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CMI NEWS

SPOTLIGHT ON YEMEN



Yemen

- » Population: 25.4 million
- » Human Development Index: 160/186
- » Gender Gap Index: 136/136
- » Labour force participation rate: men 74% / women 20%
- » Enrolment ratio in secondary school: men 46% / women 21%
- » Literacy rate: men 82% / women 48%

Sources: CIA World Factbook, Human Development Report 2013, the Global Gender Gap Report 2013, UNICEF Yemen Gender Equality Profile 2011

Text/Photos: Caroline Haga / CMI

Yemeni women work together to strengthen their participation in public life

Yemen has the highest inequality rate between men and women in the world according to many international indicators of women's status. However, quite surprisingly, women were very active during the uprising in 2011 that called for profound political reforms. This provided a historic opportunity for them to be broadly involved in the negotiations about the country's future.

CMI works to support Yemeni women, so that their voices continue to be heard throughout the transition. In the beginning of December, a group of influential women – the Women's Forum – met in Istanbul to discuss their joint efforts to support women's political participation. "Here we may have differences of opinion, but we all agree that there are common women's issues that we all need to work on together. Nobody can do it on their own," explained Salma Al-Masaabi on behalf of the enthusiastic participants.

In Yemen, one of the poorest countries in the world, the role of women in public life has traditionally been marginal. At present, there is only one woman among the total 301 representatives in the lower house of the parliament. Only 1 in 5 women participate in the workforce or enroll in secondary school, and less than half of women are literate.

Yemen is currently in the final stages of a national dialogue that aims to find solutions to key issues facing the country. The involvement of women has been unprecedented in the talks about the country's future. With strong support from the international community, nearly one third of the more than 500 seats at the National Dialogue Conference (NDC) were allocated to women. Moreover, three of the nine working groups are chaired by them.

A forum with women from diverse political backgrounds and regions

Despite the current visible role for women in this process, there is a concern that the issues of specific importance for them will not be satisfyingly addressed in the dialogue outcomes or the new constitution, and that they will continue to be marginalised in future political life.

CMI has been working in Yemen since 2011 and women have been integrally involved in all phases of our project. Recognising the particular concerns related to women's participation and gender issues, CMI has since January regularly brought together 25 women to discuss issues of mutual concern for women across political divides. The participants consider this Women's Forum unique, as it comprises representatives from all NDC working groups as well as all represented political entities, including independent women.

"This forum has been great ever since the start in Sana'a", stated Ms **Al-Masaabi**, a governorate-level education department director and an active member of one of the main political parties. "The project brings together women from various backgrounds and regions, without any discrimination or distinction. It is a very good gathering for exchanging opinions, ideas and political beliefs. Women from all backgrounds need to be brought together to discuss the issues because the ideas of women are common across the board."



Fighting for more equal representation of women in decision-making

The ultimate aim of the Women's Forum is to support continued participation of women in political decision-making. Since the start of the national dialogue in March 2013, the participants have prepared joint recommendations on key issues discussed during the dialogue to ensure that their views and experiences are reflected. These have been submitted to all dialogue participants.

At the workshop in Istanbul, the participants agreed on the common issues they want to take further. They particularly prioritised joint efforts in strengthening women's political participation and engaging both women and men in dialogue on issues of importance for women. As many studies show, full inclusion of women benefits the whole society.

Dr **Najat Juma'an**, professor of business, summarised the joint hope of the participants: "We are fighting to get no less than 30% of women to participate in decision making at all levels. If we can achieve this point, as well as we have friends among the women who work at home, Yemen can become the nation that we look for to be one of the world's best nations to live in."

Interviews with two influential Yemeni women: the young activist and the business leader

During the gathering of CMI-supported Women's Forum in Istanbul, we had the opportunity to hear the fascinating life stories and views of some of the participating Yemeni women coming from different backgrounds, including political parties, civil society, the business community and independent activism. Here is the story of two such strong women who are seeking to make a difference to Yemen's future as members of the National Dialogue Conference. More inspiring life stories will be published on CMI's website in the beginning of the year, so stay tuned.

