positions, and approving women’s empowerment strategies – yet limiting their success through insufficient financial and logistical support. In terms of the third dimension concerning the redistribution of social power, findings showed that there was a trend of carrying out women’s empowerment policies focusing on development indicators and service delivery without much efforts to create behavioural change in the society. Finally, findings related to the fourth dimension of the culture of political support showed that due to the women movement’s weakness, politicians did not feel the need to commit to their promises on gender equality. Similarly, the lack of popular support for gender equality meant that the women leaders felt isolated from the general population and especially women.

The culture of political support was found to be the main contributing factor to policy failure. The researched sample emphasised the importance of addressing challenges in each of the four dimensions in order to create a positive political culture that genuinely supports women’s empowerment and gender equality.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This research aimed to identify the relevance of three factors: capacity, instability, and political support to the failure – demonstrated in the policy mapping chapter IV – of women’s empowerment policies in Yemen in the fields of health, education, and the economy. The three factors were chosen for their significance in the agency-structures framework of women’s empowerment and their potential influence on the success of policies in Yemen. Capacity refers to the personal agency and ability a woman has, which in this context is the women leaders’ ability to implement the women’s empowerment initiative she was responsible for in her field. Instability refers to the destabilising political and economic events the country experienced between 2006 and 2014 that could have potentially disrupted national projects and policies. The culture of political support refers to the structures and political environment surrounding the women leaders in their professional institutions in terms of direct support from their management as well as access to resources that would enable them to succeed in their efforts to empower women.

To this end, a mixed-methods approach of surveys and elite interviews was carried out sampling the opinions of 65 Yemeni women leaders through an online anonymous survey, in addition to detailed feedback from 12 women leaders through elite in-depth interviews. The choice of women leaders as the population of this research was made due to their direct relation to women’s empowerment policies in the country as implementers and stakeholders. This, coupled with the fact that their presence in positions of power and their visibility was an outcome of the state’s gender policy itself. As such, incorporating the collective insights of a number of leading Yemeni women in one place through an investigation of women’s empowerment policies in Yemen, this research represents an unprecedented and important contribution to the literature on Yemeni women’s empowerment and gender equality.

The survey included three sections, each on one of the three factors – lack of capacity, instability, and the culture of political support – and concluded with one question asking the respondents to rank them in the order in which they contributed to the failure of women’s empowerment policies in Yemen between 2006 and 2014.

Furthermore, the empirical findings, for which theoretical support was described in detail in chapter III on the Literature Review, identified a number of mechanisms or dimensions for each of the three hypothesised factors. These mechanisms represented pathways, through which the factors contributed to the failure of women's empowerment policies. Moreover, these dimensions were inter-related and contributed in different degrees, as a collective, to the failure of women's empowerment policies. In terms of capacity, three mechanisms or dimensions were identified: capacity in terms of technical and professional skills, capacity in terms of communication, networking and management skills, and capacity in terms of leadership and bravery. The findings show that women leaders excelled in the first two dimensions and there was variance in the latter, which refers to the woman leaders' ability to challenge patriarchy and subject herself to the consequences of her demand for gender equality.

In terms of instability, three dimensions were also identified: the impact of instability as a disruptive mechanism of national plans and resources, its negative impact on women leaders through the new challenges they faced during times of crises, and instability as a potentially positive disruptive mechanism upending gender norms and allowing for opportunities for women. The findings showed that instability was indeed a disruptive mechanism for national policies and plans. However, its impact on women's empowerment efforts was more than others for two reasons: first, women's empowerment was not a national priority and therefore was the first to be dropped off the list of national priorities; and second, most efforts to empower women were dependent on donor funding and in times of instability most donors stopped their work leading to the closure of such projects. In terms of instability and its impact on women leaders, the findings showed that women leaders were more vulnerable during times of crises and their work was more constrained to the extent that they would rather not be vocal or visible, especially during periods where the state itself was not strong enough to protect them. With regard to instability and potential social gains for women, the findings showed that in terms of mobility and work, Yemeni women were encouraged to become income generators out of necessity, and for some it was a relatively empowering event. However, the impact of instability on the larger women's population was a negative one and any individual successes were not easily replicated or sustainable.

Finally, four mechanisms were identified in terms of the culture of political support: the influence of the patriarchal culture on formal institutions; the attitude of authoritarian regimes towards gender equality; the design of gender policies in terms of redistribution of social power; and political decision making and women's movements. Findings from the survey and elite interviews showed that the traditional conservative values overshadowed the already male-dominated work place, which affected the success of women leaders and their professional achievements. In terms of the second mechanism on authoritarian regimes, the findings agree with the literature, which argued that authoritarian regimes find themselves between the pressure from donors to promote gender equality and that of traditional forces who oppose it. Therefore, political leaders in Yemen resorted to a low-cost yet visible solution of creating governmental entities for women and appointing women in senior positions to indicate their outward support for gender equality, while sustaining a difficult working environment for women leaders, and limiting their power even though they were officially entitled to it. This dimension is relevant to the third mechanism of the culture of political support, which is policy design in terms of redistribution of social power. In this dimension, the findings showed that political leaders limited women's empowerment efforts to development projects that do not create change in the social gender power relations. In doing so they appeased the traditional forces by maintaining the stereotyped gender roles, while simultaneously appearing to implement women's empowerment projects. Finally, the fourth dimension was relevant to the lack of a strong women's movement, which was identified by the research sample as one of the reasons political leaders did not feel obliged to sincerely promote gender equality or live up to their promises. In this dimension, women leaders explained that there needs to be a mechanism to create popular support for women's empowerment initiatives as a means to achieving gender equality in order for the various policies to succeed.

Findings of this research concluded that women's empowerment in Yemen is a complex issue that requires more than top-down policies addressing development indicators such as prevalence of reproductive healthcare, enrolment in schools, and access to economic resources. Although these development targets are important, they only address women's empowerment from the supply side, ignoring the need to create popular

demand for these services. Without adequate efforts to address the gender power imbalances in the society and create popular demand for gender equality, supply-oriented policies will remain incomplete and unsustainable. The findings also showed that the desire to achieve gender equality has to be fully owned among decision makers and not just as a reaction to international pressures from donors. Additionally, to ensure political commitment, there needs to be a strong vibrant women's movement that is able to hold the politicians accountable as well as create popular support for women pioneers and the feminist agenda at the grassroots level.

Finally, this research emphasised the importance of differentiating between authority and power, and how the spill-over from the cultural to the institutional dominates Yemeni official institutions, creating a façade of political support for women's empowerment without truly supporting the empowerment cause.

## Chapter VI:

### Conclusion

Gender equality is considered a controversial issue in many conservative societies, such as Yemen, since it deals with religious and cultural values, social roles of men and women, and gender-based power dynamics in the community. In addition to being traditional and male dominated, Yemen is also known for being a poor underdeveloped country. The collective impact of underdevelopment and patriarchy is harsher on women than on men, and consequently, the situation of Yemeni women in terms of their health, education, and economic participation has been continuously dire during the last two decades, according to international development indicators. For example, seven women die every day due to childbirth complications,<sup>727</sup> and Yemen's maternal mortality rate is one of the highest in the world at 385 deaths per 100,000 live births.<sup>728</sup> About half of Yemeni women 15 years and older cannot read or write,<sup>729</sup> and only one in three Yemeni girls graduate from high-school.<sup>730</sup> Women constitute only 6% of the formal labour force,<sup>731</sup> and many women are compelled to work in difficult conditions as unpaid labourers in the agriculture sector.<sup>732</sup>

As a reaction to the above indicators, the international community put pressure on the Yemeni government to improve women's conditions, while providing technical and financial support. Consequently, the Yemeni government attempted to promote women's empowerment through two parallel tracks: first, the inclusion of women in decision-making circles by appointing them in senior positions – some of which were

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<sup>727</sup>J. S. Al-Raiby, 'Partnerships to save Yemeni women's lives', *Huffington Post: Global Motherhood Blog*, <[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jamela-saleh-alraiby/yemen-women\\_b\\_1311149.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jamela-saleh-alraiby/yemen-women_b_1311149.html)>, accessed on 23 October 2018.

