Building Sustainable Peace in Yemen: How Community Engagement Can Support National Stability

International Center for Religion & Diplomacy
Foreward by Katherine Zimmerman

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Foreward

Yemen has been embroiled in conflict for the better part of the last six years with no end in sight at the end of 2020. The civil war, which pits the Al-Houthi movement against a fractious coalition supporting the internationally recognized Yemeni government, tipped Yemen over the brink. Eighty percent of the population—24.1 million people—are in need of humanitarian assistance; almost half of all Yemenis—14.3 million people—are in acute need. Yemenis are dying from preventable diseases. The economy, in decline for over two decades, is in shambles. Yemen's currency is depreciating as remittances drop in the global economic downturn. Civil servant salaries remain unpaid, and school closures will have a lasting impact on Yemen's youth. Conditions in Yemen are catastrophic.

The international community is actively engaged in trying to mediate an end to Yemen's brutal civil war and in addressing some of Yemen's most dire humanitarian needs. UN Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths has worked tirelessly to negotiate a settlement of the national-level conflict. Ending the war is crucial, as its trajectory certainly shapes the country's immediate future. Humanitarian organizations, too, have navigated complex and dangerous conditions to deliver assistance to help the most vulnerable Yemenis and stave off the worst. Yet Yemen's fate hangs not in the resolution of its civil war or smaller conflicts, but on the capability and capacity of local institutions and infrastructure to meet basic needs of the population.

Systemic failures in governance have been a driver of Yemen's various conflicts over the years. Communities across the country hold local grievances of political and economic marginalization and face severe shortcomings in terms of basic service delivery. These have worsened under today's conditions. In addition to the national-level civil war, competition for access to resources or the political power to distribute those resources fuels local conflict. Groups like Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and others have been able to generate some popular support for their initiatives based on their ability to deliver basic goods and services to communities rather than actual support for their visions. Addressing the underlying conditions in Yemen is necessary to secure the country's future.

Projects like the one that the International Center for Religion & Diplomacy (ICRD) and **Partners**Global (**Partners**) outline in this report are too few and too far between in Yemen. The resounding consensus among the local stakeholders involved in the ICRD–**Partners** initiative on the importance of addressing service delivery—water, power, education, justice, and security—highlights a gap in how the international community has engaged in Yemen. The cost of delaying significant development projects that address Yemen's structural deficiencies until the establishment of a new central government after the civil war comes at the local level. And it is here at the local level that progress on any national-level agreement or even ceasefire will be lost.

The sheer scale of immediate humanitarian needs in the country monopolizes donor funding at the cost of medium- and long-term development projects that must be part of a solution to Yemen's challenges. Tradeoffs certainly exist between emergency humanitarian assistance and development assistance. Funding shortfalls mean that many needs in Yemen will go unmet, and shifting more money from life-saving measures must be weighed carefully. Perhaps it is time to consider investing in Yemen's future by building local capabilities

and capacities to prevent the absolute collapse of the country's weak institutions and infrastructure.

The recommendations that stem from the ICRD–**Partners** project in Yemen, including the donor focus on building technical capacity and providing infrastructure support, should inform future projects and initiatives. They also echo those derived from research and study of the conflict found in my own work and that of others. Yemen's governance gaps handicap efforts to bring the country out of conflict, and these endemic challenges will outlast the current war and threaten any peace that follows.

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Executive Summary

In 2017, in partnership with **Partners**Global (Partners) and their local affiliate **Partners**Yemen (PY), the International Center for Religion & Diplomacy (ICRD) began a three-year initiative to support Yemeni communities in **(1)** identifying and prioritizing their critical needs at the grassroots level, **(2)** developing mechanisms to better address these needs through community-based action and collaboration with local officials, and **(3)** communicating these needs to national-level decision-makers who can directly influence national peace talks and agreements.

