Youth Political Participation in Taiz: Challenges and Solutions
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About YWBOD:
Youth without Borders Organization for Development (YWBOD) is a non-governmental, non-profit civil society organization working on building the capacities of youth and empowering them to play significant and effective roles to bring about positive changes. It started its work as a non-official youth initiative in 2011, then it was officially licensed by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and Labor, license No. (4/m/2013) per law No. (2001/ 1).

YWBOD's Vision:
Developing and enhancing the role of youth in general life to bring about a positive change for their future and for the country as a whole.

YWBOD's Mission:
Contribute to create an effective and aware young generation in the local and national communities to be able to bring about positive changes.

YWBOD's Objectives:
1 – To Empower and build youth’s capacities to play effective roles in the community.
2 – To raise youth’s awareness about all youth-related issues.
3 – To engage youth in the developmental process in Yemen.
4 – To monitor and document youth-related issues.
5 – To deliver youth voices to the decision-makers and relevant stakeholders.

YWBOD's Memberships:
I- Local & National Network:
- A member of Taiz Network for Development (TND).
- A member of Yemen Network for Enhancing the Rule of Law (YNERL).
- A member of the Humanitarian Relief Coalition in Taiz (HRC).

II- International Networks:
- A member of The United Network of Young Peacebuilders (UNOY).
- A member of the International Youth Peace Group (IYPG).
- A member of the Global Land Tool Network (GLTN).
- A member of the Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (CCPPS).

Executive Summary:
This report is written on the basis of information collected from young activists and leaders of youth NGOs through emails, social media websites and phone calls. Further
information was collected by implementing a workshop in Taiz on 16 March 2017 with the participation of 15 young activists. The target groups for data collection were carefully selected to ensure engagement with youth of different social and political backgrounds.

This report aims at highlighting the challenges that youth in Taiz face to play effective roles, how to overcome these challenges, the expected political roles of youth and roles that should be played by the relevant stakeholders. Youth who engaged with the process included youth who were active in the 2011 revolution, youth associated with political parties, independent or non-partisans youth and academics. The methodology also took gender into consideration, and the youth were intentionally targeted to make a balance in the collected information.

The report starts by giving some background on the national context in Yemen and local context in Taiz, and sheds some light on youth's political participation in three significant stages in the modern history of Yemen: youth-led 2011 revolution, the transitional period and thirdly the armed conflict that has been taking place since March 2015. The report explores the current challenges for youth's political participation and the roles that youth are expected to play during the armed conflict, and may be expected to play in the event of a ceasefire and national peace agreement or in the event of a military victory by one conflict actor. The report concludes with the roles that should be played by each stakeholder to support youth's political participation at the local and national levels.
1 Background
I- Background:
In order to understand the challenges of youth's political participation in Taiz, it is important to understand the recent historical context. For this purpose, this section of the report briefly sheds lights on the political scene of Yemen as a whole and on the local context in Taiz governorate.

1.1- Yemen: Geography and the Recent Political History:
Yemen is located in the West of the Arabian Peninsula, covering 527,968 square kilometers. Saudi Arabia borders Yemen to the North, Oman to the East. The Arabian Sea and Aden Gulf lie on Yemen's southern coastline, and the Red Sea to the West. The 2004 census indicated that Yemeni population was 19,685,161. Allowing a %3 annual population growth, the Yemeni population is now estimated to be 27,362,373 in 2017.

Over the past 30 years, Yemen has witnessed many politically significant and difficult stages such as what was known as «The Separation War» in the summer of 1994 and the six wars between Saleh's regime and the Houthis in Sa'ada between June 2004 and February 2011. 2010 was the most significant year in the modern history of Yemen. In this year, there were huge peaceful movements calling for President Ali Abdullah Saleh and his regime to step down. Youth were the first to move against Sale's regime in 2011 and that is why it is called a «Youth-led Revolution». The revolutionaries had a number of objectives: to overthrow the individual and one-family control over the country; to build democratic civil state that ensured freedoms, rights and equal citizenship; to have real comprehensive economic development; to rebuild the police and military institutions and independent judiciary achieve equality and justice.

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) initiative was the only peaceful available solution to overthrow the President Saleh, particularly after some armed conflicts taken place in some governorates like Taiz (between Saleh's forces and the forces that announced responsibility
to protect the revolution and the revolutionaries) and Sana’a (between Saleh’s forces and the forces backed by Islah(1)). In accordance with the GCC Initiative and its Implementation Mechanism, on 27 February 2012, Ali Abdullah Saleh handed over power to his deputy Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi, following a one-candidate presidential election to legitimize Hadi’s accession to power. With Hadi’s accession to presidency of Yemen, the transitional period commenced during which the National Dialogue Conference (NDC) launched on 13 March 2013 and closed on 25 January 2014 with a number of outcomes that were considered to be the hope of all Yemenis. These NDC outcomes were the groundwork for drafting a new constitution to be shared widely with political and community actors to examine the draft, check for consistency with the NDC outcomes and then prepare its final version to pass for referendum. However, when the draft constitution was issued, matters did not proceed as planned, as Houthis (Ansar Allah) had already moved from being participants in the NDC to being military entities. During² the NDC, the Houthis sieged Damag, and then displacing its residents for being opponents to Zaydi movement and then storming Emran city by force.