<sup>728</sup>WHO, et. al., *Trends in maternal mortality: 1990 to 2015*, World Health Organization, Geneva, 2015, p. 56

<sup>729</sup>World Bank, 'Yemen - Literacy rate, adult female (% of females ages 15 and above)', cited in Trading Economics [tradingeconomics.com], <<https://tradingeconomics.com/yemen/literacy-rate-adult-female-percent-of-females-ages-15-and-above-wb-data.html>>, accessed 1 January 2016.

<sup>730</sup> UNICEF, 'At a glance: Yemen statistics', op. cit.

<sup>731</sup>International Labour Organization, 'Yemen Labour Force Survey 2013-14', Beirut: ILO Regional Office for Arab States, 2015, p. 7, <[http://www.ilo.org/beirut/publications/WCMS\\_419016/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/beirut/publications/WCMS_419016/lang--en/index.htm)> accessed 1 January 2016.

<sup>732</sup>M. Abdelali-Martini, 'Empowering women in the rural labor force with a focus on agricultural employment in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)', paper prepared for the 2011 Expert Group Meeting Enabling rural women's economic empowerment: institutions, opportunities, and participation, UN Women, <[un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw56/egm/Martini-EP-9-EGM-RW-Sep-2011.pdf](http://un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw56/egm/Martini-EP-9-EGM-RW-Sep-2011.pdf)>, accessed 12 August 2016.

created exclusively for women's affairs.<sup>733</sup> For example, by 2014, the percentage of women in high-level government positions, such as department director and deputy minister reached 14.46%.<sup>734</sup> Second, the implementation of women's empowerment policies in various domains, especially in health, education, and the economy. The underlying approach in these policies focused heavily on achieving development results through service delivery such as improving reproductive healthcare services and increasing girls' enrolment rates in basic education.

However, despite various efforts, the situation of Yemeni women remained dismal. Given that Yemen is arguably the worst country in the world for women,<sup>735</sup> this presents an important research puzzle, yet to be addressed in the scholarly research of Yemeni women's empowerment.

The aim of this research was to explain why women's empowerment policies in health, education, and the economy failed in Yemen between 2006 and 2014, thereby filling an important gap in the literature something like this

To explain this failure, developing a clear understanding of what women's empowerment entails as a concept was central to this research. Therefore, one of this research's important contributions to the literature was developing a nuanced and more holistic definition of women's empowerment, one that does justice to the complexity of this social concept beyond quantifiable measurements and development indices. Subsequently, to identify reasons for policy failure, a systematic mapping of women's empowerment policies, which was not done before in the scholarly literature on Yemen, was carried out so as to demonstrate this failure. Through this mapping, a desk review was conducted to evaluate the Yemeni state's gender policy and government efforts aimed at empowering women in health, education, and the economy. The systematic review of women's empowerment policies clearly showed that efforts were made to

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<sup>733</sup> Such as the creation of the Women National Committee, women related sectors in ministries, and the various women's directorates in governmental institutions, all of which were led by women at the rank of director general and higher.

<sup>734</sup> Women National Committee, *Almusharakaalsiyasiyalilmar'a: taqreer Beijing [Women's political participation: Beijing report]*, Supreme Council for Women, 2014.

<sup>735</sup> L. Adams, 'The worst place to be a woman this year got even worse', *Huffington Post*, 18 August, 2016, [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/laurie-adams/yemen-worst-place-to-be-a-woman\\_b\\_8006268.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/laurie-adams/yemen-worst-place-to-be-a-woman_b_8006268.html), (accessed 13 January 2017).

improve women's basic rights in terms of availability and access, however, most of these efforts did not achieve their stipulated goals and the process of translating the policy goals into action plans failed to account to social roots of gender inequality practices.

Furthermore, the importance of this research stems from its contribution to filling the gap in qualitative literature on Yemeni women's empowerment, especially since existing academic work on Yemeni women's empowerment focused mainly on large-scale statistical analyses. Notwithstanding the importance of statistical baseline research, especially for the design of national donor-led development projects, such research fails to explain the socio-cultural dynamics behind the various development indicators. The importance of this study lies in the fact that it provides a qualitative multi-faceted narrative of the reasons behind the policy failure of women's empowerment efforts.

To explain why women's empowerment policies failed, three elements were hypothesised as contributing factors to the failure of women's empowerment policies in Yemen. These were: the lack of capacity among women leaders involved in designing and implementing women's empowerment policies; national financial and political instability; and the lack of political support for gender equality, described in this research as the culture of political support.

To test the explanatory power of the three hypothesised factors, using surveys and interviews, this research sought answers from the collective group of Yemeni women leaders at an unprecedented scale. Yemeni women leaders were selected as the population for this research for two main reasons: a) their direct involvement as implementers of women's empowerment strategies and policies, and b) because they were the pioneers of the feminist agenda in Yemen. On its own, the existence of this elite group of powerful women in the traditional male-dominated society, is in fact, unique to Yemen, considering the dire situation of the majority of the women population. These women were the main source of empirical data on women's empowerment policies' dynamics, and their insights on gender equality within and beyond their official positions provided an invaluable understanding of the researched issue.

Moreover, the research time-line between 2006 and 2014 was chosen for two reasons; first because this duration witnessed a surge of development projects with a strong focus on women's empowerment, as well as unprecedented appointments of women in positions of power.<sup>736</sup> Second, because there is a gap in the literature on Yemeni women's empowerment covering recent decades, as much academic work focused on Yemeni women's empowerment up until the mid nineties. More recent work addressed women's political empowerment or sector-specific development indicators.<sup>737</sup> The 2014 benchmark was chosen because of the current armed conflict, which started in September 2014.

## **1. Summary of findings**

What explains the failure of women's empowerment policies in Yemen? This section discusses the key empirical findings of this research in terms of the three hypothesised factors – lack of capacity, instability, and the culture of political support – and their sub-mechanisms, through which they impacted the success of women's empowerment policies in Yemen.

### ***A. Lack of capacity***

Findings from this research suggest that lack of capacity of the women leaders as implementers of women's empowerment policies was not a strong contributor to the policies' failure. Firstly, findings show that women leaders had high capacities whether professional or personal, and secondly because findings show that they had access to networks and experts who could provide them with technical and professional expertise to enable them to better the quality of policies and relevant efforts.

Specifically, there were three dimensions or sub-mechanisms, through which capacity was seen to have influenced policy success. These are: the education and qualifications of the women leaders; their management, communication, and other soft skills; and

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<sup>736</sup>Chapter IV on gender policy provides a demonstration of these efforts.

<sup>737</sup>The Literature Review Chapter II discusses previous research on Yemeni women's empowerment.

their leadership and bravery in resisting the patriarchy within their work place. As mentioned above, both surveys and interviews revealed abundance in women leaders' qualifications and skills. The findings of this study indicate that a majority if not all of the women working in women's empowerment, especially at the most senior levels, have high qualifications and have had remarkable achievements.