This initiative was based upon the understanding of two key principles:

1 A national-level agreement, while critical, is unlikely to be effective and sustainable unless people are able to coexist peacefully at the community level around the country and to meet their basic critical needs (e.g. for services like water and electricity, the ability to support one's family economically, security, and justice).

2 Critical initiatives to meet such needs at the community level, while complicated by the civil war, need not and must not wait until a national agreement is in place—doing so exacerbates the suffering and hostilities in Yemen which only make reaching a national agreement more difficult.

The ICRD-PartnersYemen program was thus designed to connect national decision-making and international policy-making with the needs and voices from Yemeni communities at the grassroots level, while simultaneously empowering these communities to take steps to address these needs. This bottom-up process involved seven key stages, culminating in a National-Level Dialogue (NLD), on which the recommendations in this paper are based.

While other recent national-level dialogues have focused on direct discussions for how to end the civil war, this National-Level Dialogue took a different approach. By elevating critical community needs to national-level decision-makers and those who influence them, and including civil society representatives directly in the discussions, the NLD provided a platform for stakeholders affiliated with or related to major parties to the conflict to discuss less contentious issues related to the shared needs of the Yemeni public, with the goal of bringing these needs and recommendations for addressing them into national decision-making and peace talks. The NLD also provided a 'safe space' for key stakeholders from different political backgrounds who had never met before to begin developing relationships and channels for communication.

There was wide agreement among NLD participants on the need for decentralized governance and for local bodies to have power to deliver services. The NLD generated a number of recommendations which, if implemented successfully and collaboratively, could help to both address critical local needs in the immediate term and help move Yemen closer to a political settlement and broader peace by building knowledge, institutions, relationships, and trust among key parties.

Based upon the findings of both the NLD and the program as a whole, ICRD makes the following recommendations to the international community to support peace and stability in Yemen at both the local and the national levels:

1 **Support initiatives to resolve conflicts and reduce violence at the local level, even while working toward a national-level peace agreement.** Do not wait until a national agreement is reached to begin local peacebuilding initiatives, as the latter does not depend on the former and can actually help to pave the way for a national-level agreement. Addressing local conflicts can both reduce drivers of violence among parties to the national conflict and their supporters and create opportunities for trust-building and collaboration among such actors at the local level. When opposing parties see that collaboration for the common good is possible on local issues, it encourages them to explore possibilities for collaboration at higher levels. Empowering local communities to provide nonviolent alternatives for fulfilling critical needs, and resolving conflicts that hinder the fulfillment of these needs, can also reduce reliance on and support for violent extremist groups who purport to fulfill these needs for desperate communities.

2 **Support critical service delivery through strengthening of local governing bodies and legal structures—focusing not only on financial resources but the building of technical capacity.** Aid and services should be directed through sustainable structures such as local authorities, local security bodies, the legal system, and local NGOs. Working with these structures within the legal framework, while building their capacity, can achieve sustainability beyond the end of funding, in contrast to simply focusing on delivering humanitarian aid by itself, the impact of which is unlikely to be sustained after specific projects and donor grants end. Providing technical training and expertise for local authorities is crucial, so that they are equipped not only to receive aid funds, but to facilitate effective service delivery that responds efficiently to the critical needs of their communities.

3 **Enhance the role and collaboration of religious actors and CSOs in addressing local problems.** Given their deep ties to and influence in their communities at the grassroots level, religious actors and CSOs often have the most direct understanding of immediate community needs and the ability to raise public awareness and mobilize public action regarding specific issues.

4 **Support the rebuilding and enhancement of judicial infrastructure and justice mechanisms.** Judicial institutions—including courts, police, prosecutor's offices, and prisons—have been greatly damaged during the war. Strengthening the judicial system will help Yemenis gain access to justice, which will deter violence and reduce incentives to engage in violent acts to resolve issues. It will build peace at the local level, which will make communities more likely and better equipped to contribute to and sustain a national-level peace process.