Many politicians and youth attribute the power of the Houthis to their alliance with ex-president Saleh and the military forces loyal to him (the Republican Guards), who wanted to take revenge against the Islah party figures who rebelled against him in 2011, and secondly because of the military and logistic support provided by other countries. Then, they could storm Sana'a with the support of military commanders loyal to Saleh, seizing Sana'a's public institutions including the military camps.

Though an agreement called «Peace and Partnership Agreement» was signed on 21 September 2014 with efforts of the UN’s special envoy to have concurrent peaceful solutions, intensive political conflicts took place in which the Houthis escalated their pressure in several ways and intervened in local and national affairs by using military force. On the 15th of January 2015, the draft of new constitution was issued; including articles state the division of Yemen into six federal regions, but the Houthis rejected the new constitution without publicly declaring any alternative proposal regarding the federal division of Yemen. They immediately kidnapped Ahmed Awadh Bin Mubarak – President Hadi’s Chief of Staff, to exert further pressure on the president to force him withdraw the new constitution's draft and then stormed the Presidential palace and assaulting members of the Yemeni cabinet. These actions made the cabinet announced its resignation and then, on the same day (22 January 2015), the President Hadi also resigned, accusing Houthis of hindering the peaceful political process and dialogue. With the resignation of the Cabinet and the President, the country was driven into constitutional vacuum and

(1) the strongest opposition party to Saleh’s GPC since 2011, although both parties were in alliance in many previous conflicts such as the Separation war and the six Sa’ada wars.
(2) A village at the southeast of Sa’ada settled by Salafists.
Houthis put the President and some of Bahah's cabinet members under house arrest. In addition to putting everyone in the country in a serious dilemma, President Hadi's resignation brought about a great deal of divisions and differences in how to deal with this situation and who could be the best alternative to come into power. The President had submitted his resignation to the parliament (House of Representatives) which was in authority either to approve or disapprove this resignation. But, as expected, the parliament, in turn, found it too problematic to deal with the resignation; for the parliament, disapproving the resignation would not solve the ongoing crisis. At the same time, approving the resignation would put the country in another big quandary.

Approving Hadi's resignation by the parliament would essentially allow the ex-president to have control over the country when several national political parties, including Houthis, had rejected it. Houthis, in turn, proposed forming a presidential council, but was strongly opposed and rejected by some national and other regional parties mainly because it would grant Houthis greater authority and broader control over the country. As a result, the parliament did not hold a council meeting to approve or reject Hadi's resignation, and the Houthis made a Constitutional Declaration that stated dissolution of the parliament and authorized the High Revolution Committee- headed by Mohammed Ali Alhouthi, to take over the Republic's presidency. Meanwhile, military advancements to impose Houthi control over other governorates were being made on the ground by the Houthis' and Saleh's military forces.

On the 21 February 2015, Hadi escaped house arrest and fled to Aden, which enabled him to 'take back' his resignation, declaring that «the decrees that have been issued since 21 September 2015 are all invalid and illegitimate». He also called the National Dialogue Committee to hold its meetings in Aden or Taiz until Houthis left Sana'a. Hadi also renewed his commitment to the Gulf Initiative and called upon the international community to take all actions necessary for the protection of the political process in the country.

All the previously highlighted events have a direct impact on the outbreak of armed conflict in Yemen. But, many think that the Houthi-Saleh alliance's airstrikes (on 19 March 2015) on the presidential palace in Aden, was the first spark of the war. This was followed by the military movement of Houthi-Saleh forces to Aden in an attempt to gain military control over the city. Meanwhile, Houthi-Saleh forces were also moving to take over the other governorates including Taiz.

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(3) based on Article 115 and Article 116 of the National Constitution — the resignation becomes effective and is thus considered approved with an absolute majority (%51) of the Parliament Representatives voting for its approval whereby the power shall transferred to the Vice-President and if no Vice-President, as it was the case in Yemen, the parliament should have the right to take over the power and its Speaker should act as a president for a period no longer than 60 days, during which an early presidential elections should be prepared.
In reaction to these military actions by the Houthi-Saleh alliance, a military intervention under what's called «Arab Coalition» or «the Saudi-led Coalition» began on 26 March 2015 under the code of «Operation Decisive Storm,» and then the «Operation of Restoring Hope». More than two years since the war erupted, the war is still ongoing up to the writing of this report.

Due to the violent armed conflict between Hadi's internationally recognized government and the Houthi-Saleh alliance, Yemen has become one of the most fragile countries in the Middle East. The economy and infrastructure of Yemen have been destroyed and statistics reveals that 6800 people were killed and about 35000 people injured since the beginning of the war.

The conflict has caused an exceptionally miserable humanitarian situation across Yemen, with around %80 of the population in urgent need of humanitarian assistance and more 3 million internally displaced people⁴. Although the current UN special envoy, Ismail Ould Cheikh Amed, has made numerous efforts to broker a ceasefire, the conflict is ongoing, with no military victory of any of the warring parties in many of the governorates except in some Southern governorates like Aden, Lahj, Abian and Hadramout which have become under the control of the legitimate government. In this context, some of the armed groups of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) are gaining advantage from the conflict-caused mess, seizing some areas of the South to repeatedly attack the cities under the control of the legitimate government.

1.2- Taiz Governorate:
Taiz is located in the south-west of Yemen. In 2004, Taiz governorate had a population of 2,393,425, according 2004 census⁵, and its population now is estimated to be in the region of 3,161,000. About %52 of Taiz' population are women and more than %60 are youth (under 35 as defined by UN).