BELQES AL-ABDALI

Youth representative at the National Dialogue Conference, chairperson for the Afaq Al-Tagheer Forum in Taiz and an active member in many youth organisations

- I was born to a simple family. Ever since I was young my parents were trying to develop my skills and talents because I was always a very active young girl. One of my relatives told my father that girls do not need to be educated, but he insisted. Some people in my society were actually even saying that I need to wear the veil, which covers the face, but I did not want to wear it and my father granted me the freedom to choose what I wanted to do. I completed my university education and my parents always supported me.

During her studies in accounting, Belqes became more and more interested in social and political issues in her country, took on writing about them and joined youth organisations. When the uprising she had been waiting for began in 2011, she became actively involved.



Belqes (middle) discusses with other Yemeni women the issues they wish to jointly take forward

- I always felt that Yemen is going through a difficult time and that we need change. When the revolution for change began, I came very much involved in it, because it was something that we the youth had been waiting for.
- I established an initiative during the revolution: the forum for changing horizons. It is a joint collaboration between young men and women. We established a day to honour the Yemeni female revolutionaries, because we used to feel that women were absent from the Yemeni political scene. We have now been celebrating it for the past three years in Taiz.

Due to her activism, Belqes was chosen as a representative for the youth of her home region Taiz at the NDC. She feels that it has been an important venue but fears that the end results will not benefit everyone as there are in her view shortcomings regarding its representativeness. As for the issues debated at the NDC, she has a clear view of which would be the most important for women.

- Of course it is a historic forum and we need it because there is no other solution, but I am worried that the negative aspects will prevail and will undermine arriving to solutions [that will benefit] people on the street who are suffering daily. I think that the NDC has shown that women can be more aware than men of the national opinion, the people on the street.
- We as women need to support the quota of at least 30% membership of women in the three main powers: executive, judicial and legislative. If women are in decision-making positions, they will defend their rights in these positions. What is also very important for me is making education mandatory for women and determining the [minimum] age for marriage to be 18 years, in addition to resolutions that call for economic empowerment of women.

And what is her personal dream for the future?

- Can I give three? I would like to be a parliamentarian and represent the people from the streets. I also hope that with my colleagues at the forum for changing horizons we can create a large civil society organisation that can serve the people. And I also hope to be a house wife and get married and have some children. I want it all!



Dr Juma'an shares her views during the Women's Forum meeting in Istanbul

DR NAJAT JUMA'AN

Civil society organisation representative at NDC, business owner and consultant, professor of business at Sa'naa University and active member at trade associations

- I used to be Vice-General Manager at our family business and then I joined the government as a Vice-Dean for the financial institution from 2005-2011. I came back to my family business after 2011 and have worked with my brother to develop the family business. We are now developing corporate governance within the company and I am a board member. I also established a company in 2001 and am the General Director for it.

Despite very few women in the workforce and hardly any in the same position as her, she feels that she has been treated well as a business woman, particularly due to her extensive education. She has a PhD in business administration from the United States with a focus in strategic and financial management. Najat actively supports a stronger economic role for Yemeni women and believes that this may be achieved by developing a culture that is friendly towards business women or women who own businesses.

- One aspect that has helped me a lot to deal with the business community is my background. My father encouraged me and my degree helped me to deal with all these difficulties and obstacles. Although I still sometimes feel that there is a glass ceiling for women to conquer such a field as being a business woman or a member of a family business as a woman.
- There is a stereotype of women that they can only be at home. We need to work hard to change this culture and to see women in different roles, not only as a wife at home, but she could also be a business woman, she could be a lawyer or an engineer. Women also have to work hard if they want to be professionally accepted.

She believes that there is a strong relationship between business and peace.

- If we don't have peace, business cannot grow. Strategy and vision need a stable environment. I cannot plan for tomorrow if I don't know what will happen tomorrow.

