



Moving beyond promises

Perceptions, priorities and participation of youth in Yemen's transition



September 2012



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in Yemen's transition**



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About the project

'Amplifying Youth Voices' is a project funded by the German Federal Foreign Office and the Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations (ifa), run by Saferworld in partnership with Resonate Yemen and Tamkeen Development Foundation. The project supports young women and men to ensure their voices are heard by policymakers during the transition period. The project has three main components: research into young people's perceptions and priorities for the transition to inform evidence-based advocacy; strengthening the advocacy skills of select youth leaders and helping them develop stronger and more inclusive networks across Yemen; and building constructive relationships between youth leaders and Yemeni decision makers so that young people can bring their concerns, insights and experiences to bear on political decisions.

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Yemen



This map is intended for illustrative purposes only. Saferworld takes no position on whether this representation is legally or politically valid.

Acronyms

EU	European Union	UN	United Nations
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council	US	United States
GPC	General People's Congress	WFP	World Food Programme
JMP	Joint Meeting Parties	YER	Yemeni riyal
NGO	Non-governmental organisation	YSP	Yemeni Socialist Party
TDF	Tamkeen Development Foundation		

Executive summary

EIGHTEEN MONTHS AFTER THE FIRST PROTESTS called for former President Ali Abdullah Saleh to step down in February 2011, Yemen's fate remains uncertain. A key factor in the long-term success of the country's transition will be whether it is seen to be inclusive of youth and other groups, and responsive to the grievances that brought hundreds of thousands of people onto the streets. Yemeni citizens, nearly 75 percent of whom are under the age of 30, will measure the transition's progress by its ability to address these long-standing grievances.

Building on initial research undertaken by Saferworld in 2011, this report investigates the attitudes of youth groups, and in particular self-described 'independent' youth activists who were instrumental in building and maintaining the momentum of the protests throughout 2011. The research is based on focus group discussions, roundtable discussions and key informant interviews conducted between March and July 2012 with youth activists between the ages of 18 and 35 from 17 different governorates across Yemen. Based on these consultations, the report provides an insight into some of the discussions and debates happening between young women and men, their perceptions of the transition process, and the role they have played in it. It also provides recommendations to ensure that the perspectives of young women and men inform national and international policy in the transition period.

Young women and men are highly critical of the progress of the transition to date. They see a general crisis of authority and the need for tangible improvements in their day-to-day lives such as electricity, jobs, basic services and infrastructure. While everyone agrees on the success of the UN mission, young people single out the United States, Iran, and Saudi Arabia as states whose roles have been characterised by self-interested interference that has done more harm than good.

The research identifies three key priorities for the imminent National Dialogue process: restructuring the military, addressing the 'Southern Issue', and implementing a process of transitional justice. The research also highlights a number of internal and external obstacles to youth participation in the transition. External barriers include the top-down structure of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) initiative and its exclusion of young women and men, the existence of more established political forces seeking to gain from a divided and weak youth movement, and a divisive and unaccountable media. Internal obstacles include the lack of financial and technical capacity among youth activists, the absence of accepted leadership, and growing divisions among politically active youth.

Young people identify a number of opportunities for making a lasting impact on Yemen's social and political culture. These opportunities include developing a strong and independent National Youth Conference that can represent youth from all parts of the country, and raising awareness of civic rights and responsibilities at the local

level. Meanwhile, many youth feel that street politics, with its focus on bottom-up change, remains the best way they can make their voices heard.

What emerges from the research is an image of young people as an alternative 'third force' to the old regime and the political establishment. They have positioned themselves as 'guardians' of the revolution, and as advocates for the national good against what they perceive as the narrow self-interest of the political elite. Because of this, young women and men remain one of the key repositories of legitimacy within the newly reconfigured Yemeni political system, and potentially strong consensus-builders. Their inclusion in the transition process is necessary for the legitimacy of the process, and to improve its chances of securing and maintaining long-term justice and peace.

The report sets out four key recommendations for how to promote greater youth participation at all levels of the political process, within civil society, political parties, the National Dialogue, and the media – and to ensure that the transition process in Yemen leads to increased and sustained peace and security.

1. Reconstitute state authority and address negative perceptions

The **Government of Yemen**, with appropriate support from international partners, should:

- **Reconstitute its legitimacy by developing a clear vision** about the future direction of the country and managing expectations of the transition, communicating this vision to all citizens, particularly those outside of the major cities, and prioritising transparency as an underlying value of the transition.
- **Provide security and resume the provision of other basic services throughout the country.** If Yemenis do not see an improvement in their day-to-day life in terms of the provision of security, water, electricity, and other basic services, the transition will be regarded by Yemenis as incomplete.
- **Engage with and respond to the needs and priorities of Yemenis outside Sana'a** through participatory research and surveys, and adopting local-level approaches to participation.
- **Work closely with the media to promote reporting ethics** that promote peace rather than conflict.

International actors should:

- **Limit actions that are perceived by Yemenis as overstepping the fine line between support and interference** and that would de-legitimise the government's authority, such as drone strikes or informal financial or military support for non-state actors, particularly those accused of human rights abuses.

2. Make progress on youth priorities

The **Government of Yemen**, with appropriate support from international partners, should:

- **Set explicit benchmarks and guarantees** as to how the National Dialogue Conference will take place and how decisions will be made.
- **Ensure that longer term security sector reform is carried out alongside military restructuring, including** the promotion of democratic policing models to reconstitute democratic authority.
- **Address Southern grievances** through immediate and practical good faith gestures to regain trust, such as taking concrete steps towards addressing land disputes, forced retirement and other longstanding grievances.
- **Take concrete measures to respond to the grievances of protesters**, possibly to include releasing all political prisoners and apologising for injustices committed during the uprising.

- **Establish an independent body on transitional justice** that includes a truth-telling commission and reparations for victims and their families.

International actors should:

- **Cease all financial and military support to controversial and unaccountable military and security units.**
- **Support opportunities to build the capacity of civil society** to monitor and advocate for more democratic security sector reform.
- **Encourage the Government of Yemen to include the Southern Issue as a clear agenda point** and not let any stated commitment to the territorial integrity of Yemen get in the way of a genuinely inclusive process that takes the concerns of Southerners seriously.
- **Facilitate opportunities for Yemenis to engage and learn from successful transitional justice processes elsewhere.**

3. Tackle obstacles to youth participation

The **Government of Yemen** and **international supporters** of the GCC initiative should:

- **Develop and communicate a clear, transparent and inclusive peacebuilding process** that engages marginalised and excluded actors, acknowledging that while the GCC initiative was important for ending violent conflict, it is insufficient as a peacebuilding mechanism.
- **Increase support for income and employment generating initiatives for young people,** including revisiting opportunities for Yemeni youth to work in GCC countries.

Yemeni political parties should:

- **Hold internal elections for new leadership** as a concrete sign of their support for change.
- **Put in place clear strategies on reaching out to youth, empowering them and promoting youth leadership** within their parties, based on clear guidelines for youth engagement.
- **Promote greater opportunities for youth from political parties to meet with party leaders** through roundtable discussions and networking events.

4. Build on opportunities for future engagement

The **Government of Yemen** and **international actors** should:

- **Support the National Youth Conference and other coalition-building initiatives** while also respecting the independence of young women and men in deciding on the conference's design, structure and topics.
- **Continue to reach out to a broad selection of youth activists from across the country in a transparent and open manner, and promote opportunities for networking and engagement.** This could include increasing youth-policymaker engagement through roundtable discussions and interactions with policy experts that can help young people develop, communicate and implement their visions.
- **Support the capacity-building efforts of newly emerging youth initiatives.** Newly formed youth groups continue to require support in strengthening their fundraising, advocacy and organisational skills, as well as thematic and technical knowledge around security sector reform and wider monitoring of the democratic transition.
- **Promote bottom-up civic engagement through initiatives such as small grants.** A number of newly formed youth initiatives are currently working on local issues that have national relevance, such as neighbourhood security initiatives and raising awareness of civic rights and responsibilities. Youth initiatives can be financially supported indirectly through small grants administered by local and international NGOs.

1

Introduction

“If the coming national dialogue doesn’t include women and youth, it won’t be a national dialogue.”

Young woman, Ta’iz

THERE IS GROWING DISQUIET IN SANA’A as Yemenis struggle to make sense of the country’s current transition process. For many, and especially for Yemen’s youth, the 2011 protests were an opportunity to make their voices heard and to demand a civic democratic state. However, while hundreds of thousands of women and men across the country broke the barrier of fear through their activism and were empowered on a social level, the uprising was quickly overshadowed by powerful political elites, who utilised the instability caused by mass mobilisation to ignite a long-brewing conflict at the heart of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh’s regime. This led to the fragmentation of the military and the outbreak of violent conflict in many cities across the country, including Sana’a. Following months of bitter fighting, civil war was averted by a successful UN mediation process and in November 2011, Saleh signed a transition plan officially led by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) that set out a power-sharing deal that would lead to his resignation.

The GCC initiative was signed by Saleh, as head of the General People’s Congress (GPC), and by the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP), the broad umbrella of opposition groups dominated by the Islah party. While it was successful in stopping the conflict between competing political and military elites in the short-term, the GCC initiative was rejected by Southern groups, the Houthi movement, and a large number of independent youth activists, all of whom felt excluded from the process and held deep reservations about the initiative’s ability to deliver long-lasting positive change.

Under the GCC initiative and an accompanying set of implementation mechanisms, an ambitious two-year roadmap was sketched out for the country’s transition from Saleh’s rule. During the first phase, which began with the signing of the GCC initiative in November 2011, a national unity government was formed and a military committee set up and tasked with overseeing the reform of the armed forces. Phase one ended with ceremonial presidential elections on 21 February 2012, in which Abdu Rabo Mansour Hadi, nominated by the GPC and the JMP as the sole candidate, was elected president. In phase two, President Hadi and his government have been given two years to restructure the military-security apparatus, address issues of transitional justice and launch an inclusive National Dialogue Conference with the goal of revising the constitution before February 2014. The Conference is to be preceded by an inclusive preparatory process and followed by a subsequent process of constitutional reform reflecting the Conference’s outcomes. The transitional process is scheduled to culminate in general elections in February 2014.