5 **Support the participation of appropriate religious actors, tribal actors, and civil society representatives in informing national 'Track I' peace talks among government actors.** Such actors are often in tune with local needs at the community level, and can appeal to religious values and tribal customs that support peaceful resolution of conflict and care for basic human needs. They can thus help to provide a powerful moral imperative to moving the peace process forward based on pro-social principles and prioritization of citizen well-being across the north-south divide. They can also help to mobilize support at the local level for any national agreement.

6. **Support trust-building measures between conflict parties at the local, governorate, and national levels.** This could take the form of providing safe spaces for parties to discuss issues and negotiate confidence-building measures, resources with which to implement trust-building initiatives, and monitoring of such initiatives.

Stable communities will likely be better able to participate effectively in a national peace process, to mitigate violence at the local level while the national conflict persists, and to sustain peace in the country after a national agreement is reached. To build stable communities, it is imperative to strengthen local governance, ensure service delivery to address critical needs, and strengthen community participation so that Yemeni citizens can better advocate for their own needs and inform national processes in support of a truly sustainable peace.
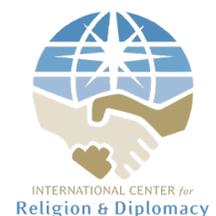
Introduction

For more than six years, Yemen has been caught in a devastating civil war that has created the world's worst humanitarian crisis, with two-thirds of the population suffering from hunger and malnutrition.[1] The Ansar Allah group (referred to by many as the Houthis) now rules much of the north (including the pre-civil war capital of Sana'a), where about 70% of the population lives. The internationally-recognized Republic of Yemen Government (ROYG) is locked in an intra-south conflict with the Southern Transition Council (STC), a political body that favors secession from Yemen and has announced self-rule in parts of southern Yemen.[2] The ROYG still holds power in the governorates of Marib, Shabwa, and parts of Hadramout in east Yemen.

In order to ease the tensions between the ROYG and the STC, Saudi Arabia brokered the Riyadh Agreement on November 5, 2019. The agreement would result in a new government shared equally between northerners and southerners, withdrawal of military forces from Aden, and incorporation of STC security forces under Yemen's Ministries of Defense and Interior. So far, however, the agreement remains largely unimplemented.

At the national level, the UN-led negotiations are facing major challenges. The Stockholm Agreement brokered by UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths between the ROYG and Ansar Allah in December 2018 has made little progress. Heavy clashes continue in several frontline areas including Marib, Al-Jawf, Dhale, Taiz, and the west coast.

Those hardest hit by the violence and devastation of the conflict are often those at the community level with the least opportunity to impact national-level peace talks and agreements such as the Stockholm Agreement and the Riyadh Agreement. With proper support, however, local communities can collectively work to mitigate tensions that arise from the deteriorating conditions and lay the critical groundwork for higher-level and more sustainable peacebuilding.

The International Center for Religion & Diplomacy (ICRD), an international NGO which works to prevent and resolve conflict, with a focus on the role that religious actors and institutions can play in peacebuilding, has been working in Yemen since 2012. ICRD has worked in partnership with local organizations and community leaders to resolve local conflicts, address violent extremism, develop peaceful solutions to address critical community needs, and build relationships and mechanism for problem-solving across diverse sectors of society.

This paper introduces findings and recommendations from a three-year ICRD initiative in Yemen designed to facilitate problem-solving at the community level and empower the priorities of Yemeni citizens to inform national peacebuilding.

Background on Program and Recommendations

In 2017, in partnership with PartnersGlobal (Partners) and their local affiliate PartnersYemen (PY), ICRD began a three-year initiative to support Yemeni communities in (1) identifying and prioritizing their critical needs at the grassroots level, (2) developing mechanisms to better address these needs through community-based action and collaboration with local officials, and (3) communicating these needs to national-level decision makers who can directly influence national peace talks and agreements.