However, their leadership abilities and particularly their capacity to resist inequality practices varied. The interviews provided further explanation of this variance and its consequence on women's empowerment policies and the gender equality plight in Yemen in general.

An interesting finding in terms of Yemeni women leaders' capacity was that many women especially in the middle and lower levels of management, would rather not challenge the structures or address gender inequalities in their workplace or their projects for fear of antagonising their superiors or the system in general and consequently, diminishing their career chances. Interviews revealed that not every woman who is in a position of formal authority a) has actual power, b) has leadership skills that enable her to champion gender equality causes, and c) has the desire or strength to challenge systematic adversity, especially if this could be detrimental to her career.

In sum, my research shows that the lack of capacity was not the main factor contributing to women's empowerment policy failure, especially when capacity is considered in terms of qualifications and skills. In terms of women's leadership and ability to create change in the social attitude towards women, further interventions are in order.

### ***B. Instability***

Compared to lack of capacity, instability as an explanation for women's empowerment failure scored higher in the survey as well as in interview results. Similarly, instability was researched through three dimensions or sub-mechanisms as a variable contributing to policy failure.

The first dimension concerns instability as a disruptive force of national policies. Findings show that political and economic instability events between 2006 and 2014

have had a negative impact on the general operations of the government, however, their impact on women's empowerment policies was more significant. This was explained by the respondents as a consequence of the fact that women's development was not a political priority, and therefore when resources were scarce, women's empowerment was among the first to be dropped from the political priorities' list. The other reason was due to the halting of international funding during times of instability. This had a detrimental effect on women's empowerment's efforts as it was their main source of funding.

Relating to this dimension, the data provided an interesting finding in terms of the negative consequences of women's empowerment projects being donor-dependent, and how donors inevitably contributed to perpetuating the problem. Results from this study indicated a pattern of pulling out funds and closing projects that were the backbone of women's empowerment initiatives in the various fields especially health, education, and the economy, every time the country goes through a phase of instability. The donors' argument was that they need to transfer their limited resources from development projects to relief and humanitarian assistance during times of crises. And while this makes sense at first, research has indicated that this is short sighted and the development vs. relief dichotomy does little for sustainable results.<sup>738</sup> In fact, it has been argued as unhelpful in terms of strengthening the community's resilience – especially that of disadvantaged groups such as women who happen to be the most vulnerable during crises – to face the very crises the international organisations claim to address. Being dependent on donors when it comes to women's empowerment seems to be the case for Yemen, and this is why, according to the findings, women's projects continue only as long as there are interested donors.

The second dimension was relevant to the risks women leaders experienced because they were women in visible positions of power during instability. Findings showed that women leaders faced threats and increased pressures from the conservative elements within their professional environment during times of crises, which negatively affected the success of their women's empowerment projects. This finding is significant in terms of the reality of Yemeni women today since the political situation of the country

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<sup>738</sup>J. El-Bushra & E. P. Lopez, *Development in conflict: the gender dimension*, Oxfam GB, 1999.

encourages the rise of political Islam and extremists to power, annulling democratic achievements of the past and threatening women's progress specifically.

Finally, the third dimension investigated the potential positive impact instability could have had on women's empowerment policies as a disruptive force of social norms, hence creating economic opportunities for women. Findings indicated that although there might be some cases of such opportunities, the scale and sustainability were insignificant.

In sum, despite its direct impact on the success of women's empowerment policies, empirical findings showed that instability was not the factor with the highest explanatory power behind the failure of women's empowerment's policies in Yemen. Furthermore, the interviewees commented that Yemen is, as such, prone to instability and therefore, was very likely to suffer from political and economic crises in the past and even into its foreseeable future. Beyond the current armed conflict, which is outside the scope of this research, the volatile political and economic situation of the country was predictable and expected.

### *C. The culture of political support*

This brings us to the third factor, which is the culture of political support for women's empowerment. The term political support is designed to represent a concept used in the Yemeni and Arab political terminology known as "Al-Irada Al-Siyasia", literally translated as "political will". It signifies the various dynamics of practiced politics in a state concerning a specific topic; in this case gender equality and women's empowerment. Yemenis understand political will in support of women's empowerment as the genuine desire of the people in senior positions to make things happen towards the end goal of achieving gender equality. It includes signing agreements, dedication of financial and human resources, providing political support and backing, pulling strings and challenging opponents, direct and indirect support of the women at the forefront of the gender equality agenda, and ensuring sustainability of achievements. Therefore, the term culture of political support was created for this purpose, a term that it is hoped will be carried on into future research on women's empowerment in Yemen and similar contexts.

The vast majority of the survey respondents agreed that the political culture in the sense of the lack of genuine will to empower women was the main reason why women's empowerment policies were not successful. That being said, survey respondents and interviewees had the opportunity to provide alternative explanations as to why women's empowerment policies failed. The comments in the survey described aspects of the gender power imbalances in the society, such as the patriarchal culture, discriminative laws, and social norms as contributing factors to Yemeni women's lack of empowerment. However, in the context of this research these are not considered impacting factors on women's empowerment policies' success but rather consequences of their failure. Consequences that should have been addressed in the various gender policies and women's empowerment efforts throughout the last two decades.

Consequently, the culture of political support included four interrelated and overlapping sub-mechanisms or dimensions, through which its impact on policy success was investigated. This categorisation was designed to provide researchers with a reasonable classification or framework to be used when examining women's empowerment policies in Yemen – and countries with similar contexts – and also to help gender policy makers address the problematic areas in policy design and implementation.

The first dimension refers to the institutional culture, which is subject to the '*spill-over from the social to the institutional*'. This spill-over is different from the economic term '*spill-over effect*', which describes how seemingly unrelated events are affected by one another. The *spill-over* in this research describes the fact that institutions are essentially made up of individuals and therefore, these individuals bring and allow their social and cultural values to dominate the workplace environment. To the extent that personal and cultural values supersede the organisational regulations and even laws, depending on the number of people sharing those values and the power they hold officially or personally. Since men represent the majority of the Yemeni public institutions' personnel, especially at the top, it becomes understandable that a male culture dominates these institutions.

The interviewees explained that they have been struggling to create spaces for themselves in their workplace even if it was simply having dedicated female toilets, or

infiltrating important men-only meetings.<sup>739</sup> It was interesting to discover that women leaders in senior positions exclaimed that they found it harder to create significant change in favour of gender equality as they progressed in their career. They referred this to the high visibility their actions have and the potential ripple effect their decisions could make in the society, should they succeed. A matter that was strongly resisted by the conservative groups.

In general, the spill-over from the social to the institutional is a reflection of the general attitude of the Yemeni society towards women. The men working in state institutions are members of the larger traditional and conservative community and abide by its informal rules. The interviewees explained that even modern and liberal men who seem to differ in their behaviour from the general Yemeni male pattern would only support gender equality as long as it does not affect their personal status or their interests. For when their interests as members of the men's-club/culture clash with the women's interest, they would evidently choose what is best for them.

The second dimension relates to the nature of authoritarian regimes and their attitude towards gender equality. Previous research showed that authoritarian regimes are opportunistic by nature in that they adopt a Machiavellian approach to ensure their survival, which is dependent on traditional forces rather than democratic processes.<sup>740</sup> To this end, although Yemen is in essence a democracy as it has a parliament, and elections are the constitutional channel through which people can rise to power, it is plagued with corruption and monopoly of politics, which makes it a quasi-authoritarian regime or a pseudo democracy at best.