The GCC power-sharing agreement between rival elite groups and the gradual re-balancing of influence in the armed forces is stabilising the situation in the short term. In the medium and longer term, business as usual is not an option. Yemen currently faces the worst humanitarian and economic crisis in its history. Unemployment is at an all-time high, and is well above 50 percent for youth under 30 years of age, who constitute nearly 75 percent of the population.¹ The repeated sabotaging of the pipelines in Mareb and Ras Issa and continued insecurity on the roads have led to an approximately 25 percent decrease in crude oil production in 2011, which forms three quarters of the government's income and 90 percent of the country's exports.² It has been almost one year since Saleh signed the GCC agreement, and yet most households continue to experience only a few hours of electricity a day, even in Sana'a. Not only is the lack of electricity a drain on morale, it is also a drain on productivity.

Despite these challenges, there is a chance for Yemen's transitional government to turn the recent political turmoil into an opportunity to begin moving the country in the direction of greater peace and security. However, the importance of the next two years cannot be overstated. As UN Special Adviser to Yemen Jamal Benomar said in a statement on 17 July 2012, "to put it bluntly, if the national dialogue fails, many expect the entire transition and peace process will collapse. It is clear that the stakes are very high."³ A key factor in the long-term success of the country's transition will be its ability to ensure that it is perceived to be both inclusive of youth and other groups and responsive to the grievances that brought hundreds of thousands of people to the streets in 2011.⁴ Even though influential actors within the Southern Movement, the Houthis, and independent youth activists rejected the GCC initiative, many continue to see the National Dialogue process as an integral part of the country's transition from Saleh's rule, and Yemenis from across the country are competing to participate in the National Dialogue Conference to ensure their views are reflected. This is a positive sign that things have changed in the psyche of a country that only a year ago was on the brink of full-blown civil war.

For the purposes of this paper, 'youth' refers to young women and men between the ages of 18 and 35. This age bracket takes into account cultural conceptions of 'youth', and also factors in the report's desire to focus on youth of voting age. The report investigates the attitudes of politically active young women and men, and in particular self-described 'independent' youth activists who were instrumental in building and maintaining the momentum of the protests throughout 2011. Although they remained ideologically and regionally diverse, the activists who joined the protests as 'independents' shifted the foundations of Yemeni politics, which was hitherto contained in a top-down political system of backroom deals and patronage networks. The report examines the views of these young women and men on the transition to date, their priorities for the future and the way in which they are currently participating in bringing about change. It seeks to provide an insight into some of the discussions and debates happening between these young women and men.

Initial consultations for this research began on the cusp between phase one and two of the country's transition period. Following the elections on 21 February 2012, Saferworld and its partner, Tamkeen Development Foundation (TDF) launched the research. In March and April 2012 TDF conducted a total of 12 focus group discussions in Sana'a, Ta'iz, Aden and Hodeida, which included participants selected from neighbouring governorates. The result was that the discussions captured the perspectives of 136 young women and men aged between the ages of 18 and 35 from Sana'a, Mareb,

¹ Madsen E L, *The Effects of a Very Young Age Structure in Yemen: Country Case Study* (Population Action International, 2010).

² Al-Maqtari M, 'Oil in Yemen to run out in 12 years,' *Yemen Times*, 12 April 2012, at www.yementimes.com/en/1563/news/696/Oil-in-Yemen-to-run-out-in-12-years.htm, accessed 28 August 2012.

³ Schratz C, 'Food insecurity threatens fragile peace in Yemen,' *South-South News*, 19 July 2012, at www.southsouthnews.com/pages/NewsDetails.aspx?NewsId=404df354-14e2-4a36-ab28-e760784c9473, accessed 28 August 2012.

⁴ Saferworld research conducted in 2011 found that the protests clearly prioritised several long-standing grievances relating to exclusion from political participation, abuses by security forces, and corruption associated with the current political system. For more information, see Haddad S and Rogers J, *Public Protest and Visions for Change: Yemen*, (Saferworld, November 2011).

Amran, Dhammar, Hodeida, Rima, Hajjah, Ta'iz, Ibb, Aden, Lahj, Abyan, Dhalea and Shabwa.

This research was supplemented by further consultations: in June 2012, Saferworld held three roundtable discussions in Sana'a which brought together youth activists from seventeen different governorates. Discussions revolved around the activists' perceptions of the transition process to date, what they felt were the most pressing issues the transitional government should address in their regions, and ideas on how the National Dialogue Conference could be made more inclusive. In July 2012 Saferworld also conducted key informant interviews with a selection of youth activists from Hadramaut, Aden, Ta'iz, Sana'a and Sa'ada, to examine in greater depth some of the issues that emerged from the group consultations. Further information on the research methodology is provided in the annex.

Based on these consultations, the report also provides recommendations grounded in these wide-ranging consultations to ensure that the perspectives of young women and men inform national and international policy in the transition. Although the transition process is fragile and uneven, it constitutes an opportunity to engage with youth and ensure they are included in rebuilding Yemen's social contract.

2

Perceptions of the transition

“There are some people in rural areas who don’t even know we have a new president.”

Young woman, Hadramaut.

THIS SECTION INVESTIGATES YOUTH ATTITUDES towards the transition process, including their views on political developments as well as changes they have observed in their day-to-day lives. Young women and men often measure the success of the transition by its ability to bring security and basic services to the population. In Sana’a, inclusion is also a significant yardstick against which to measure the transition, particularly among more politically active youth. Based on these criteria, young women and men are highly critical of transition progress in the first six months following President Hadi’s election. There is a marked centre-periphery dimension to this perception: young people in Sana’a are on the whole far more positive about the transition process, while those outside the capital feel that, both in terms of national politics as well as in their daily realities, things are not improving. A young Adeni man remarked, “Conventionally, a transition is supposed to be a change from bad to good. Here, it has gone from bad to worse.”

A crisis of authority

“I’m telling you if the country falls into chaos, everything will be lost. No revolution, no Hiraak⁵, no Southern Issue, no Sa’ada issue⁶, no stability, no youth. Somalia! And we are already hungry!”

Young man, Aden.

Throughout the country, young Yemenis are grappling with a general crisis of authority. A key reason for this is that authority has not been durably re-constituted through the one-man elections of 21 February 2012. Many young people feel that the election process was a waste of money, particularly since authority in Sana’a and elsewhere – from the structures of the state and the military to newspaper banners and the media –

⁵ Al-Hiraak Al-Janoubi (the Southern Movement), or Hiraak, is a diverse and loosely organised popular movement that emerged in 2007, originally as a rights-based movement requesting equality for Southerners under the law and a change in the relationship between North and South Yemen. Regime repression of protests bolstered calls for secession, and by 2011 Hiraak had become a fluid group that housed a number of ideological preferences, from violent secession through to unity and referendum. For more information, see International Crisis Group, *Breaking Point? Yemen’s Southern Question* (ICG, October 2011).

⁶ The ‘Sa’ada issue’ refers to grievances in the governorate of Sa’ada leading up to, and including, the wars that began in 2004 between the Yemeni government and the Houthi movement. For more information, see International Crisis Group, *Yemen: Defusing the Sa’ada Time Bomb* (ICG, May 2009).

remain contested. Rumours that President Hadi has yet to move into the presidential palace⁷ and is constrained in terms of his movements validate these concerns.

Former President Saleh's continued presence in the country, and his control over large sections of the political and military establishment further erode President Hadi's legitimacy in the eyes of young people. Many believe the former president still wields substantial political influence behind the scenes. Dismissing the transitional government as "a government only in name", a young woman in Aden said she sees real power to be still firmly under Saleh's control, while a youth leader from Aden believes that "Ali Abdullah Saleh is here, he inhibits the transition period [...] he is the one who is behind this crisis now."

Many young people also believe that both divisions within the military and the subsequent GCC 'power-sharing' deal are impeding attempts to form a clear break with the past regime. "The GCC is based on a division of power between those who signed it and it excluded those who didn't. We want reconciliation and inclusiveness, not elite power-sharing," said a young man in Sana'a. As a result, many continue to struggle to make sense of transition priorities in a context where the political settlement remains contested and the threat of a return to the violence of June 2011 continues to impede progress on national priorities. The permanent state of conflict management that has characterised national politics in Yemen for a number of decades continues. Internal divisions and a struggle for control of key institutions of the state, especially within the military and security apparatus, have precluded progress on other concerns.

Ambiguous and contested authority is not limited to the president, but radiates down to the governorate and local level. Youth from across the country gave examples of how power and authority remain contested and unclear at the local levels. "In Hajjah the situation has got worse and worse. The Houthis are here, Al-Qaeda is here, and we don't really know what is going on. Our governor has no authority and can't even enter the governorate," a youth activist from Hajjah explained.

Faith in the transitional government improved during the first six months following President Hadi's election because of a number of strategic moves he made in restructuring the military to diffuse power away from Saleh's inner circle.⁸ Nonetheless, youth discussions of the transition often involve debates about the best way to rebuild 'legitimate authority', either through restoring security, creating a new constitution or electing a new parliament in free and fair elections, reflecting a deep unease with the reality of contested authority. A majority of young people consulted articulated their strong desire for a more effective government: "There should be a real government that can dismiss and give orders [...] and which doesn't consider itself a guest in the government or a ministry," said a young woman in Ta'iz.

Security, the economy and basic services as the yardsticks of the transition

"What do I want from the transition? I want security. I want electricity. I want health. I want good roads. I want no army in the streets. I want a job. That's what I want, but I don't know where to start."