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(4) http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/YEMEN20%202017%HNO_Final.pdf
(5) http://www.yemen-nic.info/gover/taiz/brife/
Taiz consists of 23 districts, 3 of them are urban (Alqahera, Almothafar and Sala) while the other 20 are rural districts. Its economy is based on industrial, agricultural and handicraft activities. Taiz has the highest rates of education in comparison of other governorates and this is one reason for calling it «The Capital of Yemeni Culture».

Taiz is considered to have played significant roles in different stages of the history of Yemen. This has made it a target for many armed conflicts particularly since the 26 September revolution. The following sheds light on the history of the armed conflicts in Taiz.

1.2.1- Taiz and the Armed Conflict:
The conflict that has been taking place in Taiz since April 2015 is not something new, but can be considered part of a recurring that began during the 26 September 1962 revolution. Many politicians consider Taiz to be the center of political opposition in Yemen in general. People of Taiz always call for a civil state and a state of law and equal citizenship. The reason of this is attributed to the high rates of literacy and the existence of many political movements in Taiz since the middle of the previous century.

Historical tracing of the conflict in Taiz reveals that history repeats itself. In 1977, the villages of what was known as «Hugaria Territory» (the most populous part at the South of Taiz currently consisting of several districts) was besieged by the military forces that were under the command of Ali Abdul Saleh- the commander of Taiz military region at the time.

Since the 1980's, Saleh's regime continuously and intentionally marginalized and overlooked Taiz in terms of development in all fields. An example of such marginalization is obviously noticed in Mocha port which was purposively ignored and kept only as a smuggling port, despite being considered to be one of the most important Yemeni sea ports, connecting between the Read Sea and the Indian Ocean and between Europe and East of Africa, South of Asia and the Middle East. Similarly, people of Taiz historically suffered from being deprived from the high-level positions in spite of
their high qualifications.

The same scenario is currently repeated in Taiz. When the political and civil forces in Taiz announced their refusal to make Taiz a passage to Aden for the armed groups of the Houthi-Saleh alliance, and called for avoidance of establishing militias in Taiz, Houthi groups with the support of forces loyal to the ex-president, which were still existing within some military and police institutions in Taiz, stormed Taiz. This led to the emergence of what is called «the Popular Resistance», which announced its loyalty to the legitimate president Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi with the objective of restoring the legitimate authority and protect the city from the Houthis.

Both Houthis and the resistance forces are attempting to maintain a hold on Taiz governorate, not only militarily, but also politically. Politically, each conflict actor has appointed a governor and other high-position decision-makers. As a result, there have been two governors; each one running the affairs of areas under his control. However, there have been other central issues that require only one decision-maker- such as the issue of the public employee's salaries, where the source of paying such salaries determines which governor shall sign the salaries checks. At earlier phases of the conflict, the Central Bank in Sana’a used to pay the salaries and the governor appointed by Houthi-Saleh alliance was authorized to sign the salaries checks of all public employees of Taiz in the districts held by Houthi-Saleh's forces as well as the liberated districts. But, later on after the Central Bank relocation to Aden, the salaries were paid by the Central Bank in Aden and the governor appointed by the Hadi's government is authorized to sign the salaries checks of all employees.

As a result, the Houthi-Saleh forces besieged Taiz city, closing almost all the roads to deliver the essential requirements of food, water, medicine to the city. In addition to the siege, violent armed conflict has been taking place since April 2015 in which all forms of death, starvation and enforced displacement are practiced. The armed conflict is on-going in Taiz, though, up to writing this report, the three urban districts (Alqahera, Almuthafar and Sala) and other districts like Mocha and Dhubab (Bab Almandab strait) have been liberated by the resistance forces. The Houthi-Saleh forces continues to maintain their military hold on the remaining districts and continue to blockade the three urban districts of Alqahera, Almuthafar and Salah; there is now only one long and rugged road left for people to move in and out of these districts and to transport the food and medical materials into the city with great difficulty. The three urban districts of the city have been under blockade for more a year and a half now, creating a massive humanitarian need in these areas. Taiz is considered to be one of the worst effected governorates in the country. Statistics up to the end of March 2017 reveals...
that more than 178,643 families were internally and externally displaced, 3628 people killed, 16716 causalities in addition to the destruction of about 4249 public and private properties. 

The armed conflict has had a hugely negative impact on the lives of Taiz people who face great challenges to have access to food, health and other services. The infrastructure of Taiz has also been badly affected with the destruction and closure of many public institutions such as the schools, hospitals, justice and security institutions. Recently, there have been formal (local authority) and informal (youth and community) efforts to recover the functions of such institutions, but a lot of challenges still exist.

In addition to the destruction and death of civilians, the citizens of Taiz have been badly affected by the trauma of the conflict. Many unexpected negative phenomenon have occurred as a result of this war- such as internal armed conflicts and illegal actions, negatively affecting the governorate and the civil and peaceful life that people used to call for in all their civil participations. All these caused very negative impact on youth and their political participation at the national and local levels.

However, hope glimmered again regarding re-engaging youth in politics when young activists recently implemented activities calling for stability and peace restoration in Taiz. But, there have been many challenges and barriers to this work, which will be explored further in the following section of the report.

(6) http://www.chr-taiz-ye.org/
2

Taiz Youth’s Political Participation:
II- Taiz Youth's Political Participation:
Yemen in general and Taiz in particular have witnessed historically significant stages that are directly related to Taiz youth political participation at the national and local levels. Here, it is important to highlight these stages and the roles played by youth in order to understand the current challenges and barriers to youth political participation in Taiz and how to overcome the challenges to achieve a real political participation. The following are some of the most significant phases of Yemeni’s recent history relevant to youth’s political participation in Taiz.