She stresses that women took to the streets during the uprising in 2011 for the same reasons as men did. During the dialogue conference, she strongly pushed for the equal treatment of everyone.

- [Women] were marginalised, they didn't have opportunities, they were scared that their kids might not have a good future, especially with high unemployment and a high poverty rate. I think these are the reasons that brought women to demonstrate, and show that they are upset and request change. People are equal in front of the law and in their opportunities. We should not discriminate between people. The constitution should be built on these principles.

As for a future peaceful Yemen, Najat believes that all members of the NDC should forget their individual interests and work towards a common goal.

- If we think about Yemen, about the people of Yemen, what we want to do for the people of Yemen, what we want to do for our coming generation, how we want to build Yemen, then I think peace will come.
- » More information about CMI's project in Yemen

Project news

High-level seminar highlighted importance of inclusivity, local ownership and coordination between international peace mediation actors



Altogether 80 key mediation and conflict resolution practitioners gathered on 14 November in Brussels to jointly discuss the new United Nation's guidance for effective mediation and the EU's experiences in applying these principles in practice. Gathering an impressive list of international speakers, including such prominent mediation experts as President **Martti Ahtisaari** and UN Mediator-in-Residence **Margaret Vogt**, the seminar discussed how the UN principles could best be implemented in EU's mediation efforts.

Highlighting the importance for EU to be aware of these fundamentals, Ms Vogt remarked: "Failure to follow these guidelines may lead us to do some harm. For example, if we are not conscious of the need to be coherent when trying to help in a conflict situation we may actually hurt the process."

- » [Read more](#)

Project news



Seeking an identity: Defining paths for conflict prevention and sustainable peace in the Mano River Union

CMI and the Mano River Union organised their third high-level seminar on the link between identity and conflict in the region in October 2013. It tackled the exploitation of identity for political gain, and the fact that the people of the Mano River Union should be considered as one people with a common destiny. The seminar gathered key regional actors and stakeholders in the field of elections, refugees, identification and citizenship to jointly share their experiences.

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CMI and UNDP conducted mediation course for key Togolese stakeholders



In September 2013, CMI and UNDP jointly organised a course in Lomé on conflict analysis and mediation for key stakeholders of the Togolese socio-political dialogue. Representatives from national institutions, civil society organisations, media and political parties from diverse and sometimes opposing social, political and religious backgrounds came together and discussed a range of subjects that touched upon the core of the recent election-related crisis in Togo.

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Organisational news

CMI selected as Finnish Foreign Ministry's development cooperation partnership organisation

CMI has been selected as a new partnership organisation for development cooperation by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland. To be eligible as a partnership organisation, the NGO or foundation must have strong expertise and experience in development cooperation matters and good knowledge of the local operating environment.

“We are very happy and proud to have been selected as a partnership organisation”, says CMI's Executive Director **Tuija Talvitie**. “For over 13 years, CMI has been carrying out a number of projects across the world to help prevent and resolve conflicts. This decision reinforces our strong commitment to continue working to promote sustainable peace.”

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President Ahtisaari and CMI joined the world in honoring the memory of Nelson Mandela



President Ahtisaari stated: “The most impressive man of my generation has passed away. No one has influenced my life more than President **Nelson Mandela**.”

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Ahtisaari Days focused on mediation in everyday life and the world's conflicts

The national Ahtisaari Days were held for the third time on 7 November. The programme included various activities in the town of Kuopio, which was the main site this year, but the day was also celebrated in schools around Finland. President Ahtisaari and CMI staff visited several schools in Kuopio to highlight the importance of mediation and conciliation in everyday life.

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Season's Greetings!

WE BELIEVE IN A CONFLICT-FREE WORLD

We believe that all violent conflicts can be resolved if there's sufficient political will and skill. Achieving lasting peace requires long-term commitment, local ownership, creative solutions and broad involvement by everyone, including women and youth.

In today's world, we are all interconnected. The development and welfare of other nations, no matter how far away, has an effect on all our lives.

Help us make a difference and bring more peace to the world!

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