Youth activist, Sana'a.

The success of the transition will be measured by the government's ability to bring security, basic services and economic development to the lives of average Yemenis. Young people demand tangible improvements in their day-to-day lives: electricity, jobs, access to health and education, and rebuilding the infrastructure destroyed by months of fighting and neglect are as much, if not more important to their perceptions

⁷ Al-Yemeni A Q, 'Why Hasn't the President Moved into the Presidential Palace?', *Al-Ahale*, 25 July 2012, at alahale.net/article/4633, accessed 28 August 2012.

⁸ Most recently, President Hadi transferred the command of several Republican Guards' units, under the command of Saleh's son Ahmed Ali Saleh, to different regional commands. This gained him praise from many youth activists and Hadi has subsequently seen a rise in his popularity among many youth, particularly in Sana'a. See BBC News, 'Yemen's President Hadi restructures military', 7 August 2012, at www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-19166152, accessed 28 August 2012.

of the transition's success, than high-level politics. In particular, youth single out security as a pressing priority and the largest obstacle to restoring the economy.

Youth assessments of progress so far are negative, even though most young people want to remain optimistic. The further away youth are from Sana'a, the less optimistic they are about the transition and the less they felt that the transition is having an impact on their daily lives. In Sana'a, perceptions are tentatively optimistic, though security remains a pressing concern. According to a young man interviewed in Sana'a in March 2012, "after [the] elections things have slowly started coming back to normal. There's a sense that a lot of things have been achieved, although not everything." Another man from Sana'a agreed with this assessment: "I see the electricity coming back, kind of, and that is a beautiful thing. But then I remember that the political prisoners and arrested demonstrators haven't been released."

Outside of Sana'a, and particularly in the South, feelings are strikingly more pessimistic. In Aden, insecurity is the most pressing concern identified by youth in the wake of the transition. This is especially felt by young women, whose daily reality is shaped by fear of crime, increasing lawlessness, and violence between armed groups. Violence is attributed largely to the security forces themselves, and though most blame the former regime, Hiraak is also implicated in creating chaos and disorder. One woman from Aden said "Although done under the guise of 'laws' and 'initiatives', the transition itself has become random and chaotic. We are now living its results. It is like waking up suddenly from a dream... everywhere there is random violence. No one can cross the road safely." In Ta'iz and Ibb, a young man highlighted the on-going fragmentation of the security forces and the resulting spread of lawlessness as an indication that the transition is not on track: "now the army and security forces are private. I can rent two cars and a gun and do whatever I want."

Beyond law and order, electricity and food security are also major concerns, although they are seen as being closely tied to the unstable security situation. Many young people, like a young man in Ta'iz, argue that "you cannot fix the economic situation without security and safety; they are the main prerequisites." In Hodeida, the lack of electricity has led to renewed protests,⁹ while in rural areas, and for the most vulnerable city dwellers, growing food insecurity and the worsening humanitarian situation have put millions of already vulnerable Yemenis at acute risk of malnutrition. In March 2012, the UN World Food Programme (WFP) classified approximately 10 million people – 45 percent of the population – as food insecure.¹⁰

International actors: 'Good' mediation vs. 'bad' intervention

In what has so far been a messy and uneven transition, one of the few things that everyone in the country can agree on is the success of the UN mission led by Special Adviser Jamal Benomar. The mission is credited with averting what many saw as an inevitable civil war in late 2011, and youth consistently praise Ben Omar's ability to have gained the trust of all parties in the country, and his support for an inclusive transition process.

However, as a young woman from Ta'iz pointed out, while "in Yemen we prefer outside mediation to solve our problems," there is a fine line between mediation and interference. Youth single out the United States, Iran, and Saudi Arabia as states whose roles in the country have been characterised by self-interested interference that has done more harm than good. Many youth express a respect and admiration for President Hadi and a desire to see him succeed in bringing about real change. At the same time many youth suspect that regional and international powers are continuing to provide

⁹ Al-Samei M, 'Hodeida and Aden protests condemn constant power outages', *Yemen Times*, 21 June 2012, at www.yementimes.com/en/1583/news/1026/Hodeida-and-Aden-protests-condemn-constant-power-outages.htm, accessed 28 August 2012.

¹⁰ WFP released the preliminary findings of the recently completed UN Comprehensive Food Security Survey for Yemen on 14 March 2012. The full report is available at <http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/ena/wfp247832.pdf>, accessed 7 September 2012.

financial and military support to individuals and state and non-state actors, thereby indirectly supporting the traditional tribal, military and security apparatuses of the former regime.

The GCC initiative is viewed with particular scorn by many youth activists. “The initiative offered Yemen on a golden platter for intervention from the US, Saudi Arabia, Iran and other global and regional powers,” argued a youth leader in Sana’a. Similarly, a youth leader in Hodeida argued that the GCC initiative had been pushed by Saudi Arabia “to encircle and control the revolution.” As a result, an increasing number of young people believe that Yemen is now indirectly ruled by outside powers and that the transition has opened Yemen to deeper intervention from the US, Saudi Arabia and Iran. Part of the reason for this perception is the perceived ‘division’ of tasks by countries, with various aspects of the transition, from the constitution to the national dialogue to military restructuring, having been divided up and ‘handed out’ to various regional and international powers.

Direct decision making power is most often attributed to the US, whose role in restructuring the army is viewed with open distrust, due to the perception of the US as having a vested interest in maintaining Saleh-era leaders with whom it has built up working relations.¹¹ Much of this sentiment translates into criticism of the actions and rhetoric of the US Ambassador to Yemen. A young Adeni man is worth quoting at some length for a colourful film metaphor that captures the dominant mood in many of the consultations throughout the country:

“The American director took all the leading actors and gave them secondary roles, and unfortunately he gave the actors with the secondary roles lead roles this time. The director wasn’t creative and did not convince the people. He convinced only the personalities and the parties who participated – the characters of this play, which we call a farce. The title turned out to be: ‘the people want power-sharing’, not ‘the people want to topple the regime’. [The Director] made Ali Abdullah Saleh rest a little between the first scene and the second scene. All this happened without the will of the people, in the South or the North. They became mere spectators.”

Despite this widespread hostility to the way in which international actors are intervening in Yemen, most participants in focus group discussions agree on the importance in principle of third-party mediation in solving conflicts between different groups at the national level. For instance, youth in the South affirm the need to have a ‘North-South’ dialogue “under international and regional supervision, because the dialogue in Sana’a under the barrels of the artillery is not accepted.”¹² The principle of international involvement is still affirmed by Yemen’s youth groups, but its practice is increasingly criticised.

¹¹ In July 2012, following a year-long suspension, the Pentagon announced that it would resume military aid to Yemen, including a shipment of drones. The \$112 million worth of aid would supply Yemen with military equipment as well as counterterrorism improvement equipment. See Whitlock C and Tate J, ‘US increases planned aid to Yemen in fight against al-Qaeda’, *Washington Post*, 19 July 2012, at www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-increases-planned-aid-to-yemen-in-fight-against-al-qaeda/2012/07/19/gJQAJ3HsvW_story.html, accessed 28 August 2012. For further information about US government assistance to Yemen, see US Department of State, ‘U.S. Government Assistance to Yemen’, 7 August 2012, at www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2012/08/196136.htm, accessed 28 August 2012.

¹² Youth leader in Aden, focus group discussion, March 2012.

3

Priorities for the National Dialogue

IF THE GOVERNMENT OF YEMEN and its international supporters are to capitalise on the broad support for the National Dialogue, it is essential that they maintain inclusiveness and open and transparent communication, to ensure that Sana'a-based policymakers are aware of the concerns of a broad range of Yemenis. One central aspect of this is to ensure that the National Dialogue and the transition reflect the priorities identified by young Yemenis not just in Sana'a but throughout the country.

Determining such transition priorities in the context of an unstable political settlement is highly challenging. For example, all youth consulted agree that re-establishing security is a priority. However, there is less agreement over the steps needed to achieve this aim. Does re-establishing security begin by dismissing high-level officers to avert the danger of a military coup? Does it require reconstituting legitimate authority first by selecting someone who could credibly command the armed forces, dismiss problematic officers and fight violence and crime? Or does restructuring require a legal basis and thus the re-drafting of the constitution first? And if it does, who is entitled to decide who redrafts the constitution?

The research sought to challenge youth to think through different priority options and their implications and spell out which issues they would like to see tackled by the National Dialogue Conference and the broader transition process. Youth were asked to list the top three priorities to be addressed in the National Dialogue. Their answers reflect a remarkable degree of consistency: restructuring the military, addressing the Southern Issue, and transitional justice. The following is a snapshot of the discussions that took place around these priorities.

Priority 1: Restructuring the military and wider security sector reform

"I can't express my opinion because of the army."

Youth leader, Sana'a.

Insecurity remains the most pressing concern identified by young people, and this is closely linked to the need to restructure the military and security services. Youth feel directly threatened by the presence of divided military units in the streets, and also indirectly menaced through exposure to high levels of crime and lawlessness, as well as kidnappings and 'disappearances'. Furthermore, youth express the need to ensure that military units work for the national good rather than elite actors, who they feel use the divided military to destabilise the country. Consequently, young people see army restructuring as the most pressing priority, and link it to wider security concerns such

as lawlessness, terrorism and regime change. Although not explicitly mentioned by youth, the link between military restructuring and increased law and order illustrates the need for broader security sector reform that goes beyond simply restructuring the military and incorporates reform of other security agencies, including the police.