1.2- During the 2011 Revolution and the Transitional Period:
The 2011 revolution is known as «Youth Revolution» because it was youth who started the peaceful protests and demonstrations against Ali Abdullah Saleh and his regime.

The first tent in all Yemen was erected by youth in Taiz. A journalist, in a statement to New Arabi Journal, described 2011 revolution as «taking about the role of Taiz Youth in 2011 revolution is talking about the revolutionitself». Actually, this is not to ignore the role of youth in other governorates but to show the particularly significant role of Taiz youth. Everyone knows that Taiz youth played such roles not only in Taiz, but in all revolution squares all over Yemen. Taiz youth really did practice their political rights through the peaceful protests and demonstrations and took the initiative of two of the most important events of the revolution. The first event was «The March of Life» in which youth walked on foot from Taiz to the capital Sana’a on 20th of December 2011. The second event was called «The March of Apologizing to the South» organized by Taiz Youth on the 5th of May 2012 to apologize for the people of the South regarding the mistreatments committed by Saleh’s regime in the South. Events continued and Taiz youth were the victims of Saleh and his regime's attempts to suppress the 2011 uprising, most apparently when he burned the freedom square in
Taiz on 29 May 2011 and when armed clashes emerged between Saleh's forces and the opponent forces who claimed responsibility to protect the revolutionaries.

Although the GCC Initiative was a peaceful solution signed by Saleh and the other political actors, it was not signed up to by youth and faced a lot of protests in Taiz and other governorates because of being deviated from the revolution objectives, particularly in terms of the immunity given to Saleh and some of his assistants. This is why Taiz youth participated in organizing public demonstrations expressing their refusal of the GCC Initiative.

However, youth in Yemen and in Taiz in particular had no other peaceful alternatives to bring down the regime except the GCC Initiative. So, they had to respond to it positively just in order to save Yemen from war as well as it will contribute in bringing down the Saleh's regime peacefully. In accordance with the GCC Initiative, a one-candidate presidential election took place just for the purpose of legitimizing Hadi's accession to power. Most of the youth supported and participated effectively in this election for being a peaceful step to ensure Saleh stepped down.

Taiz youth political participation was tremendous during the preparation and implementation of the National Dialogue Conference (NDC), which was launched on the 18th of March 2013 and closed on the 25th of January 2014. The NDC was considered a turning point in the contemporary history of Yemen and youth played a great political role as participants and they widely supported its success and issues. The youth implemented a lot of activities, supported by NGOs and political parties in order to amplify youth's voices and opinions about the NDC issues. The NDC supported youth's political participation not only through youth's engagement as one of the NDC component groups, but also by establishing a unit called «the Community Participation Unit» concerned with people's opinions about NDC issues.

Taiz youth and NGOs played a very important role in supporting the NDC. In fact, Taiz was the governorate that succeeded in having the highest percentage of interactions through a great number of activities and events supporting the NDC. This contributed directly to concluding the NDC with a comprehensive list of outcomes that meet with almost all community's expectations except those who have personal and narrow interests. The NDC outcomes also included some outcomes concerned with and supporting of youth's political participation, such as «youth's engagement in all the aspects of life in a percentage not less than %20».

Youth also played a very important role in raising the public awareness on the NDC outcomes,
implementing a lot of activities and initiatives such as graffiti, video flashes and many other activities supporting the peaceful political process in Yemen. They implemented activities supporting the rule of law, good governance, human rights, democracy and other issues relevant to the political process. During this, the Constitutional Drafting Committee was working on drafting the new constitution of Yemen in accordance with the NDC’s outcomes. The draft of the new constitution was officially launched in January 2015.

The new Yemeni constitution was a hope for all Yemenis, but some political parties, some political parties, though they were participants in the NDC and had members in the Constitutional Drafting committee, rebelled against the new constitution as well as against Hadi’s transitional government. Youth and NGOs in Taiz participated in supporting the draft of the new constitution but events quickly took over, with Houthis driving from Sa’ada to Emran and Sana’a and then to Aden and Taiz, ultimately leading to the military intervention of the Saudi Arabia-led Arab coalition on the 26th of March 2015 and the eruption of the armed conflict in Taiz on the 14th of April 2015.

In sum, youth political activism in Taiz was at its climax during the 2011 youth revolution, and youth were active in supporting the transitional period up to when the war erupted in March 2015. Youth were eager to take part in the political scene at the national and local levels, but the changed circumstances caused the emergence of many challenges that hinder their local and national political participation.

2.2- During the Armed Conflict:
The armed conflict directly influenced youth's political participation in Taiz. At the beginning of the conflict, they did not have any political activities because of the suspension of the local and national political process- a process that was replaced by violence as a means to achieve geographical control and political dominance. As a result, some Taiz youth engaged in what is called «the popular resistance» that emerged to fight Houthi-Saleh forces.
The armed conflict caused a very bad humanitarian situation in Taiz. Youth and other civic actors (NGOs, donors and local authority) quickly changed their priorities to providing humanitarian aids such as food, medicines, water, etc. Youth either lost their interest in political participation or deprioritized political activities due to the immediate humanitarian needs of the community.