The data collected in this research provided empirical support for this theory in terms of the Yemeni state's attitude towards gender equality. Findings showed that government officials respond to pressures from the international community by signing international agreements for women's empowerment and by appointing women in positions of power. Meanwhile, they refrained from creating real changes in women's

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<sup>739</sup> This refers to the male only Qat sessions held daily in the homes of officials as a quasi-government meeting where important work-related discussions and decisions are made. This is similar in a way to western men's exclusive clubs and bar gatherings after working hours.

<sup>740</sup> E. Manea, *The Arab state and women's rights: The trap of authoritarian governance*, Routledge Studies in Middle Eastern Politics, Taylor & Francis, 2010, p. 193.

status, fearing that disrupting the social gender power dynamics will anger traditional conservative forces. These forces such as tribes, Islamic parties, and traditional groups are instrumental in keeping politicians in their positions of power, and simultaneously have an interest in keeping the gender power imbalances in the society in favour of men, due to their traditional nature and values.

Chapter IV on gender policies, which presented an overview of the gender policies of the Yemeni government between 2006 and 2014, provided basis for this conclusion. Moreover, findings from the survey and interviews also lend support to this argument.

The third dimension of the culture of political support relates to the policy design itself in terms of addressing the gender relations and redistribution of gender power in the society. Findings showed that women's empowerment policies in Yemen tended to focus on reducing the gap between men and women in terms of access to resources. Yemeni gender policies were designed from a developmental angle in that they addressed specific measurable indicators, which could be improved by short term projects.

This approach provided donors with good progress reports, which they in turn shared with their funders and tax-payers, demonstrating their contribution to women's empowerment in Yemen. Examples of these projects include infrastructure development and equipment provision, such as building girls' schools or providing hospitals with reproductive healthcare equipment and medicines. Having tangible quick results is often a precondition to donor funding. The problem with this approach is that it was often one-sided as it did not address the supply side of the women's empowerment issue. Since behavioural-change initiatives require a long time and continuous efforts, and more importantly, require challenging social norms, donors prefer not to engage in such endeavours. In an ideal situation, behavioural change efforts would be led by national governments as part of long-term development policies. Unfortunately, in Yemen, according to the findings from this research, this was not the case and most efforts concerning gender equality were led by donors and international organisations based on their goals.

The fourth and final dimension of the culture of political support is relevant to the relation between decision makers and the feminist or women's movement in Yemen.

Previous research showed that women's gains in post transitional countries with strong women's movements are more sustainable than those where the women's movements were weak.

In the case of Yemen, although it is growing, the women's movement is essentially in its infancy and does not have a strong effect either on the population at large or on the politicians who govern. The interviewed women leaders stated that they often found themselves under attack not only by the conservative forces within their institutions, but also by the general public, including the female population, whose best interest they were defending.

Many of the feminist pioneers expressed being disheartened by the society that did not recognise their sacrifices and struggle, and how on many occasions, the politicians used the conservative sentiments of the larger public against the women leaders and the gender equality agenda in general. This was clearly visible in times when the traditional forces such as conservative tribes or religious groups fought back against attempts to change the gender power dynamics or any project that would attempt to redistribute gender power socially.<sup>741</sup>

The fact was that the absence of a strong women's movement allowed decision makers to go back on their promises for women's empowerment and gender equality with hardly any consequences. Therefore, findings showed that while it is important to have genuine and sustainable top-down policies in terms of creating gender equality, it is also vital to have a strong women's movement that creates popular support for women's empowerment at the grassroots level. Not only does this movement make women leaders at the frontier feel supported, but it also keeps the politicians accountable for their promises to women.

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<sup>741</sup> A visible example of this was during the campaign to ban marriages of children younger than 18 years of age.

## 2. Research contributions and implications

Findings from this research present aspects of the political culture surrounding women's empowerment policies identified from the experiences of women leaders as feminist pioneers, and as implementers of those policies. While these findings reflect the perceptions of the women leaders as an elite group and not the larger women population, they have significant theoretical, empirical, and political implications on the Yemeni gender literature. In fact, these implications could be potentially applicable to similar societies beyond Yemen.

Theoretically, this research highlights the inadequacy of the common approach to women's empowerment, which focuses on development indicators of service delivery. Yemen's gender policies continue to reduce the empowerment equation to the delivery of services, usually through integrating women's empowerment in national development plans, without creating behavioural changes in the society to ensure sustainability of achievements. The systematic policy mapping of gender policies implemented between 2006 and 2014, which is an important contribution in its own right, provides an evidence-based conclusion of this conceptual inadequacy. To this end, this research recommends a nuanced understanding of women's empowerment, how it is measured, and how it is achieved. Expanding on an existing<sup>742</sup> understanding of women's empowerment, this research defined women's empowerment as *“the sustained ability to have and exercise choices, yielding desired outcomes, regarding important decisions related to health, education, economic opportunity, in a way that positively addresses the gender power imbalances in her life.”*

The importance of this theoretical contribution is that it stresses the need for deliberate efforts to change the gender power dynamics in a sustainable manner for women's empowerment policies to succeed. In the sense that in addition to building schools and creating incentives for families to send their daughters to study, the state should carry out awareness campaigns aiming at creating behavioural changes so that families recognise the importance of their daughters' education. The success of these campaigns

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<sup>742</sup>N. Kabeer, 'Resources, agency, achievements: Reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment', *Development and Change*, Vol. 30 (3), 1999, p. 437.

means that families continue to educate their girls when incentives disappear, and even when it becomes challenging for their daughters to get to school.

Moreover, building on this theoretical contribution to the literature, this research has strong policy implications as it describes the political aspects of gender equality policies in Yemen and the dynamics of the culture of political support for women's empowerment. This research's contribution agrees with and provides context to the authoritarian regimes' trap, proposed in previous research<sup>743</sup> regarding the attitude of authoritarian regimes toward gender equality. Aspects of the predicament Yemeni politicians' face between their response to international pressures to empower women on the one hand, and their submission to traditional forces, who are instrumental in keeping the politicians in power, and who do not approve of gender equality in the Yemeni society, on the other hand, are presented.

Additionally, the empirical contributions of this research are on two levels: first, this study provides new data collected through surveys and interviews from the women leaders themselves on an unprecedented scale. What is unique about this study is that the very presence of these women in decision-making positions is a product of the country's gender policies politically, which is a testimony to the significance of this research.

Second, this research identifies three contributing factors that account for the failure of women's empowerment policies in Yemen, specifying sub-mechanisms or pathways for each factor. It presents a categorical examination of how these factors impacted Yemeni women's empowerment policies at the national level, and one from the points of view of those responsible for implementing the women's empowerment efforts. This categorisation presents an opportunity for understanding how the various factors interact and affect gender policies, offering a breakthrough in understanding the failure of women's empowerment policies in health, education, and the economy, and providing an empirical basis for drastic policy changes.

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<sup>743</sup>Manea, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

Furthermore, there are visible practical implications of this work in light of the socio-political dynamics of gender equality efforts identified through this research. Findings indicate that most of the proclaimed efforts and promises by the state to empower Yemeni women were superficial and aimed at pleasing the international community rather than creating genuine change. Bargaining, manipulation, discrimination, and corruption were identified as facets of the women's empowerment's political culture at the highest-making circles. The women explained that they themselves were subject to the limiting socially-enforced gender roles even in their professional environments. That being a woman, was the defining characteristic in the eyes of their male colleagues and even male subordinates, regardless of their professional qualifications and position of authority. There was specific mention of the practices within institutions that encouraged gender stereotypes and allowed men to continue to dominate decision-making, such as excluding women from important meetings by conducting them in men's-only Qat sessions after working hours. Furthermore, within the context of the political culture, the importance of support from the grassroots was brought up by the women leaders, who explained that they needed to feel that someone had their back when they challenged the status quo. This could have been in the form of unions, women's organisations, or even informal alliances within and beyond their institutions. This indicates that there needs for popular support for the women's gender equality's plight and its champions, otherwise it becomes a tedious and reversible struggle.