The lack of clear lines of command and accountability within the security services is a key driver of insecurity for young women and men. In late June 2012, government security forces fired into a crowd of protesters in al-Mansoura district in Aden, killing more than a dozen people.¹³ Following a series of similar clashes, many Yemenis demanded to know how President Hadi's security forces could use lethal force in a crowded urban area, much like the former regime had done only a year before. Hadi's defenders suggest that the security forces under the command of Saleh's son and nephews were responsible. Such ambiguity over who is in command of the military and security apparatus makes accountability impossible, sets a dangerous precedent, and ensures that the day-to-day lives of average Yemenis continues to be marked by fear and insecurity.

The lack of state security provision, and the lack of trust in what state security there is, contributes to feelings of insecurity. "I do not feel safe," explained a young woman in Aden. "Weapons have become a psychological outlet. A man goes out in the middle of the night and disturbs people by shooting into the air." Similarly in Sana'a a young man explained "When I walk on the street I don't feel secure as a citizen", while in Hodeida, a young woman described the feeling as being "like having no protection walls. You would never step outside your house after sunset or be able to live your life regularly during the day. At any moment, your rights as a human being could be violated. You could get killed or robbed." This pervasive insecurity is particularly strongly felt by children and other vulnerable groups. A young woman in Ta'iz, for example, discussed in detail her children's anxiety and persistent fear of "the killers and the bombing."

From these personal experiences, youth draw macro-level conclusions about appropriate priorities, highlighting how personal insecurity is linked to the broader process of military restructuring and wider security sector reform, and how this is a necessary step towards ensuring that local-level conflicts are addressed. For example, a young man in Aden argues "If the National Dialogue happens under the current military, which has loyalty only to the local sheikh and no national loyalty, then there will be no dialogue – because it will be a dialogue on the banner of fear. This will lead to war."

In Aden and more broadly in Southern Yemen, the Southern Issue is a cross-cutting concern that affects discussions on military restructuring. Youth in the South stress that restructuring the army must address the issue of the forcibly retired former Southern officers,¹⁴ even if only symbolically, and would need to include reforms that allow more regional independence.

In all consultations, young people throughout the country stress that restructuring the army needs to go beyond simply cherry-picking commanders and specific individuals. Instead, they argue that it requires deeper reform of the structures of the security and military units. A youth leader in Ta'iz expressed concern that a narrow focus on replacing individuals runs the risk of simply shifting power "from one family system to another." Clear mandates and defined relationships between different branches of the armed forces such as between the army and the Republican Guard, as well as between different security forces, need to be established. Young people express a vision of cultural change within the military and the security system, to spread "a culture of loving the country and of being loyal to the country and its people,"¹⁵ and to replace

¹³ Tuhama E, 'Amidst calls for Southern secession: security forces kill protesters', *Yemen Times*, 25 June 2012, at www.yementimes.com/en/1584/news/1043/Amidst-calls-for-southern-secession;-security-forces-kill-protesters.htm, accessed 28 August 2012.

¹⁴ Following the civil war between North and South Yemen in 1994, the regime in Sana'a fired top Southern military commanders and made many others in both the army and the civil service retire. This has emerged as a contentious issue and a driving demand for resolving the Southern Issue. By mid-2007, some of these army officers had founded the 'South Yemen Retired Army Officers Committee'.

¹⁵ Young woman, Ta'iz, March 2012.

what they felt was a narrow focus of loyalty on individual commanders, often along tribal or regional lines.

In addition, and in order to ensure that the military and security apparatus is rebuilt according to a set of shared values, young women and men highlighted the need for accountability for past crimes in order to break with the past. This is explored in greater detail under 'Transitional Justice' in Priority 3.

Priority 2: The Southern Issue

"In order for me to interact with the transition, I have to have faith in the government. But how can I trust someone who stole my money and my rights? Therefore, I believe that any [North-South] dialogue has to begin with a gesture of good faith."

Young woman, Aden.

"The Southern Issue is bigger than just an issue of human rights or the economy," a young Adeni man explained. Finding a solution to the Southern Issue was listed as a top priority in all consultations in the South, though some opted in the short term to give priority to establishing security. A young woman in Aden explained the need for a solution by saying "the revolution's goal was to overthrow the regime, but we cannot afford to delay the Southern Issue until after we achieve the initial goals of the revolution."

The failure of the transition to ensure even basic inclusion of Southern voices and concerns, let alone bring about tangible change in the South, is causing disillusionment that is fuelling greater support for separation. While youth in the North share a desire to address the Southern Issue, many tend to assume it can be subsumed under broader headings such as reforming the constitution towards federalism. They also tend to closely link the issue of Sa'ada and the South, while Southerners more frequently insist on its distinctiveness. This leads some Southerners to feel that their issues are being ignored, in part because they are not labelled appropriately. This increases their distrust of Northern elites – as evidenced in a young woman's admonition that "they don't even mention these issues [the concerns of the South]. They are always talking about the army and the regime." A young man expressed the same sentiment: "Development and reform programmes are all talking about the Northern regions. Where are the South and the problems we have?"

While there is widespread recognition of the importance of the Southern Issue and addressing Southern concerns as a matter of priority, concrete demands vary among youth in the South. A federal constitution may be able to meet Southern demands, but the process by which a solution is arrived at is crucial. Young women and men in the South, including youth leaders, all demand good faith gestures, such as directly reaching out to prominent and respected Southerners and the clear prioritisation of the Southern Issue in the National Dialogue, irrespective of final status questions. For them, an inclusive process that places Southern concerns front and centre is now the only way to tackle the Southern Issue, and it needs to begin with concrete gestures from the transitional government to build trust and demonstrate a desire to tackle the issue seriously.

Within the South, discontent with Hiraak, an escalating cycle of outbidding, and disagreements between different interpretations of what a solution to the Southern Issue looks like, lie just beneath the surface. While young women and men in Aden often argue that the revolution began in the South in 2007, many young people sharply criticised the Southern leadership, particularly leaders of Hiraak, for continuously raising the ceiling of demands. As a young man in Aden argued:

"We were inside Aden when the revolution started from al-Mansoura. But because they are out of touch and because of their special interests, the so-called leaders of Hiraak were not prepared for this stage... They said that this does not concern us, either closely or remotely. If Hiraak had a qualified and prepared leadership, it would have embraced the

revolution and supported the fall of the regime, but it seems to have been an integral part of the regime.”

Young people in the South typically fall into three broad categories: those seeking to maintain unity, those seeking some form of self-determination, and those who believe separation is the only way to long-lasting peace. The largest segment of those consulted preferred some form of self-determination, ideally through a referendum under international supervision. A young man from Aden said, “Our brothers in the South and the brothers in the North need to be convinced that the Southern Issue must be solved according to the will of the people of the South. Give us an opportunity to decide what state we want to be a part of. Give us the option of federalism, and also give the JMP and Islah the opportunity to persuade the people of the South that it is in our interests to maintain unity.”

For a smaller but undoubtedly growing number of young people, separation is an increasingly more tempting option. “I don’t think there is anything to look forward to from this government. These 24 months will pass and we’ll be standing in the same spot. The existing regime that was in place before is still in power today. Hameed Al-Ahmar has increasingly more power, but he destroyed the South even more than Ali Abdallah Saleh did.”

Finally, there remains a small minority who prefer unity and who are critical of calls for secession. “Those young protesters don’t even know what separation means,” argued one young woman from Aden. “They are brainwashed into demanding separation. This type of thinking makes the problem worse. Let us not blame the regime for everything. There are people, other than the regime, who promote chaos for their own benefit.”

Priority 3: Transitional justice

“The GCC deal meant that we traded justice in exchange for peace, and in the end we have neither.”

Female blogger and activist, Sana’a.

Youth prioritise transitional justice for two main reasons: as a means of reparation for damages suffered by protesters, political detainees and civilians affected by fighting, and as a means of establishing accountability. Transitional justice is also seen as an integral tool for peacebuilding. “Transitional justice is at the root of a lot of problems the country is currently facing, such as revenge killings, kidnappings, and electricity problems,” a young man from Shabwa explained. Although several participants cautioned that stabilising the country should take precedence over justice at this point in time, overall there is strong support for a process that includes elements of reparation, truth-telling, and accountability.

Disappointment with the realities of the transition with respect to justice and accountability runs very high. Much opposition continues to centre on the immunity law that was negotiated as part of the GCC initiative. “How can I feel secure, when immunity is given to him [Saleh] and his family?” asked a young woman in Aden. Fundamental to the process of transitional justice is providing a means of reparation for damages suffered by protesters, political detainees and civilians affected by the fighting. “Political prisoners are part of the society. They fought for a certain issue, and now we are talking about a transitional phase saying that it is legitimate. How can I leave them in prison, while they were fighting for my cause?” asked a young woman in Ibb, highlighting how issues of transitional justice are directly linked to the perceived legitimacy of the transition. “The continued existence of political prisoners creates fear,” another young woman in Ta’iz explained. “When you walk on the streets it’s always on your mind that they may arrest you too.”

Young people have varying opinions about how far back into Yemen’s past transitional justice should reach. Many youth activists explain that the period should cover the

wars against the Houthis as well as the 1994 civil war between the North and the South. Some activists call for a process of transitional justice that extends back to the 1962 revolution. “In order to start building the new state,” a young woman in Sana’a argued, “we must come to terms with the crimes of the past.”

Finally, youth express deep distrust for the ability of existing institutions to investigate assassinations, political prisoners, disappearances, and crimes against protesters. A young woman in Aden explained that “If there is a fair court that sues and detains or at least legally pursues the regime figures who killed the youth at the beginning of the revolution, the feeling of security will make you want to sit and talk... But the reality is that the system, the court and the army are all corrupted.” Consequently many youth propose the creation of new, specialised and temporary bodies that would be ‘honest and neutral’.

Transitional justice is therefore closely tied up with and merges into broader concern for accountability and institutional reform, which are also prioritised by youth for the two-year transition. Youth express support for prosecuting corrupt officials, reclaiming property from looters and broader law enforcement, but the emphasis on transitional justice reveals the extent to which they feel a degree of accountability is necessary before they or the country can move on.