In such a context, youth’s priorities changed and they engaged themselves in voluntary activities for providing humanitarian aid. Youth voluntary humanitarian activities were obvious not only in the urban districts, but in the rural areas as well. In such a way, youth were able to play significantly effective roles, accomplishing great success stories.

Because of the humanitarian crisis in Taiz and the change of international NGOs and donors priorities, many political parties founded NGOs, initiatives and coalitions as an attempt to have a control over the humanitarian funds. Unfortunately, this contributed to creating a kind of conflict within local communities because of the unfair distribution of aids. Realizing this problem, youth and independent youth initiatives came together to form a coalition called «Gamee'ana Taiz (We are All Taiz)» of more than 60 initiatives to implement independent humanitarian projects and activities to target beneficiaries equally either self-funded or funded by businessmen. The establishment of such a coalition by youth and youth initiatives is considered as a success story for youth's civic participation during the armed conflict period.

The liberation of the three districts of Taiz city (Alqahera, Salah and Almudhafar) contributed effectively in the recovery of life there. However, Taiz suffered from inefficient and weak governmental institutions due to destruction of some of them, the displacement of staff, the lack of operational budgets and other reasons. Here, youth realized this problem and have recently begun playing an important role. In addition to their humanitarian activities, youth began to look towards supporting the recovery of public life especially when the government showed interests in refunctoioning the public institutions. In this regard, youth and local NGOs resumed political participation to call the public institutions to play their roles and functions. Though this participation is insufficient, it is considered important to restore the role of youth in the political scene.

There have also been other initiatives and interventions on conflict resolution and community peace on small local levels for example the project titled «Youth Peace Agents» implemented by YWBOD in partnership with Saferworld Organization. Moreover, there were political activities such as calling for the implementation of the NDC’s outcomes through implementing some workshops and media campaigns.
Actually, it is obviously noted that youth have learnt from their faults in 2011 revolution, doing best to avoid such mistakes. One of the mistakes was the individual work of youth so that they were weak to put pressure on decision-makers. In this regard, they realized the significance of establishing networks and coalitions to amplify their voices and put pressure on any attempts deviating from their visions or objectives, particularly the objectives of the 2011 revolution. The following is one of the success stories of the recent youth's political practices during the armed conflict period.

Youth formed a coalition called «the National Independent Coalition (NIC)», aiming at addressing the social and political issues in Taiz with independent mechanisms that meet public interests and expectations not the interests of specific individuals or political parties. A success story of this coalition was its contribution in addressing the issue of «Gazwan»- a young armed man supported by Saddiq Sarhan- the Head of Military Council of Taiz Province and the Commander of the 22nd Mica Brigade. Gazwan exploited the support of Saddil Sarhan to practice some illegal action such as assaulting people. Actually, this was the reason behind the intervention of other troops like «Abu Al-Abass Troop», causing a very intensive tension between Abu Al-Abass troops and the military forces commanded by Saddiq Sarhan especially when the latter refused to hand Gazwan to the local authority to take legal actions against him. Here, the NIC played a positive and diplomatic role through delivering a letter to Saddiq Sarhan, firstly appreciating his role in enhancing security in Taiz and, secondly, drawing his attention on his duty to hand Gazwan to the local authority in order to avoid people's accusation of protecting an outlaw person and this situation will make him (Saddiq Sarhan) in a very poor place to face society and media. So, the situation is being solved by this means, avoided the eruption of an internal conflict within the liberated districts of Taiz.

Such activities and initiatives contribute to recovering youth's political participation. The above described youth's activities reflect the young activists' keenness and desire to play effective political roles, but there are many challenges and obstacles hindering them to play such roles at the national and local levels. These challenges will be demonstrated in the next part of the report.
3
Challenges and Barriers to Youth Political Participation in Taiz
III: Challenges and Barriers to Youth Political Participation in Taiz

According to the interviews and the workshop implemented for data collection, many obstacles and challenges are facing youth in Taiz to take part in the national and local political scenes. This section highlights some of the key challenges faced by youth, and how they are relevant to youth's political participation. The challenges and barriers are ordered according to their perceived level of impact.

3.1- Armed Conflict:
For the last two years, the armed conflict in Taiz has a negative impact on the political participation of young activists, causing a number of consequent obstacles and challenges. The following are the obstacles and challenges the emerged due to the armed conflict in Taiz:

3.1.1- The suspension of the political process:
The on-going conflict caused the country's transitional political process to be suspended. This is considered to be a major barrier to political participation- «blocking all the roads of youth's political interventions», as described by a young woman.

The majority of youth in Taiz call for the return of state authority and the cessation of war, as the continuation of the armed conflict has created a new reality that does not incubate nor respond to youth political interventions. For this reason, many young people are simply watching the situation, hoping to re-create a better context or to improve the current context so that they can raise their political voices. As one young woman said «the current situation» of a suspended political process, «is the biggest challenge for the political participation of youth» and the recovery of the political process at the local and national levels will directly contribute to creating opportunities for youth's active political participation.

Some youth added that talking about political participation or peaceful political issues during the worst armed conflict, ever witnessed in Taiz, does not receive a positive reaction from the society because of the belief that no voice is louder than the sounds of guns and, therefore, the language of arms and forces is dominant on the scene. One participant said, «the current situation does not allow the young voices to raise».

3.1.2- Insecurity & Lack of Safety:
«Security and safety,» was repeated by one of the participants in the workshop, pointing out that the lack of security and safety due to the conflict is one of the key obstacles that stand in the way of youth playing an effective political role. During the discussion,
it became clear that the issue of insecurity is caused primarily by the armed clashes and indiscriminate shelling of non-military sites, threatening the safety of local community members in general, including youth. Insecurity is also felt as a result of the inefficient performance of the local security and justice institutions and this makes youth scared and hesitate to take any actions that may put their lives at risks.