### **3. Avenues for future research**

There are various potential directions for future scholarly work building on this thesis, such as expanding on its theoretical contributions, replication of this research using different methods, and comparative research targeting other social, geographic, or time frames.

As illustrated in this thesis, Yemeni women leaders have to fight on multiple fronts in their quest for promoting and achieving gender equality, and how these challenges have negatively impacted the success of women's empowerment policies in the country. Studies are warranted to address each of those fronts with extensive examples and use cases of successes and failures.

In terms of theoretical avenues, further studies could build on the theoretical difference between authority and power in the experiences of Yemeni women leaders, which was repeatedly highlighted in this research's findings. To this end, it would be interesting to examine aspects of agency of women leaders in positions of power working in a patriarchal environment.

Moreover, a follow-up research could examine how empowerment policies are to address social redistribution of power before or parallel to development efforts. Such research could propose integration of the nuance conceptualisation of women's empowerment, offered in this research, in gender policy design, implementation, and evaluation. In another direction, the findings from this research could guide women's empowerment policies and interventions in both times of peace and during and post instability or even armed conflict.

Likewise, future empirical research could target the same research population addressing women's empowerment policies using other research methods. For example, focus group discussions could provide new insights as well as oral histories and ethnographical methods. Alternatively, women's empowerment efforts could be evaluated using process tracing and Qualitative Comparative Analysis, which is a method suitable for combining qualitative and quantitative analyses.

The third direction of potential follow-up research encourages the exploration of aspects beyond this thesis. For example, a study could explore in depth one of the findings of this thesis regarding the variance in challenges women leaders face as they climb the political ladder. The study could compare gender-based challenges of women in two or more levels of seniority in state institutions. One of the important contributions of this thesis is that it provided a systematic review of the gender policy in Yemen, and therefore, it would be interesting to share this review with some of the key women's empowerment institutions to obtain feedback. The purpose of this would be to identify gender policy at two different arenas: the national/government level compared to the individual directorate or unit within the government institutions.

Alternatively, gender-based challenges could be examined between women leaders in private, public, and non-governmental sectors. It would be equally interesting to investigate women's leadership in the tribal system in comparison to those working in state and national institutions, as there are indications that tribes have a high autonomy from the state in its local norms and regulations. Furthermore, political analysis of authoritarian regimes and the gender policies could be explored through a comparative research using political events as case studies.

Equally important, political aspects of international organisations and donors' engagement in gender equality efforts in Yemen could be researched. Similarly, an exceptionally attractive area of research is in the perceptions of Yemeni women, whether in positions of power or among the general public, of foreign involvement in development programmes aimed at women. Do they see them as a positive contribution to society or as an external force aiming at distorting values under the guise of human rights and gender equality? In her classical essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' Spivak (1988)<sup>744</sup> once coined the term "White men are saving brown women from brown men". While her focus was on India, her work may very well be a point of departure for a hypothesis on foreign aid for women in Yemen. This hypothesis could be tested

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<sup>744</sup> G. C. Spivak, 'Can the subaltern speak?.' *Can the subaltern speak? Reflections on the history of an idea*, 1988, p. 50.

through empirical findings from the wider community and not just from the elite so as to reflect a closer understanding of reality.

Additionally, empirical research is recommended to investigate feedback from men in positions of power who have worked or been involved in women's empowerment policies in Yemen in the same timeframe and compare those findings to these in this research. The same research could extend to countries with similar societies such as other Arab countries or traditional societies in other regions.

In sum, this research sheds light on important aspects of women's empowerment policies in Yemen, providing useful information for theoretical scholars, practicing policy makers and implementers, and even for development specialists. It, therefore, represents one of many important milestones in the long road of Yemeni feminist research, and is hoped to facilitate a better understanding of gender equality in Yemen and sustainable means to achieving it. This, I believe, should be a priority as it has been neglected for far too long.



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## **Appendices**

## Appendix A: Survey questions<sup>745</sup>

Welcome page

### A. General info section - to establish background and diversity of sample:

Age group

Marital status

Geographic origin

Level of education

General area of occupation

### B. Capacity

Question	Indicator
Do you consider yourself an expert in a specific field?	Expertise as a sign of capacity
Years of experience	More experience indicates better capacity
Did you receive any local or international awards or recognition	Recognition is an indicator of high value
What are the languages that you speak	Communication skills
How do you evaluate computer and internet skills	Communication skills
Level of use of social media	Communication skills
Do you have relations and communicate with donors and diplomats	Network and connections with sources of power/funding

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<sup>745</sup> This is a translation of the original questionnaire which was made in Arabic.

Have you ever travelled outside Yemen	Exposure and independence as a sign of personal strength and awareness
Source of news	Awareness and exposure
Have you had any training recently	Capacity and expertise
Do you have a clear goal and career ambition	Vision as a sign of professional strength and leadership
Are you active in women's empowerment projects	Activities in gender equality as a sign of capacity and relation with women's movement
Are you aware of the laws concerning you as a woman?	Awareness as a sign of capacity
If you had better skills would you have done a better job concerning women's empowerment	To establish direct causality

### C. Political support

<b>Question</b>	<b>Indicator</b>
If you need legal or technical support can you get it?	Technical and legal support as an indicator of institutional support
Do you have someone to seek professional or personal advice from?	Support from leadership
Do you have support from your direct supervisor	Support from leadership
Did you get a promotion in the last two years?	Recognition as sign of support

Do you think you will be promoted in the next two years	Recognition and job satisfaction
Do you know the top leadership in your org	Network as access to sources of power
Relation with HR, Legal and Finance	Internal organisational support as a sign of political support from above
Are you able to successfully achieve your goals	Success as a sign of positive environment, Support from leadership
Women related projects success	Success as a sign of positive environment towards women
Level of affiliation to political entities	Political support
Are you able to impact political leadership	Influence in politics
Access to political leadership	Power network
Do you think the laws equate between men and women	Level of awareness as a sign of exposure
Do you think the state's gender policies are good for women?	To establish direct causality

#### **D. Instability**

<b>Question</b>	<b>Indicator</b>
How were you personally affected by instability and conflict?	Perception on instability as direct impact on the women through personal experience

How do you view yourself compared to 2010 <sup>746</sup>	Perception of achievement and direct impact of instability professionally and personally
Did the women related projects in your work stop because of the conflict/instability?	To establish direct causality of impact of instability on women's empowerment projects
Do you have a success story in working for women during instability	Impact of instability on opportunities
Is instability the reason for women's current conditions?	To establish direct causality