4

Obstacles to youth participation in the transition

YOUTH SEE THEIR PARTICIPATION in Yemen's post-2011 political landscape as integral to the success of the transition, as "society is measured by the status of its women and youth," in the words of a young woman from Aden. Indeed, a common argument has emerged, to which most Yemenis subscribe, that since the youth and women led the revolution in Yemen, their participation will be fundamental to securing and maintaining the transition. However, youth do not feel that the promise of inclusive participation has been followed through.

Young people, particularly in Sana'a and Ta'iz, are enthusiastic about the National Dialogue Conference. Even in Aden, where there is greater scepticism about the process, a leading female activist remarked that the Conference potentially provided an unprecedented opportunity "to give us access to the people at the highest levels in government." A Houthi youth activist expressed a similar sentiment, "our stance has been clear, we will participate in the National Dialogue but that doesn't mean we are with the GCC initiative. We continue to reject that initiative."

At the same time, young people are acutely aware of the failures of past dialogue. They remain concerned that any role for youth will be purely cosmetic or decorative, fearing superficial and highly selective inclusion. A youth leader in Aden explained:

"Of course there will be participation by youth and women, but only to complete the numbers. We are being called to fill in a quota, to give off a certain image... They will allow us to participate as women, as young people, but will they take our opinion seriously? Or will they bring us so that they can say 'we have engaged young people,' without any true engagement?"

As a result of the dynamics of the 2011 uprising, many young people are painfully aware of the way in which amorphous mass movements can become dominated by the most organised groups and channelled into pathways far removed from the demands of a majority of their members. They have a first-hand understanding of the challenges to effective participation and are deeply sceptical about the prospects for success.

A number of barriers impede the participation of young people in the transition process. There are external barriers, such as the top-down structure of the GCC initiative and the exclusion of young women and men from participating in its design

and implementation, as well as the existence of more established political forces seeking to gain from a divided and weak youth movement. There are also internal obstacles to participation, such as the lack of financial and technical capacity among youth activists, as well as the absence of accepted leadership and growing divisions within the highly diverse groups of politically active youth. Finally, youth also highlight the role played by a divisive and unaccountable media in entrenching divisions and impeding the genuine participation of youth, women and civil society. These obstacles are explored in greater detail below.

**Obstacle 1:
The GCC initiative –
exclusive in structure
and process**

“The GCC initiative means that youth are stuck between a predator’s jaws: the anvil of the GPC and the hammer of the JMP.”

Young man, Hodeida.

One of the biggest barriers to youth inclusion, as identified by young people themselves, is the GCC initiative, which is perceived to have ‘halted’ genuine change. Many young women and men see themselves as having driven the protests at the initial stages despite being one of the weakest and most marginalised segments of society. They feel that they have paid a high price for this participation as a result of attacks by security forces in which many youth activists were arrested, beaten, and killed. The GCC initiative did not involve young people in its design and has not so far in its implementation, and for many it places the power firmly back into the hands of more established regime forces. A young woman in Hodeida described her frustration: “Even if we ask to participate, how could we? Only political parties signed the Gulf initiative. What role do we have as youth [who protested] in the squares? Nothing. Our role is over.”

A young man in Ta’iz described his concerns that the revolution has been snatched away from youth by force:

“Now [the government] is saying that it wants to have a dialogue with the youth... They say ‘organise yourselves and we will have a dialogue with you’. No, you come to the squares and have a dialogue with the young people, no matter how big the numbers and how wide the area and no matter how young they are, because through such meetings with the youth, you will actually achieve a dialogue. But instead they say they will have a dialogue with the youth and then choose whomever they want from the youth [to participate in the National Dialogue Conference].”

Despite continued political engagement and the lingering influence of the protest squares as sites of grassroots civic debate, more and more young people are growing disillusioned with the GCC initiative’s limited approach. While it may be touted as the successful ‘Yemeni model’ internationally, it is seen as cosmetic and ineffectual at home.

“The GCC initiative meant that the UN, the EU and non-governmental organisations deal with the youth, and so the government doesn’t see it as their problem,” said a female activist working for a youth organisation in Sana’a. “In the meantime, youth are being used by everyone. They are being used by donors and political parties, and they are being used by local and international NGOs.”

Although the GCC initiative makes reference to “appropriate” inclusion of youth and women, young people feel that the process is purely cosmetic. “In front of the cameras they say that women and youth took part in this phase. But actually they marginalised our opinions,” said a young woman from Aden. Many young people are concerned that inclusion will only be superficial and believe that the dialogue itself will be a sham, and that the GCC initiative is the tool used to legitimise this exclusion.

**Obstacle 2:
The divide-and-rule
politics of established
political forces**

“None of the political parties listen... Instead, they bribe the oppressed to remain silent and we are forced to accept injustice.”

Young woman, Hodeida.

In addition to concerns about process, young people identify a continuation of the ‘culture of exclusion’¹⁶ within established political parties. Youth feel constrained by a political culture that continues to marginalise youth efforts at the expense of age, experience and more established voices. Young people also increasingly feel that competing political parties are exacerbating divisions among young people by encouraging youth to join their cause in exchange for financial support, training, and protection.

Box 1: Women in the transition

“I think there has been change! My mentality and attitude have changed after the revolution.”

Young woman, Aden.

While critical of the transition, most young people interviewed are adamant that the protests have achieved a rapid change in attitudes and in breaking a barrier of fear. This is particularly so with regard to women. In all of the women-only consultations, women stressed a sea change in their ability to participate politically that has subsisted despite concerns of a ‘rollback’. Thus in Ta’iz, a young woman stated that:

“After the events, women’s role has become clearer and their point of view is taken into consideration by men in general. During group sessions we have attended, we’ve noticed that most people are increasingly considering women’s opinions. Maybe it’s because women’s points of view have tended to be more moderate and not partisan. Also, men’s views [towards women] before and after the revolution have changed for the better.”

Similar sentiments were expressed in the all-male focus groups, and there is general agreement around the idea that women’s participation should be equal to that of men. However, like the concerns about youth exclusion, women are now concerned less by complete marginalisation than by being relegated to a highly selective and purely decorative role. A youth leader in Aden expressed a common concern:

“We now have three women ministers, all for human rights and the ‘soft’ issues that the government feels doesn’t matter... Was there an adoption of women in key ministries? That is where you can assess the role of women.”

Women remain adamant about linking their inclusion to broader struggles for equal rights. Thus, a young woman in Ta’iz explained, “When I say youth, I am talking about both men and women here. There is no difference. A woman’s voice is the same as a man’s voice.” Similarly, a young woman in Aden advocated for “activating young people’s role which means both men and women.”

“The revolution didn’t teach political parties how to accept each other. Instead we went back to old habits and old problems,” a young man in Sana’a said. This extends to the exclusion of women, as a young woman in Aden explained: “They [the parties] ignore women, even if their opinion is right, they won’t take it into consideration because they underestimate a woman’s opinions.” Box 1 provides further insight into the dynamics of women’s participation in the transition.¹⁷

According to many ‘independent’ and non-aligned youth consulted during the research period, political parties such as Islah, or movements such as the Houthis or Hiraak are perceived to have “co-opted”, “hijacked”, “duplicated” and “divided” the youth voice. Youth describe how new youth groups with confusingly similar names to independent youth initiatives cropped up that were later attributed to Islah. When a youth voice is needed, “[political forces] will select youth who have connections with political parties; they will choose people who don’t represent the views of the young people inside the squares,” said a young man from Ta’iz.

Youth consulted highlighted the Islah party in particular as playing a divisive role within the youth movement. While Islah can draw on its organisational hierarchy, “the rest of the young people are dispersed,” a young man in Ta’iz explained. As a

¹⁶ Political exclusion is one of the top grievances articulated by youth as a driver of the protests in consultations conducted by Saferworld and TDF in 2011. See *op cit* Saferworld, 2011.

¹⁷ The role of women in the protests and the transition process is examined in more detail in Shaker W, Marzouk M and Haddad S, *Strong Voices: Women’s Political Participation from Protest to Transition*, (Saferworld, May 2012).

young woman in Ta'iz argued, the party “used youth as a ladder or a bridge to reach the point they want. Islah then rejected the youth and ... didn't appoint any one of them during the transitional process or the transitional authority. Why? ‘Because you are not qualified’, they said.”

A young woman from Hadramaut explained her anger towards the tactics of established political parties. “I consider myself an ideological opponent to Islah, but I believe they have a right to believe what they want. What bothers me about their tactics is they try to actively close space for discussion. You need to do what you are told without criticising. This is what makes it difficult to participate in the transition. Actually, all political parties work this way.”

Youth feel that young people within political parties are often seen as little more than mobilisation tools rolled out to protest when the party needs to make a statement, but are given little decision making powers beyond this. Youth participation within political parties is explored in greater depth in Box 2.

In addition to Islah, the Houthis' influence on young people's political participation was also discussed. Speaking about increasingly militant protests in Ta'iz, a young man explained that

“Young people were divided into three groups. The third group is like me who doesn't know what to do. With the other two groups, one tends towards the Houthis and accepts support from them and has travelled to Syria, Lebanon and Iran and so on. The other group is co-ordinated with Islah and Tawakkol and receive resources from them. It means that there is a division between the young people.”

Young men in Aden likewise talked about the selective provision of resources by political forces such as Islah, Hiraak and the Houthis to youth in exchange for support. The divisiveness of established political forces draws much anger from youth, who feel disillusioned by the self-interested tactics of these forces in fostering conflict and securing personal gains at the expense of the national good. Youth from rural areas explained how they are regularly approached by political parties and groups such as Islah, Hiraak or the Houthis, who encourage them to protest and fight on their behalf in exchange for money or food. A young man from Ta'iz explained, “I was injured during the protests. When I was in hospital representatives from the Houthis came to me and offered me 10,000 YER (\$50 US dollars) if I were to come and receive training from them in Sa'ada. There was all this talk against Islah as if they are the biggest enemy.”