3.1.3- Poverty and Unemployment
The armed conflict was also seen to be the main reason behind the high and growing rates of unemployment and poverty in Taiz, not only of youth, but all the community members, negatively affecting youth's participation in civil and political life. Although «the majority are not satisfied with what is going on in Taiz and have no interests to be part of the conflict», stated a young activist, «some of youth are involved in the conflict either as fighters or as media supporters due to their bad economic circumstances». «The problem of poverty and unemployment» was mentioned by most of the target youth, stressing that improving the economic situation will have a positive impact in improving youth's political participation.

3.2- Weak Capacity:
The weak capacities of youth and the relevant actors (the government, local authority and CSOs) have directly contributed to the weakness of youth's political participation in Taiz, particularly during this unexpected violent armed conflict. The following shows how the weakness of each actor is relevant to the weakness of youth's political participation and how these weak capacities are real challenges for youth to play effective political roles:

3.2.1- Weak capacity of government and local authority:
Although youth were one of the main participating groups in the NDC, the exclusion of youth in any political process during the armed conflict has deprived them from any real opportunities to represent themselves. For example, there have been many political dialogues between the parties of the conflict, but youth did not participate formally in such political events. This indicates that the weakness of government's ability to deal with youth as a key component not during peace, as happened at the NDC, but in the war, is a challenge to youth's political participation. The failure of most of state institutions to perform their services and the lack of adequate alternatives by the local authorities is indicative of the weakness of the local authority. As one activist said, «the destruction of infrastructure and the cessation of all governmental institutions, especially the security and judiciary, make youth running after their daily needs without any desire for any other civil participation». 
3.2.2- CSO's weak capacities

Weakness of the civil organizations to cope with the conflict situation is also another challenge. Due to the armed conflict, most of the NGOs of political missions, stopped and almost all the donors suspended funds for projects of political nature. «Many donors and local NGOs shifted priorities to humanitarian assistance provision instead», said a chairman of a youth-led NGO. Such NGOs and political parties, said one activist, «left youth in a mess», indicating their weak function to amplify youth's political voices.

The political parties, moreover, which are part of the conflict, played negative roles by fueling the conflict and have only very limited actions to engage and motivate youth to play peaceful political roles. They also did not give real opportunities for youth to exercise their peaceful political rights. A participant in the workshop stated that «there are no political parties that guarantee the rights of youth»; another participant added that «the political parties always allocate the decision-making only for the old political elites with no real engagement of youth». In fact, the weakness of the political parties' capacities makes them of inefficient performance in terms of youth's political participation and this was emphasized by many of the target informants as one of the main obstacles to youth's national and local political participation.

3.2.3- Youth's Weak Capacities

Youth's political engagement requires building their capacities and raising their awareness on all local and national political issues. If their abilities and awareness are weak, their political participation will be weak and ineffective too. Many of the target youth believe that the weakness of youth's skills and awareness is one of the challenges that limit their political participation. A young woman described the «political illiteracy among youth regarding the rights and duties» and another woman said that «the lack of political culture» is one of the obstacles to youth's political participation.

Prior to the outbreak of the war in 2015, youth were playing effective roles. However, they were unable to cope with the situation of war because of their weak capacities. Building youth's capacities and raising their awareness and understanding is significantly required to empower them replay effective political roles at the local and national levels.

In this war, it is obviously noted that the armed conflict caused the suspension of the political process, insecurity and unsafety situation and the highest rates of poverty and unemployment. Youth, CSO's, political parties, the government and local authority are unable to cope with the war because of their weak capacities, negatively effecting youth's roles in politics. Taiz young activists agree that they should play different roles in this situation and in any post conflict context and these expected roles are highlighted in the following section of this report.
4
Youth’s Expected Political Roles:
VI- Youth's Expected Political Roles:
There have been many projects, activities, events and discussions about youth's political roles in Yemen. It is important to shed light on the roles that should be played by youth in Taiz during the current situation and in the future. Looking at the matter, three scenarios are expected:

- The first is the continuity of the armed conflict.
- The second scenario is the stop of war due to a national peace agreement.
- The third scenario is the stop of war by the military victory of one conflict actor.

The following are the expected roles of youth in each of these scenarios.

4.1- Continuity of the Armed Conflict:
The continuity of the armed conflict in Taiz will require youth and other actors to respond to the consequences of the armed conflict and to enhance youth's political participation. On the basis of the opinions of youth themselves, the following is the roles should be played in this scenario:

4.1.1- Awareness Raising:
Raising the public awareness within the local communities and youth is an important matter that should be taken into consideration if the armed conflict goes on. Raising awareness on all the relevant political, social, health, etc. issues that occur during conflicts is really required. In fact, youth played great roles in raising awareness in the previous period of the conflict, but it is essential to support and enhance such roles further.

Many youth think that establishing a grounding in political understanding among youth and an awareness of the significance of their political direct and indirect participation in decision-making is one of the significant roles that should be played by them in case of continuity of war in Taiz. They also agree that, this can be achieved by political and rights programs and through political youth media that reflects youth's visions and ambitions. Some of youth think that playing such a role of awareness raising also requires strong and well-built capacities of young people within the local communities. So, they should also play the role of building the capacities of the local youth to contribute in raising the public awareness on the political and social issues.