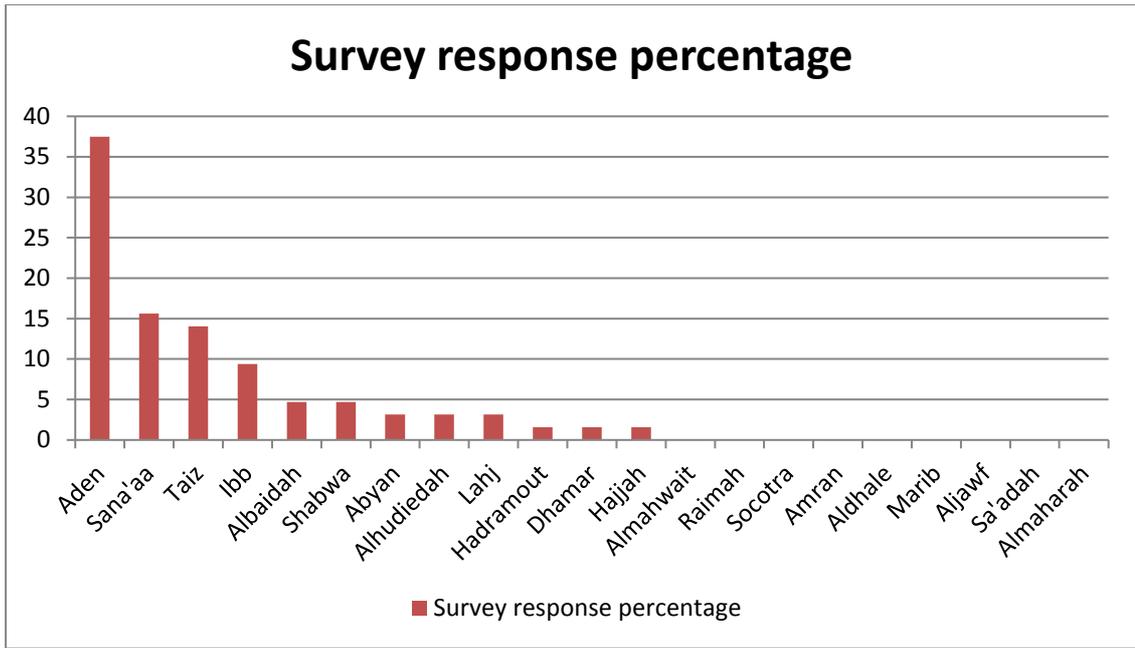
**Last question on all three factors:**

Rank the three causes in terms of impact on women's empowerment	To establish direct causality and explanatory power
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<sup>746</sup> 2010 was used as a bench mark because it followed the discovery of liquid gas in 2008 in Yemen which increased the national revenues and were considered good for the economy and is one year before the political turmoil of the Arab Spring in 2011 and the following years of political transition and instability.

## Appendix B: Survey responses geographical coverage



## Yemen Administrative Map



Copyrights: Yemen Administrative Map 2012. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

## Appendix C: Interviewee profiles

In alphabetical order of last name:

### 1. AbuOsba, Bilqis

Dr. Bilqis AbuOsba is a professor of Political and Gender Sciences at the University of Sana'a, Yemen. She has a PhD in Politics Sciences and a Masters Degree also in Political Sciences both from Cairo University. She is also a member of the Gender Studies Centre at Sana'a University and one of the co-founders of the Gender and Development Masters programme there.



In addition to her academic specialisation, her expertise concerns the role of civil society in empowering ordinary citizens in Yemen. She played a key role in establishing several women's networks and alliances in order for women leaders, especially youth, to be able to fight for their rights during the transition period Yemen is in. She chaired various lobby and advocacy events with leading local NGOs/CSOs to make women's voices heard in Yemen.

Since 2006, she has focused on gender-related issues: early marriage, women's political participation and combating corruption. She was selected as the first ever vice-chairwomen of the Supreme National Authority for Combating Corruption. During these years she has gained an enormous experience in fighting corruption in Yemen.

Bilqis was a supporter of the National Dialogue Conference outcomes and also member of the political committees involved in peace talks such as the women's advisory team to the Secretary General's envoy to Yemen. She was also an advocate and observer of the peace talks in Geneva and Kuwait.

She co-founded and is now the CEO of AWAM foundation for Development and Culture, which was established in 2005. AWAM is a non-governmental organisation that focuses on promoting democracy, human rights and good governance in Yemen, particularly the democratic rights of women. Awam was established by a group of women activists, academics and civil society organisations with the objective of

advocating for the inclusion of women's rights in the Constitution and follow-up of the National Dialogue processes. It aims toward at least 30% participation of women in the state's legislative, executive and judicial bodies, and to raise awareness and general support for women's participation in the political, economic, social and cultural arena. Dr. Bilqis has published extensively in the field of politics and gender and has represented Yemen on many regional and international platforms.

## 2. Al-Eryani, Lamia

Lamia Al-Eryani is a Yemeni women pioneer who has been extensively involved in women and children's rights for the past twenty years. She has two bachelor degrees one in computer science and the other in business administration and politics. She has a high diploma in early childhood development from Canada and has a Masters Degree in Child Rights from the Lebanese University in Beirut. Since April 2014 she



has been the president of the Higher Council for Motherhood and Childhood. Before that she was deputy minister for Girls' Education Sector at the Technical Education and Vocational Training Ministry. During her work at the ministry she was instrumental in efforts to increase girls' enrolment in the vocational education sector through both policy implementation and awareness building activities. She was able to elevate the capacity of the Girls' Education Sector and create strong support for it using her networks with donors, the private sector, and civil society.

Lamia has contributed to many national strategies on human rights and child rights such as the National Strategy for Human Rights, National Strategy for Children and Youth, National Strategy for Early Childhood, and the National Strategy on Street Children. She has written extensively on rights and development issues in Yemen especially from an egalitarian and gender perspective. She has also represented the country on many regional and international platforms. She has founded Shawthab Foundation for Children and Development and has been leading it since 2004.

Lamia is the first to create an animation production on children rights in Yemen. She is the first recipient of Dr. Abdulaziz Al-Maqaleh Award for Novels for her work “A woman... however.” Her expertise cross cut between child and human rights and development using culture and literature as a tool for change. In 2016, she founded an NGO called Yemen Peace School Organisation (YPS ), which she has been heading since then. One of the YPS’s main goals is women’s empowerment in peace-building according to UN resolution 1325. She is also a member of the Yemeni Women Collation for Peace and Security since 2016.

### 3. Al-Hakimi, Eshraq



Dr. Eshraq Al-Hakimi has been Deputy Minister of Education since 2013, leading the Girls’ Education Sector at the ministry. She is a strong advocate of gender equality and has a mission to remove the gender disparity in basic and secondary education. Before her current position, she was working as Director of the Women Development Research and Studies Centre at Taiz University where she was teaching at the College of Education since 1997.

Eshraq has published educational books on evaluating curricula, environment education, behavioural educational objectives in science, and educational methods. She has training in human-rights integration in education, safe education, democracy practices, environmental issues, and gender policies in higher education.

In her work in the education sector she has been a strong advocate for girls’ education and integrating human rights in the education system. She has used her extensive training in education, empowerment, human rights and gender policies in improving the education system and integrating gender in the ministry’s policies.

Dr. Al-Hakimi received the President of the Republic’s Award for Scientific Research on her doctorate thesis on global warming awareness through education.

She is currently one of the most senior professional Yemeni women in positions of authority in the country.

#### 4. Al-Jaifi, Nafisa

Dr. Nafisa Al-Jaifi holds a Professional Specialisation Certificate in 2006 from the International Child and Youth Care University of Victoria BC, Canada. Before that she availed a Ph.D. in Medicine (Paediatrics-Subspecialist Neonatology) 1996 from the Paediatrics Medical Academy



from Saint-Petersburg, Russia. She has an M.Sc. Degree in Paediatrics with Thesis on Clinical and Radiological Studies in Cases of Hydrocephalus and Bachelor Degree of General Medicine & Surgery from Cairo University.

Dr. Al-Jaifi has worked extensively with international organisation and partnership projects. She took lead in the designing and implementation of many Yemeni government national strategies such as safe motherhood, children and Youth development, early childhood development, school health and providing her feedback in preparing basic and secondary education, anti-corruption, human rights. She was also instrumental in lobbying for the amending of many legislations on mothers and children in Yemen. Her expertise includes child and women's rights, development and public health management, policy, decision making and strategic management.