Finally, youth highlight the negative role played by newspapers, radio, television and other media in spreading rumours and instigating confrontations and divisions between various actors. “In the South the media has played an antagonistic role towards those who are advocating for change, which has meant that many people stopped becoming active for fear of being attacked,” said a youth activist in Aden.

Youth across the country agree with such sentiments. “Unfortunately the media in Yemen is either owned by powerful political figures or by certain groups with a specific political agenda. Each of them spreads their own lies,” a young man in Sana'a said. A man in Hadramaut agreed, adding that “whoever has demands will be attacked by the media and called either ‘remains of the regime’ or ‘an American soldier’”

Box 2: Youth participation within political parties

There is an emerging generational and ideological divide within Islah and other large political parties. There has been a souring in the relationships between youth and the party leadership because of the exclusion of youth from leadership and decision making. Reliance of parties on wasta (nepotism) and social status in selecting leadership, as well as tribal standings, mean that youth do not have as much trust in the older generation of party leaders.

Between July 2011 and February 2012, the Youth Development Organisation in Ta'iz interviewed 400 youth, 42 percent of whom were affiliated to an established political party.¹⁸ Of the 400 youth, 85 percent feel that they were either constrained or excluded from leadership positions within major parties. Of those who were currently affiliated to a political party, only 21 percent said they felt included in the decision making of the party, and 46 percent said that they felt a person's social standing dictated whether they would be promoted to leadership positions, compared to 28 percent who said such decisions were based on merit. Finally, only 17 percent of youth believe they have the ability to affect policies within their political parties.

The numbers above highlight the limitations that young people are confronted with in trying to affect change within many of the established political parties. Such findings indicate that the exclusion youth faced in the political system before the protests of 2011 has not changed since the signing of the GCC initiative.

Obstacle 3: Internal divisions and capacity limit formal participation

"We've now reached a point where people have stopped talking to each other, simply because they belong to a different party."

Young woman, Ta'iz.

Many young women and men interviewed said they are actively avoiding creating formal organisations to participate in the transition in favour of more flexible alliances that can serve as watchdogs to guard the revolution. However, those seeking to engage more formally with the process face a number of internal obstacles to doing so. These relate to a lack of technical and financial capacity as well as to the increasing divisions within the youth movement specifically, and the protest movement more generally. A partisan and confrontational media culture has contributed to entrenching divisions and mistrust between various actors.

"If youth want to move beyond activism, they need to develop a political agenda, they need to learn how to reach office and how to influence people," a young woman in Sana'a said. However, for many young people, a lack of experience or entry-point into politics makes this difficult to achieve. Youth identify their lack of experience in organising, leadership and coalition-building as obstacles to forming independent blocks in the National Dialogue Conference. "As a single youth activist you cannot make your voice heard, you need to find a coalition that best represents you. As activists we need to realise it is not only about 'screaming to make your voice heard', it's about strategy and ideology and networking," said a female youth activist from Hadramaut.

Although youth have more recently begun to coalesce into larger coalitions, the lack of easily accessible funding represents a challenge to the sustainability of these coalitions. Many youth initiatives remain unregistered by the new government, making it difficult to get funds from national and international donors. The economic situation means that young people cannot take on unlimited amounts of unpaid voluntary work. "People need to find a job, they don't have money to be able to put their ideas into practice," explained a civil society activist from Ta'iz. The lack of technical and financial capacity makes it difficult for youth to build on the momentum of the protest movement and make their voice heard. "As youth, the first step is to admit we have a problem. Yes, there are spoilers, but we should also identify our own weaknesses and find ways to address them, and not simply blame others and reject external ideas and concepts," said a leading youth activist from Hodeida.

The lack of technical and financial capacity also contributes to exacerbating existing divisions. Mistrust between youth, driven by suspicions of affiliations to more organised groups such as the Houthis and Islah, inhibits coalition building among activists. Divisions have emerged over ideology, political party affiliation, regionalism, reform versus revolution, and within self-identified 'independents'.

¹⁸ Youth Development Organisation, Ta'iz, 'Report on Observations of Youth Political Participation between July 2011 and February 2012', June 2012, at youthdo.org/ar/images/stories/youth/report.pdf (Arabic), accessed 28 August 2012.

Many youth not affiliated with more organised movements place much of the blame for divisions on groups such as Islah and the Houthis. “Political parties tried to jump on the back of our revolution,” a youth activist in Hadramaut says. “That’s when divisions developed over who is affiliated to whom.” Of those consulted who are involved with Islah or the Houthis, the most common response to questions around division are that they are to be expected. “Divisions within youth are a reflection of broader divisions: Islah, Houthis, Southerners, liberals, and more,” said a youth activist involved with the Houthi youth branch. A member of Islah’s youth wing echoed this statement, “We all came together in the square united to achieve our goal. Now that we have done so it is only natural that we each work towards ensuring the revolution fits within our own unique ideological vision.”

Another emerging division that has grown over time is that between ‘radical’ and ‘reformist’ ideologies within youth movements. A debate between two young women in Ta’iz in March 2012 is worth quoting at some length to highlight this division.

WOMAN A: *Before anything we have to continue to overthrow them with a revolution. We are not in a transitional phase. We are still in the first stage.*

WOMAN B: *But if we keep thinking that we are in the first stage, the country will not achieve anything. All roads will be closed. I want to accept reality: that there is a new president that we all elected and we will support him to see what he can achieve.*

WOMAN A: *If we’d been realistic and accepted on the first day of the protests that we were only 20 and Yemen was unsuitable for revolution, then nothing would have happened.*

Frustration is also growing among self-identified ‘independent’ youth who differentiate themselves by what they are not. “When we say ‘independent’ what does that mean exactly? That doesn’t exist. To me when you say you are ‘independent’ it means you’re doing nothing. I understand about not wanting to be affiliated to political parties, but at least be affiliated to an idea or a belief,” explained a young woman in Hadramaut.

This makes it difficult for self-identified independents to decide on a unified direction and to choose an effective leader. An independent activist from Sana’a explained this dilemma: “When the Egyptians created Facebook pages, they only created three groups. So they centralised communication. With us, everyone wants to be a leader. I’ve created four Facebook pages about the revolution myself. But in the end, if everyone creates four pages, where does that leave us?”

Decentralised decision making in a context of mistrust and sabotage, combined with increasing frustration and disillusionment with the political process, is damaging attempts at dialogue between and within youth around their demands and priorities, and is a recipe for conflict in the near future.

5

Opportunities: Street politics, awareness-raising and the future of youth participation

IN THE 18 MONTHS SINCE PROTESTS BEGAN IN YEMEN, young Yemenis have undergone a process of rapid political mobilisation and maturation. Engaged and enthusiastic about their potential contribution, they are pursuing multiple initiatives to affect change at the local and national level, and they want to ensure their voices shape the transition. This enthusiasm presents the greatest opportunity for the participation of youth. A young man in Hodeida encapsulates the excitement felt by many youth about participating in bringing about change:

“I can change things in my district, my neighbourhood, even in my governorate. Wherever there is corruption, I will change it... We want water and electricity. I can start a sit-in and distribute flyers, I will shout slogans, I will make posters... I will make a sign, carry it on my head and walk. I will write on the wall. What I give reflects who I am. On the one hand I’m afraid, what will happen if I get caught? But at the same time I feel emancipated from the previous fear that dominated our lives. So I need to express myself freely by any form, by paper, by pen or by slogans. This is the least any of us can do.”

Despite their differences, young people have emerged as one of the few national-level actors with an inclusive and concrete vision for long-term peace and reconciliation demonstrate an ability to be consensus-builders between competing political forces, and the youth movement promises to have a lasting impact on Yemen’s social and political culture. Youth also recognise that working from the bottom up will be the most effective strategy for achieving change in the longer term. Analogous to their political and civic awakening through the protests, youth believe that much can be done in terms of awareness-raising at the local level to help transform Yemen’s political culture towards greater inclusion.

The National Youth Conference

Some youth activists stress the importance of organising themselves into a single body to be able to ensure they can influence the transition. A youth leader in Sana'a for example, expressed concern that youth will be excluded "because they don't have a vision" and are not sufficiently organised, "therefore they will be eliminated." This thinking influenced the idea of a national youth conference that would solidify young people's positions on certain issues. Nonetheless, the challenges that emerged when youth activists initially tried to organise a National Conference for Youth illustrate the difficulties of political organisation in the context of the mistrust and fears of co-optation that have dominated the transition process in the first six months.

During consultations in early March 2012, youth discussed the idea of a youth conference as an umbrella for different groups to formulate their priorities ahead of the National Dialogue Conference. A young man in Hodeida described such a conference as an opportunity to "bring together all youth from across the country to share their ideas, visions and directions, and discuss youth issues to be presented as a vision document to the National Dialogue Conference." The initiative was driven mainly by a number of 'revolutionary youth' activists from the media centres of the protest squares in Sana'a and Ta'iz. Independent youth groups expressed concern about how such an ambitious conference with little funding could be organised effectively in the short time period, and appealed to NGOs and the business community for support.

The transitional government, keen to demonstrate an interest in including youth in the National Dialogue Conference, jumped on the idea of organising such a conference, and began a series of consultative meetings to communicate with youth groups. Before long youth activists complained of being sidelined from decision making processes, and claimed that the government was changing the focus of the conference. Confusion, misunderstanding and a lack of trust between government, political parties, and independent youth groups led to one of the meetings organised by the government in mid-June 2012 descending into chaos.