4.1.2- Recovery of Public Institutions' Functions:
Participating in the recovery of public institutions' functions is an important role should be play by youth in such a situation of armed conflict. Many youth confirm that weak and malfunctions of the public institutions negatively impact people's lives and youth's
political participation. So, they think that it is significant for youth to play a political role in supporting and enhancing the recovery of the public institutions through implementing events, advocacy campaigns, monitoring, evaluating and networking activities to put pressures and support the improvement of public institutions' functions.

4.2- A National Peace Agreement:
Though most youth in Taiz no longer have hope in any political peace solution for the ongoing armed conflict taking place in Yemen as a whole. But, it remains as an expected scenario, particularly with their beliefs that the armed conflict is never a better alternative of peace to accomplish stability and development. For them, the armed conflict deprives them of their essential needs and their civil and political rights. The target youth, thus, emphasize the importance of playing the following effective roles in case of stopping the war by a national peace agreement:

4.2.1- Raising Awareness:
Ending the armed conflict by a national peace agreement can be rejected by some of the local communities because of the revenge and hatred that may occur due to the armed conflict. It is also expected that a national peace agreement may be rejected for being incomplete or unjust to some people, particularly the conflict victims and this can be a threat against any peace agreement, predicting future armed conflicts. For this and other relevant reasons, awareness raising within local communities is a must. Youth expect to play this role, raising the public awareness on the peace agreement and the social and political issues that may occur post the armed conflict, doing best to enhance coexistence and social cohesion. They should take part in raising awareness to support any transitional political period and in removing the war consequences. They should also play roles in raising awareness on legal framework of any peace agreement including the Transitional Justice Law, compensation of victims and any relevant issues to pave the way for any other activities of advocacy and capacity building.

4.2.2- Advocacy:
The political and social issues caused by any armed conflict requires joint efforts to address such issues either directly or by media advocacy campaigns and putting pressure on all stakeholders relevant to any of these issues. Youth think that they can play a great effective role in advocating such issues either at local levels (quarter, village, district, governorate, etc.) or at the national level.

4.2.3- Capacity Building:
Youth confirm on the actual need for building the capacities of youth and the other community members to empower them cope with the imposed context of a national
peace agreement, particularly when there is no other alternative to stop war. In such a situation, the local communities should be supported to enhance their social and political roles. For this reason, many youth expect to play effective roles in building the capacities of youth, first, and then the other community members and relevant stakeholders to be able to play their roles to support the political transitional period that may result from any national peace agreement.

4.3- Military Victory:
The military victory of one conflict actors will be of positive consequences such as stopping of destruction and death and the recovery of public life and economy. This, however, requires ability of all actors to cope with the new situation to delimit the armed conflict consequences. It will be important to take into consideration any risks and threats associated with this scenario such as the dominance of certain armed groups, existence of informal armed groups and the conflicts that may erupt among the armed groups of the victorious party. Actually, the military victory will create many opportunities for youth to play the following expected roles:

4.3.1- The National Dialogue Outcomes:
Many youth think that the military victory of the legitimate government will create a lot of opportunities for youth to play political roles, particularly in the outcomes of the NDC. The NDC’s outcomes are actually the slogan raised by the legitimate government in its war with the Houthi-Saleh alliance and its military victory will reopen doors for youth to play effective roles in terms of promoting, advocating and implementing the NDC’s outcomes in general and the outcomes that state the necessity of engaging youth in all the fields of life including politics. As one of the target young activist said: «youth should play effective role in implementing the youth-related outcomes of the NDC». They, thus, should call for implementing these outcomes and take the initiative to participate effectively in politics at the local and national levels.

4.3.2- The New Constitution:
In the words of a female activist, youth should «practice the roles stated in the new constitution not only in terms of raising awareness on such roles, but also in actually playing such roles». The military victory of the legitimate government will create opportunities for youth to play roles in the different political processes included in the new constitution like the referendum, elections, etc.

4.3.3- Capacity Building:
If the armed conflict stopped by a military victory, it is emphasized that youth and the community members in general are really in need for capacity building to empower them
play roles in politics. That is why youth expect to play roles in building the capacities of youth and other community members to empower them support the peace and stability locally and nationally.

4.3.4- Reconciliation:
The armed conflict caused a lot of consequences that have negative impact on the small local communities of Taiz. Any armed conflict causes cases of unfairness, social, material and psychological harms. It also causes fragile social interactions influenced by individual or group practices that expand the culture of hatred and intolerance. In this regard, youth think it is their duty to «settle the grievances occurred during and post the conflict and participate in reparation to ensure successful political process without repeating the faults of the previous regimes, groups and entities». 
5 Stakeholders’ Roles:
V- Stakeholders' Roles:
Overcoming the above mentioned challenges and barriers to youth's political participation in Taiz requires joint efforts of all relevant stakeholders. Youth alone, especially during the ongoing armed conflict, will not be able to face these challenges and subsequently their political participation will remain weak unless all relevant stakeholders create real opportunities that directly or indirectly enhance youth's political roles. So, it is important, in this part, to shed lights on the roles assumed by each of these stakeholders in the following.