Since April 2018, she has been a consultant with the World Health Organisation in the field of essential newborn care, and has managed the Mother & Newborn Voucher Program in Yemen with the World Bank and Social Fund for Development before that. Between 2001 and 2013 she has served as the General Secretary of the higher council of motherhood and childhood as well as director of child development World bank project which implemented with cooperation with UNICEF. And was Chairperson of National Safe Motherhood Alliance (NSMA) between 2007 and 2012. In addition to teaching at the Medical Collage at Sana'a University since 1989, she had served as practicing Paediatrician.

Dr. Al-Jaifi received several national awards and recognitions such as the Gold Shield Award of the Higher Council for Motherhood and Childhood in 2014, NSMA award for the efforts dedicated towards alleviating the suffering of mothers in Yemen in 2012, and a Presidential Award from the President of Yemen for her contributions to the National Strategy for Childhood and Youth in 2009.

She is a member in the Board of Directors in the Arab Women's Leadership Institute since 2013, and a member of the Women Peace Partnership since 2015. Dr. Al-Jaifi was a board member of the Global WRA for Safe Motherhood in Washington D.C. between 2009 and 2013.

#### 5. Al-Raiby, Jamela

Dr. Jamela Al-Raiby is a Paediatrician by profession with public health experience in leading the implementation and monitoring the reproductive, maternal, neonatal, child and adolescent health, and well-being programmes. Currently, she is the Regional Advisor for child and adolescent health at the World Health Organisation Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean. She also worked for reproductive and maternal health in the Regional Office for 3 years (2013-2015). Before that, she was the deputy minister for the Reproductive Health and Population Sector in the Ministry of Public Health and Population in Yemen between 2008 and 2012. Before that she was the General Director for Women's Affairs at the ministry between 2004 and 2008. As the General Director, she was responsible for advocating and building the leadership capacities of women toward decision-making positions in the health sector. She was also responsible for mainstreaming gender in public health strategies, policies, and plans. Moreover, she was an advocate for safe motherhood in Yemen including advocating for a minimum age for marriage and outlawing Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). Dr Jamela was an elected member in the board of the Global White Ribbon Alliance (2010-2012).



During her work in the public sector, she gained theoretical and practical knowledge on public policies and strategies and implemented them in women's empowerment

policies and action plans in the health sector, especially the Health Strategy of Yemen 2010-2015. Her expertise included human resources policies and strategies, health financing and, organisational structure development at the level of ministry and local health offices. She also encouraged the involvement of the local communities and civil society in her work.

#### 6. Awadh, Wafa

Currently Advisor to the Minister of Trade and Industry and former Director General of the Women's Directorate at the Ministry of Industry and Trade between 2000 and 2018. She has a Bachelor in Accounting from the Commerce and Economics College of Aden University and Higher Diploma in Law and Management from the Administrative Sciences Institute in Aden. She has had many professional trainings and qualifications in her career in women's leadership, Training of Trainers, Total



Quality Management, gender integration in development and planning, gender sensitive budgeting, demographic census, computer literacy and English language qualifications, projects planning and management, gender mainstreaming in government projects, and public policies.

In addition to her work as Director General, Wafa is a licensed international trainer in Public Policies and has implemented many training programmes for staff at the Ministry of Industry and Trade and partner organisations in several of the above fields. Wafa has established a charity under the name Dunyana for Relief and Social Development, through which she has been able to complement her public work in women's empowerment and community development. She has also taken part in many government economic initiatives such as the Fourth Five –year National Economic Strategy 2011-2015, The National Strategy for Empowering People with Special Needs 2003, National Strategy for Rehabilitating Street Children 2002, Small Industries

National Project 2001, Working Women's National Report 2005, The Vocational Training Curricula for Working Women 2004, Women Development National Strategy 2002, Poverty Reduction National Strategy, and the Businesswomen's Integration in Economic Development Strategy 2009.

#### 7. Basha, Amal

Amal Basha studied political science, economics and mass communication at the American University in Cairo and Law at the Queen Arwa University. She later completed a postgraduate degree in Public Administration at the National Institute for Administrative Sciences (NIAS), and in Empirical Research and Women Studies at Sana'a University. Basha also holds a Master's degree in International Development and Gender from the University of Sussex, UK.



Following her political science studies, Basha intended to join the Foreign Ministry and become a diplomat. She therefore began her career in politics as Head of Section for Bilateral Relations and then for International Organisations at the Ministry of Economy, Supply and Trade. A few years later, Basha became Head of Section for Foreign Relations at the Ministry of Industry.

However, she did not pursue her ministerial career, but instead chose to get involved in the social and cultural development of Yemeni society and, later, in women's and human rights. Amal worked for the United Nations, in particular as Programme Officer for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and a number of other NGOs in this field.

Throughout her various positions with the United Nations, the International Human Rights Law Group and the International Committee of the Red Cross Delegation in Yemen, Basha became a strong human rights activist, advocating on behalf of women's and children's rights, arbitrarily detained prisoners and fighting against torture and force disappearance.

Together with other Yemeni human rights organisations, she submitted comprehensive Parallel reports on several human rights violations to the UN Treaty Bodies and human rights related bodies including torture in 2009, Children Rights in 2005, CEDAW in 2006 and 2009 and Universal Periodic Report (UPR) in 2010.

As Chairperson of the Sisters' Arab Forum for Human Rights(SAF), Amal Basha defends the rights of women, prisoners and refugees, freedom of expression and fights for more political freedoms.

In recognition of her contribution to development efforts within the Yemeni community, she has received a number of Letters of Appreciation from the UNDP, NGOs at national, regional and international levels. Basha also received the Golden Medal for Peace Initiative during the Gulf War in 1990, and was honoured as “Mother of the Year” and one of the “Most Prominent Working Women in Yemen” in 1997. She was awarded the Bahrain Shura Council Shield, the Palestine Center for Human Rights Shield and the Yemeni Union Medal Bronze for her work defending human rights. In February 2014, she was elected by Recardo Karam Takreem Foundation based in Lebanon, for as “The Arab Woman of the Year 2014 Award and in June 2017 the University of Toronto conferred Ms Basha an honorary PhD Degree in Law, as one of global human rights leader.

#### 8. Hummed, Amat Al-Razzak Ali

Dr. Amat Al-Razzak Hummed was the first Yemeni woman to avail a PhD in Curricula and Teaching Methods. She is a professor in the Education College at Sana'a University since 1987, and served as head of the Scientific Research and Higher Studies Department at the University between 1991 and 1993.

She has been politically active as a member of the General People's Congress and was elected as the first woman to hold a position of an assistant deputy<sup>747</sup> to the secretary general of the General People's Congress - the ruling



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<sup>747</sup> This is the fourth highest rank in the party.

party at the time – in December 2005. In 2006, she was appointed as the first woman to become Minister of Social Affairs and Labour. She retained her position the year after under a new government leadership, and was reappointed to this position as part of the Consensus Government in 2011. In fact, she was the only woman to co-sign the Gulf Cooperation Council Initiative and its Implementation Mechanism, through which power was peacefully transferred in November 2011.

In addition to her political role, she was also involved in national policies and development issues. She was instrumental in the creation of the National Population Policy Conference in 1990 and consecutive policy efforts. During her work at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour and Social Affairs she led several national efforts on aligning vocational education with market demands, integration of women in the work force and empowering women to compete, and combating female poverty.