Youth expressed a desire to organise their own conference without being under the control of the transitional government, and so a number of youth groups began developing proposals and building coalitions to hold a conference. By mid-August 2012, two broad coalitions had formed: a national coalition led by a large youth group loosely affiliated to Islah, which sought to organise an inclusive national conference for all youth regardless of social or political affiliation, and a smaller and more concentrated group of independent activists from the protest squares. The latter group sought to solidify their own goals before participating in the national youth conference. Both of these conferences would identify youth priorities to be brought to the National Dialogue Conference.

Youth input into the preparatory committee of the National Dialogue Conference was fraught with tension. The biggest complaint by youth groups was about the lack of transparency in the selection process. The decision to select "independent revolutionary youth" was announced on 10 June 2012, leaving just a week for the selection. This led to suspicions that youth had been strategically pre-selected. Additionally, the Contact Committee that was established to agree on the process of conducting the National Dialogue Conference set out criteria for youth participation, which included stipulations that the number of members of the youth initiative or coalition must be over 500 (or 1,000 members in the case of Ta'iz and Ibb) to be eligible for representation. Smaller groups were allowed to merge into larger entities to meet this requirement. The representatives were also required to have participated in at least 10 political, human and civic initiatives in the squares and be between the ages of 18 and 40.

Many youth activists felt these conditions, as well as being top-down and opaque, were biased towards stronger, more established youth initiatives with party affiliations. Youth activists fear that certain political parties may be doubly represented given that the majority of large youth coalitions currently in the squares are dominated by these groups. Many youth also consider the members of the committee itself to be part of

the established political elite of the old regime, which in their view undermines the legitimacy of the National Dialogue.¹⁹

Street politics and bottom-up change

Despite the more proactive efforts of some youth activists described above, most young people see their role in the transition in more informal and flexible terms: agreeing with the need for greater organisation and coherence through a youth conference, but emphasising a broader monitoring role for young people through existing political parties, civil society organisations and movements. “We need to keep the pressure on the government and on all political actors,” said a young woman from Hodeida. For many young people therefore, despite the differences that have emerged, there is a popular belief that all youth who were involved in the protests are part of one broader movement for change. Thus, a young man in Hodeida argued that “the party-affiliated youth should also conduct a revolution inside their own parties.” A youth leader in Sana’a urged “We must share ideas to all work together. It’s not necessary to be gathered under the same party. In the end, we are all together under one country.”

Because of the frustrations and challenges of participation in official political processes, an increasing number of young activists are placing more and more emphasis on local action. In order to actively tackle problems, they are increasingly focusing on bottom-up approaches, partly in reaction to what they perceive as increasingly top-down change in Yemen enforced both by national reformers and international actors.

Young people continue to see their efforts best utilised within the framework of organisational groups and activist networks. Local action such as protest marches, sit-ins and strikes organised by trade unions and public sector workers is fuelling a slow ‘institutional revolution’ far removed from the official processes of transition.²⁰ This process has ousted university deans, local mayors and government officials, as well as managers of state-owned companies widely seen as corrupt and too closely affiliated with the old regime. This tactic is driven by young people’s faith in direct and immediate action to support, speed up or supplant top-down change. A young woman in Hodeida stated: “As youth, we should participate in institutional reform. When I see a corrupt institution, I should not remain silent and should cause escalation within it to help the authorities pinpoint corruption and address it.”

It is not surprising, therefore, that for many youth street politics remains the way they feel they can best make their voices heard. For some, years of exclusion means they have lost confidence in effecting change at the national level, where established power brokers hold more sway. For others, such as a young woman in Aden, local-level change takes priority over, and prepares the ground for, change at the national level: “I think we made a mistake when we went out to protest without trying to change the situation step-by-step. For example, at the faculty [of economics] we broke the silence and fear and managed to successfully change a professor that we didn’t want.”

There is no doubt that public protest has been added to the political repertoire in Yemen and is unlikely to disappear. However, such protests are liable to be smaller, more concentrated, and to target specific issues and sectors. Since the transition has begun, protests have directly targeted tangible issues relating to the port of Aden, the closure of the Saudi embassy and the Southern Issue.²¹ Local initiatives and constructive action, not just against old problems but in favour of new solutions, are proliferating.

¹⁹ Atlantic Council, *Report from Yemen’s Political Transition: Changing the Status Quo? Roundtable* (Public International Law and Policy Group, May 2012).

²⁰ For further information about the ‘parallel’ or ‘institutional’ revolution, see Gordon S, ‘The Parallel Revolution in Yemen,’ *Critical Threats*, 6 March 2012, at www.criticalthreats.org/yemen/gordon-parallel-revolution-march-6-2012, accessed 28 August 2012.

²¹ To give two examples: public protests erupted in Yemen following the closure of the Saudi embassy in Sana’a, which prevented Yemenis from applying for visas to perform Hajj (See *Yemen Post*, ‘Protesters call for reopening Saudi embassy in Sana’a,’ 28 June 2012, at yemenpost.net/Detail123456789.aspx?ID=3&SubID=5610, accessed 28 August 2012). Similarly, youth organised protests demanding the United Arab Emirates company DP World leave the country following its failure to follow-through on promised economic deals (See *Yemen Post*, ‘Protests Continue Against DP World in Yemen,’ 15 January 2012, at www.yemenpost.net/Detail123456789.aspx?ID=3&SubID=4516&MainCat=3, accessed 28 August 2012).

Many young people today would subscribe to the statement of a young woman from Aden as a model of action: “The regime was not everything. We established a local initiative... and achieved a great deal.”

Raising awareness

Young people consistently stress a lack of awareness of civic rights and responsibilities on the part of the general public to be a major inhibition to both an inclusive transition and long-term peace. Most stress the need for broad sections of the population to have access to more reliable information, to know their rights and to be aware of possibilities for confronting perceived injustices as part of a movement towards more accountable government. Youth see their role in the transition as being central to the process of ensuring Yemeni citizens are aware of their rights and responsibilities in the current period.

Such sentiments are echoed by youth from across the country. “First of all, we should educate youth to be able to participate in the dialogue. I think awareness is crucial in order to empower youth,” a young woman from Aden argued. A youth leader in Hodeida explained that “the most important thing is raising cultural, social and human rights awareness,” while a young woman in Sana’a declared that “We need to raise awareness from Tihamah to Sa’ada. There are only about ten people who know about the constitution.”

In order to be meaningfully included, people need to be aware of political processes and how they can participate in the transition and in governance. Yet many youth feel the government has neglected to explain this to the general population. A young woman in Ta’iz explained:

“For us in the past, these laws and articles were useless, and the public wasn’t aware of its rights and duties. Now I think we all know that each Yemeni citizen has rights and duties. There are rights and duties for each of the executive, legislative and judicial authorities. When we know that, then we can start changing and talking about all of these elements.”

Therefore, many youth stress the need for broad sections of the population to have access to more reliable information, to know their rights and to be informed about possibilities for confronting perceived injustices. “I would like to see the associations and governmental and non-governmental institutions raising awareness about the new constitution,” a young woman from Hodeida said, arguing that “going out there to the field is necessary to provide people with information before conducting a referendum.”

Finally, youth see awareness-raising as a means to effect long-term change by influencing attitudes and values. Thus, a young woman in Aden discussed the importance of promoting “tolerance and peace” by “working in our area.” A young woman in Ta’iz was met with enthusiastic agreement when she said that “the root of problem is that we need to establish a culture of difference, that our differences shouldn’t invalidate intimacy. This is what we need to know to live with each other.”

6

Conclusion and recommendations

THIS REPORT SEEKS TO PROVIDE A SNAPSHOT of the opinions and thoughts of young women and men in Yemen about the success of the transition so far, and the role they have played in it. What has emerged from these consultations is an image of young people as an important ‘third force’ between the old regime and established political forces such as Islah, the Houthis and Hiraak. Young women and men see their role as being to ‘guard’ and ‘preserve’ the goals of the revolution, and to advocate for the national good against what they perceive to be the narrow self-interest of established political forces, which are often in violent conflict with one another. Because of this, they remain one of the key repositories of legitimacy within the newly reconfigured Yemeni political system, and are strong advocates for long-term peace and security.

However, young women and men are struggling to participate in the transition while also navigating a sensitive balance between powerful and competing self-interested parties. Thus, many tend to differentiate themselves by what they are not, and have grasped onto the term ‘independent’ to signify a movement that seeks to bring about change for all Yemenis and is not driven by self-interested political gains at the expense of the national good. However, while having proven to be effective consensus-builders in the short-term, they are constrained by the new political landscape carved out by the GCC initiative, which has favoured established political parties over grassroots movements. Youth activists also face organisational and financial constraints that have limited their capacity to bring about sustained positive change. Finally, they are also operating in an environment that is increasingly constrained by the deteriorating security and economic situation.

Nonetheless, young women and men remain keen to engage with the transition process. This inclusion needs to be across the board, rather than being relegated to small roles as ‘independents’ or ‘youth’. The recommendations below, based on the research findings, outline key steps for promoting greater youth participation at all levels of the political process, within civil society, political parties, the National Dialogue and the media, and for ensuring that the transition process in Yemen leads to increased and sustained peace and security.

**Recommendation 1:
Reconstitute state
authority and address
negative perceptions**

Consultations with youth across the country have cast a spotlight on the negative perceptions young people have of transition developments to date. The internal struggle for control of key institutions (especially within the military and security apparatus) and weak state presence throughout the country, which manifests in insecurity and the lack of basic services, has contributed to governmental authority being ambiguous and contested. This in turn affects local politics and everyday lives.