5.1- The Government:
The youth informants of this study think that the government has a key role in reconnecting youth with politics. It should create an environment and a context in which youth can practice their political rights at the local and national levels. The following is the government's expected roles to enhance youth's political participation:

- Engaging youth in any future peaceful dialogues and any processes related to the post war Yemen.
- Engaging youth in all the local and national political processes in accordance with the outcomes of the NDC and the international covenants conventions.
- Improving the economic, social and political conditions related to youth's political participation.
- Adopting youth's political participation as a national project/strategy and commit to implement it.
- Support and respond to the local and national youth issues.
- Dedicate media spaces for youth's awareness raising, giving youth more opportunities and more representation in media.
- Engage the educational institutions to raise youth's awareness on the politics, citizenship and patriotism in all educational levels and curriculums.
- Encourage, facilitate and support youth organizations and their activities and projects that support's youth's political participation.

5.2- local authority:
The local authority is one of the most important actors in supporting youth's political participation for being closer to youth and youth's issues. So, it should play positive roles in enhancing youth's political participation. In this regard, youth think that the local authority should play the following roles:
- Locally implement any national policies related to youth's participation.
- Engage youth in the implementation of local development programs and policies.
- Adopt youth's innovative projects in all the fields, especially in the field of politics.
- Encourage and engage youth entities in the processes of following-up and evaluating the local executive units and in the political accountability programs.
- Interact with youth's activities and provide media support to amplify youth's voices to higher levels.
- Provide support and facilities for youth's various activities, particularly the political activities.
- Search and raise funds to improve youth's economic and social conditions.
- Observe and respond to youth issues, particularly the issues that negatively affect youth's political participation.
- Allocate a space in the local media to raise the public awareness on the importance of youth's political participation.

5.3- local CSOs:
The local CSOs played prominently significant roles in connecting youth with politics prior the armed conflict and did really engage youth in many development and political activities and projects. However, they played very limited roles during the current armed conflict because of various reasons such as their week capacities to cope with situation of war and the stop of funding projects of political nature in addition to the sudden change in the priorities and needs of the community that made many CSOs change their priorities to humanitarian relief. Because of this apparent connection between the CSOs' roles and youth's political participation, youth stress on the significance of the CSOs' roles, expecting them to play the following roles in order to overcome the challenges and barriers to youth's political participation:

- Design and implement projects and programs that raise youth's political awareness participation.
- Promote a balanced and patriotic political culture away from intolerance, partisanship and the personal, tribal and the sectarian interests, characterized by flexibility of relationships and interactions among the community members.
- Contribute in creating and supporting a national to address the community issues and to restore the balance between the narrow social and sectarian loyalties and the patriotic loyalties to mitigate the extreme discourse and accomplish the social cohesion, coexistence and peace.
- Observe issues that negatively impact youth's participation, highlighting them in the media, design and implement interventions to address them.
- Search and raise funds to improve youth's economic and social conditions.
- Amplify youth's voices locally, nationally, regionally and internationally, advocating their issues and expectations.
- Adopt, support and build the capacities of the youth initiatives and the newly-established political coalitions to improve their performance in the political scenes.
- Constantly build youth's capacities and raise their awareness to empower them to play effective roles in politics.
- Network youth with all the relevant local, national, regional and international stakeholders.

5.4 – The Political Parties:
The political parties are a very effective means of creating a fertile environment for youth's political engagement at the local and national levels. Though, to a certain extent, such political parties played this role prior to the armed conflict, many youth think that the political parties' roles during the armed conflict were not sufficiently effective. Worse still, many political parties played negative roles in fueling the conflict by engaging youth in the armed conflict either as fighters or media supporters with no real roles to promote youth's peaceful political participation. Therefore, the political parties have a great responsibility in this aspect and, as youth think, they should play the following roles to support youth's political participation:

- Practice internal democracy and engage youth in all the internal political processes, including decision-making.
- Give real opportunities for youth to take decision-making and leadership positions within the political parties.
- Constantly build youth's capacities and raise their awareness on political issues.
- Adopt and take youth's visions and viewpoints into consideration in the local and national decision-making.
- Observe, advocate and address youth-related issues.
- Provide financial and media support for youth's political activities and initiatives.
- Engage youth in experience and knowledge exchanging programs locally, regionally and internationally.

5.5- Donors:
Funding the activities and projects is very significant to enhance youth's political participation. This was particularly evident during the transitional period, including the NDC when many donors funded many projects and programs that involved youth in the political process and contributed to amplifying youth's voices locally and nationally. But, the eruption of the armed conflict, due to the sudden shift of the priorities, a lot of donors suspended funding projects of political nature, focusing mainly on humanitarian relief with only some exceptions. So, youth think that the donors have a role in supporting their
political participation. The following are the roles that should be played by the donors in order to support youth's political participation:

- Funding the local and national CSOs' projects that support youth's political participation and improve their social and economic circumstances.
- Build the national and local CSOs' capacities, engaging them in experience and knowledge exchanging programs to improve their performance during peace and war as well.
- Internationally adopt and advocate youth's issues.

5.6. Media:
Media is a double-edged weapon and it is one of the most effective means on people and the communities. So, it should play a positive role in supporting youth's peaceful political participation. As youth expect, the following are the roles that should be played by media to overcome the challenges and barriers to their political participation:
- Implement awareness raising activities and programs that raise youth's awareness on the political issues and the importance of their political participation.
- Media advocate youth-related issues in order to raise them to the relevant authorities and decision-makers.
- Promote youth activities and initiatives in the media to motivate them continue such activities and initiatives.
- Support and engage youth in the political media.
- Establish an objective, independent and neutral political media serves the national issues and allocated spaces for youth to take part in this media.
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