Prior to her position as Minister, Hummed was an expert with the Ministry of Education on curriculum development, early learning education, women's education. She has contributed to developing the national curricula as a national expert in the Arabic language syllabus, Kindergarten curricula, and early education years. She also contributed to the creation of the National Basic Education Strategy. In 2005, she was the national focal person for the Arab League on Women's Education regional census. She was chosen one of 50 regional educational experts in the Women and Education Conference in Damascus 2003.

Dr. Hummed has many publications in the fields of education, research, women's political participation, curriculum development, and women's empowerment. In recognition of her achievement, she was named as one of Forbes Middle East 2014 list for most powerful Arab women at number 33 among 200 women.

## 9. Mashour, Hooria

Hooria Mashour is known as one of the feminist pioneers in Yemen and a leading figure in the rights and freedoms struggle.

She has a bachelor in Administration and Economy and took courses in Economic Law at Karl Marx University-Leipzig in Germany. She has started her career in the education sector and then worked with UNESCO –Yemen as director of organisations and international relations.



Since 2000, she has worked at the Women National Committee, which is the government body created to advance the women agenda in Yemen. Hooria had a leading role in designing and advocating for many national policies and strategies such as the Basic Education Strategy, Poverty Reduction Strategy. However, her mark was mostly visible through women's empowerment work especially through the Gender Development Strategy and its related projects and activities across all government institutions.

Before 2011 majority of her work focused on women's development and gender issues. Yemen's uprising of 2011 was a turning point in her life when she became active in the human rights and democracy struggle and was member of the National Council for Revolution Forces and the spokesperson of the council.

She represented Yemen on many regional and international platforms speaking on behalf of the Yemeni government in front of the United Nations and other international entities. Hooria was especially instrumental on the country's progress in implementing the Convention on the Elimination of all form of Discrimination Against Women.

In 2012 she became Minister of Human Rights and pushed on the women and other minorities agenda through her work. She is known for her fights for freedoms and strong advocacy against corruption and dictatorship. In recognition of her achievement, she was named as one of Forbes 2014 list for most powerful women in the Middle East.

#### 10. Nasher, Fawzia

Fawzia Nasher is considered one of Yemen's pioneers of women's economic empowerment. She has experience in both the private and public sectors.

In addition to her degree in Psychiatry from Cairo University, she has a degree in Business Administration from the American University in Cairo, and a High diploma in business management from the American university in Cairo as well as another from the London School of Business and Management.



Her expertise combine the fields of business and marketing with women and development and she is considered one of the strongest advocates for Yemeni women's economic empowerment. She co-founded the Women Arab Investors Union in 2004 in Egypt and is one of its board members, and is one of the first businesswomen to join the Chamber of Commerce in 1996, where she founded the Women Section at the Chamber in 2003. In 2005, she was appointed as head of the Women's department at the Federation of Chambers. In 2007, Fawzia founded the Yemeni Businesswomen Council as the first independent organised body for Yemeni businesswomen, which she has been running since. In 2010 she was elected by Yemeni businessmen to become member of the Arab Working Women Affairs Committee affiliated with the Arab Labour Organisation. In 2013 she co-founded the Economic Empowerment Network in Yemen and co-founded the Yemeni Forum for Businesses and the Alliance for Women's Rights Advocacy. She was honoured by the Union of Female Arab Investors and the Arab Association of Businesswomen for Development as well as by several Businesswomen councils across the region. Fawzia represented Yemen on many regional and international platforms and has been a strong advocate for Yemeni women's rights especially economic empowerment.

In addition to her personal achievement as a successful Yemeni businesswoman, she has been able to help hundreds of Yemeni businesswomen thrive and was instrumental in lobbying for policy change to facilitate Yemeni women's entry to the economic

sector as well as promoting enabling regulations to increase women's economic participation nationally.

She has also conducted and supervised many research studies on gender and economic development in Yemen as well as created the first database of Yemeni businesswomen.

#### 11. Othman, Arwa

Arwa Othman is a writer, journalist, anthropology researcher and leading advocate working to end child marriage in Yemen. She was appointed as the first woman as Minister of Culture in 2014 and is now serving as a diplomat in Yemen's mission in Tunisia.



In 2013, Othman participated in Yemen's national dialogue conference, tasked with shaping the country's new constitution. The recommendations by the rights and freedom committee, which Othman headed, are among the most progressive and rights-respecting to come out of the process. They include reforms that could vastly improve the lives of Yemeni women and children, such as enshrining gender equality in law, prohibiting discrimination, and setting the minimum age for marriage at 18. The committee also recommended criminal sanctions for anyone who forces a child to marry. Othman is widely credited with bringing these strong recommendations to fruition.

After that, she became the first woman appointed as Minister of Culture. Arwa Othman was selected as one of the 2014 recipients of the prestigious Alison Des Forges Award for Extraordinary Activism.

Othman, born in Taiz, is admired by many for her activism and her unconditional solidarity with vulnerable groups - she's a great supporter for minorities' rights in Yemen, i.e. Jews and Muhamasheen (Yemenis of African origin, also known as Akhdam). Her unwavering courage has also made her a target of aggressive tarnishing campaigns as well as of physical assaults by conservative groups for her outspoken, and sometimes secular, stances against fundamentalism and patriarchy.

Othman has always shown powerful critic against religious leaders and corrupt politicians. Othman is known for her forthright and outspoken writings using her real name, which was not the case when she started off writing columns in the local press - she wrote in disguise between 1982-1984. Since then until today, she has published several short stories collections, has been awarded several awards for her literary work and activism, and most importantly, she has been a prolific columnist.

## Appendix D: Information Sheet and Consent Form Template



### INFORMATION SHEET

Dear ....

School of Politics, Economics and  
International Relations  
*Nadia Al-Sakkaf*  
*Politics and International Relations*  
*Department*  
*University of Reading*  
*RG6 6AH*  
*email n.al-sakkaf@pgr.reading.ac.uk*

Thank you for agreeing to take part in my research on the Politics of Gender of the Republic of Yemen. The main research question in this study is “Why the women’s empowerment policies in the Republic of Yemen between 2006 and 2014 failed.”

The research includes qualitative Elite Interviews with Yemeni women leaders who have been involved in the women’s empowerment policies in various fields during the research scope timeline.

You as a woman leader and one who has been influential in the women’s empowerment movement in the country, are an important stakeholder in this issue. Your input which is based on your own personal and professional experiences is invaluable for this kind of research. You will kindly share your opinions on the relevance of capacity, instability, and the culture of political support to women’s empowerment policies in Yemen.

The final text of extracts from the interviews which will be included in the thesis will be shared with you for approval. Considering that you are a woman leader holding a unique and visible position in the Yemeni society, your name and profile information will be mentioned in the study.

Your input will be used as a contribution to my PhD in Politics, and consequently any journal articles or published materials resulting from this study.

This project has been reviewed by the University of Reading Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable opinion for conduct.

**Thank you for your help.**

Sincerely

Nadia Al-Sakkaf

Consent Form

1. I have read and had explained to me by Nadia Al-Sakkaf the accompanying Information Sheet relating to the project on: The Politics of Gender in Yemen.
  
2. I have had explained to me the purposes of the project and what will be required of me, and any questions I have had have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to the arrangements described in the Information Sheet in so far as they relate to my participation.
  
3. I understand that participation is entirely voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw from the project any time, and that this will be without detriment.
  
4. I agree to the interview being documented via various communication means such as phone conversations, emails, WhatsApp and Skype.
  
5. I approve of the publishing of my input as part of the research conducted and any subsequent publications based on this thesis.

Name:

Signed:

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Date:

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