At the same time there is a growing perception that the GCC initiative has allowed Yemen's transition to be controlled by outside forces. International support for the transitional government has been crucial to maintaining peace and security in the short term. Faith in the transition government has ebbed and flowed in the first six months since President Hadi's election, depending on his decisions around military restructuring. However, the combination of a weak and contested transitional government and growing mistrust of international actors lends credence to non-state actors and militias who argue that Yemen is an occupied country. This argument has deep roots. Nonetheless, the Government of Yemen and the international community can mitigate such perceptions through a number of steps:

The Government of Yemen, with appropriate support from international partners, should:

- **Reconstitute its legitimacy by developing a clear vision** about the future direction of the country and managing expectations of the transition, communicating this vision to all citizens, particularly those outside of the major cities, and prioritising transparency as an underlying value of the transition.
- **Provide security and resume the provision of other basic services throughout the country.** If Yemenis do not see an improvement in their day-to-day life in the provision of security, water, electricity, and other basic services, the transition will be regarded by Yemenis as incomplete.
- **Engage with and respond to the needs and priorities of Yemenis outside Sana'a** through participatory research and surveys, and adopting local-level approaches to participation.
- **Work closely with the media to promote reporting ethics** that promote peace rather than conflict.

International actors should:

- **Limit actions that are perceived by Yemenis as overstepping the fine line between support and interference** and that would de-legitimise the government's authority, such as drone strikes or informal financial or military support for non-state actors, particularly those accused of human rights abuses.

**Recommendation 2:
Make progress on
youth priorities**

It is essential that the National Dialogue reflects the priorities of young Yemenis. The consultations summarised here demonstrate that insecurity remains their most pressing concern. Youth feel threatened by the security services and the high levels of crime and lawlessness, and they attribute many local-level conflicts and insecurities to national military divisions. President Hadi should ensure that military restructuring goes beyond simply replacing commanders to deeper security sector reform that incorporates the development of clear lines of command and accountability.

Finding a solution to the Southern Issue is a top priority for Yemenis in the South. While young people in the North share a desire to address this issue, many assume it can be subsumed under broader headings. This increases distrust in the South and leads to defensive solidarity on the part of Southerners with the most radical positions, despite deepening public discontent with Hiraak, outbidding, and disagreements

between different Southern factions. Young people in the South demand good faith gestures, a meaningful seat at the table and sensitivity to their demands. Finally, disappointment with a lack of justice and accountability in the transition process runs high. Young people are not satisfied with current laws and processes around transitional justice, and want to see a process that includes elements of reparation, truth-telling, and accountability. However, youth express deep distrust about the ability of existing institutions to oversee such a process.

The Government of Yemen, with appropriate support from international partners, should:

- **Set explicit benchmarks and guarantees** as to how the National Dialogue Conference will take place and how decisions will be made.
- **Ensure that longer term security sector reform is carried out alongside military restructuring, including** the promotion of democratic policing models to reconstitute democratic authority.
- **Address Southern grievances** through immediate and practical good faith gestures to regain trust, such as taking concrete steps towards addressing land disputes, forced retirement and other longstanding grievances.
- **Take concrete measures to respond to the grievances of protesters**, possibly to include releasing all political prisoners and apologising for injustices committed during the uprising.
- **Establish an independent body on transitional justice** that includes a truth-telling commission and reparations for victims and their families.

International actors should:

- **Cease all financial and military support to controversial and unaccountable military and security units.**
- **Support opportunities to build the capacity of civil society** to monitor and advocate for more democratic security sector reform.
- **Encourage the Government of Yemen to include the Southern Issue as a clear agenda point** and not let the stated commitment to the territorial integrity of Yemen get in the way of a genuinely inclusive process that takes the concerns of Southerners seriously.
- **Facilitate opportunities for Yemenis to engage and learn from successful transitional justice processes elsewhere.**

**Recommendation 3:
Tackle obstacles to
youth participation**

Young people are acutely aware of the failures of past dialogue in Yemen and fear their inclusion in the current transition and beyond will be superficial and highly selective. They are concerned about external barriers to their political participation, related to the top-down structure and process of the GCC initiative, as well as the divide-and-rule tactics of established political forces that seek to gain from a divided and weak youth movement. Youth not aligned to political parties such as Islah, or movements such as the Houthis or Hiraak, feel that these groups have divided and tried to hijack the youth voice. Youth also highlight the role played by a divisive and unaccountable media in entrenching divisions and impeding the genuine participation of youth, women and civil society.

Young people are also aware of their own limitations, including a lack of financial and technical capacity for many newly formed initiatives as well as the absence of leadership and growing divisions within the youth movement. There is continued disagreement over how best to engage with the transition process under the GCC initiative, whether protests should continue, and on the concrete actions that are needed from young people to help it succeed.

The Government of Yemen and international supporters of the GCC initiative should:

- **Develop and communicate a clear, transparent and inclusive peacebuilding process** that engages marginalised and excluded actors, acknowledging that while the GCC initiative was important for ending violent conflict, it is insufficient as a peacebuilding mechanism.
- **Increase support for income and employment generating initiatives for young people,** including revisiting opportunities for Yemeni youth to work in GCC countries.

Yemeni political parties should:

- **Hold internal elections for new leadership** as a concrete sign of their support for change.
- **Put in place clear strategies on reaching out to youth, empowering them and promoting youth leadership** within their parties, based on clear guidelines for youth engagement.
- **Promote greater opportunities for youth from political parties to meet with party leaders** through roundtable discussions and networking events.

**Recommendation 4:
Build on opportunities
for greater political
engagement**

Since the protests began, young Yemenis have undergone a process of rapid political mobilisation and maturation. Engaged and enthusiastic about their potential contribution, they are pursuing initiatives at the local and national level to effect change. In particular, youth have understood that they need to organise and co-ordinate to achieve impact at the national level. At the same time, many young people are placing more and more emphasis on local action, and increasingly focusing on bottom up approaches to actively tackling problems, partly driven by what they perceive as an overly top-down transition process. Local action such as protest marches, sit-ins and strikes has fuelled important local-level changes in parallel to official processes.

Young people consistently stress a lack of awareness of civic rights and responsibilities among the population as a major obstacle to peace and an inclusive transition. Analogous to their own political and civic awakening through the protests, youth want broad sections of the population to have access to more reliable information, to know their rights and to be aware of possibilities for confronting perceived injustices as part of a movement towards more accountable government.

The Government of Yemen and international actors should:

- **Support the National Youth Conference and other coalition-building initiatives** while also respecting the independence of young women and men in deciding on the conference's design, structure and topics.
- **Continue to reach out to a broad selection of youth activists from across the country in a transparent and open manner, and promote opportunities for networking and engagement.** This could include increasing youth-policymaker engagement through roundtable discussions and interactions with policy experts that can help young people develop, communicate and implement their visions.
- **Support capacity-building efforts of newly emerging youth initiatives.** Newly formed youth groups continue to require support in strengthening their fundraising, advocacy, organisational skills, as well as thematic and technical knowledge around security sector reform and wider monitoring of the democratic transition.
- **Promote bottom-up civic engagement through initiatives such as small grants.** A number of newly formed youth initiatives are currently working on local issues that have national relevance, such as neighbourhood security initiatives and awareness-raising. Youth initiatives can be financially supported indirectly through small grants administered by local and international NGOs.

ANNEX: Methodology

Initial consultations for this report began on the cusp between phase one and two of the country's transition period. Following the election of President Hadi on 21 February 2012, Saferworld and TDF launched the research for this report. In March and April 2012, TDF conducted a total of 12 focus group discussions in Sana'a, Ta'iz, Aden and Hodeida. These discussions also included participants from neighbouring governorates. The result was that they captured the perspectives of 136 young women and men (aged 18–35) from Sana'a, Mareb, Amran, Dhammar, Hodeida, Rima, Hajjah, Ta'iz, Ibb, Aden, Lahj, Abyan, Dhalea and Shabwa.

Primary location of focus group discussion	Targeted governorates
Sana'a	Sana'a, Mareb, Amran, Dhamar
Hodeida	Hodeida, Rima, Hajjah
Ta'iz	Ta'iz and Ibb
Aden	Aden, Lahj, Abyan, Dhalea and Shabwa

In each of the primary locations, three focus group discussions were held with 10 to 12 young women and men between the ages of 18 and 35. In each location, one focus group was carried out with young men, one with young women, and one with a mixed selection of 'youth leaders' who are prominent figures in revolutionary coalitions, civil society and the media, human rights and legal groups, and political party youth wings.

Youth were selected on the basis of a broad list of criteria that sought to capture diverse perspectives from a number of geographical, regional, social, political and economic groups. Participants included young people describing themselves as supporters of GPC, JMP, the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP), Hiraak, the Houthis, independents, or as being "non-political". 41 percent of the participants and 31 percent of 'youth leaders' were female.

The focus group discussions provided an initial overview of youth perceptions of the early stages of the transition process. These were supplemented by further consultations: in June 2012, Saferworld held three roundtable discussions in Sana'a which brought together youth activists from 17 different governorates. Discussions revolved around the activists' perceptions of the transition process to date, what they felt were the most pressing issues for the transitional government to address in their regions, and ideas on how the National Dialogue Conference could be made more inclusive. In July 2012 Saferworld also conducted key informant interviews with a selection of youth activists from Hadramaut, Aden, Ta'iz, Sana'a and Sa'ada, to examine in greater depth some of the issues that emerged from the group consultations.

Throughout the research period, Saferworld also closely monitored English and Arabic news media, policy dialogue around the transition, and conducted an intensive literature review to ensure that youth claims could be supplemented by facts, and to provide an accurate reflection of the situation on the ground.

In Yemen's heterogeneous political environment, conflict, insecurity and mistrust feature heavily. This affects the ability of the research to capture an entirely representative picture. Although Saferworld and TDF have worked hard to ensure that the voices of a diverse and representative sample of young women and men are reflected in the research, the report does not claim to present an exhaustive panorama of perspectives. Instead, it endeavours to provide a snapshot of some of the discussions and debates that took place between 21 February and 21 July 2012 between some youth activists across the country.

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COVER PHOTO: Youth in Sana'a's Change Square celebrate the election of President Hadi on 20 February 2012, which signalled an end to Saleh's 33-year rule.

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