1 A national-level agreement, while critical, is unlikely to be effective and sustainable unless people are able to coexist peacefully at the community level around the country and to meet their basic critical needs (e.g. for services like water and electricity, the ability to support one's family economically, security, and justice).

2 Critical initiatives to meet such needs at the community level, while complicated by the civil war, need not and must not wait until a national agreement is in place—doing so exacerbates the suffering and hostilities in Yemen which only make reaching a national agreement more difficult.

The ICRD-PartnersYemen (PY) program was thus designed to connect national decision-making and international policymaking with the needs and voices from Yemeni communities at the grassroots level, while simultaneously empowering these communities to take steps to address these needs. This bottom-up process involved seven key stages, culminating in the recommendations provided in this paper.

Overview of Program Components which Produced These Recommendations

The process involved seven key components, which are summarized below: (1) Formation and Training of Facilitation Teams, (2) Community Dialogues, (3) Community Projects, (4) 'Lessons Learned' Community Dialogues, (5) Regional Dialogues (Intra-South and Intra-North), (6) National-Level Dialogue, and (7) Dissemination of Outcomes within Yemen.

1 **Formation and Training of Facilitation Teams**—In the first stage, joint teams of local religious leaders and leaders of civil society organizations (CSOs) were formed in the participating governorates—Abyan, Aden, Shabwa, and Lahj in the south and Dhamar, Ibb, Taiz, and Sana'a in the north. Religious and CSO leaders were chosen because each have significant influence and trust within their communities, yet often do not collaborate together. These teams received training in skills such as dialogue, facilitation, and advocacy to prepare them to lead local community dialogues in the next stage.

2 **Community Dialogues**—In each governorate, a local community dialogue brought together key stakeholders in the community—such as religious leaders, civil society activists, local council members, and others—to discuss and prioritize key community needs and interests, strategize on how to communicate these needs to higher-level decision-makers, and develop ideas for community projects that could begin addressing some of these needs. Participants voted on which project ideas should be implemented.

③ Community Projects—Led by facilitator teams and CSOs involving other stakeholders in the communities, thirteen local community projects were implemented across the eight governorates. The key goals of these projects were to: (1) begin addressing some critical community needs based on local priorities; (2) enable local communities to build skills in collaborative problem-solving and project implementation for the common good, while producing tangible benefits from this collaboration and strengthening the dialogue mechanism as an available tool for addressing other issues; and (3) strengthen communication and collaboration with local government officials while generating lessons learned to communicate to higher-level decision-makers.

The community projects that were implemented included initiatives such as repairing sewage/sanitation systems, providing clean water delivery systems, and enhancing educational facilities—including building security structures and bathroom facilities to enable girls to return to school, addressing classroom crowding in light of the influx of internally displaced persons (IDPs), and creating a special-needs library for disabled students. Such projects included outreach to local government officials to build their awareness of the community needs and collaborate with them in implementation, as feasible.

The projects also included outreach to the wider communities to both (1) make them aware that these projects had come about through the community dialogue mechanism, a mechanism that is available for addressing future issues, and (2) promote sustainability by raising awareness of the public's role in maintaining the project services. For example, imams spoke in the mosques to the public about issues such as the importance of water conservation, of not polluting water sources or obstructing sewage systems, and of maintaining safe spaces for girls' education. Awareness-raising initiatives were also conducted in schools, through outreach on radio programs, and through social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook.

④ 'Lessons Learned' Community Dialogues—At the completion of the community initiatives, a second round of community dialogues was held to receive feedback from the community on the impact of the initiatives and to discuss the lessons learned for future initiatives and advocacy with decision-makers. At this time, dialogue participants also nominated representatives from their communities to attend the regional dialogues in the next stage.

⑤ Regional Dialogues (Intra-South and Intra-North)—In the next stage, one intra-south and one intra-north regional dialogue were held, bringing together community representatives and regional- and governorate-level decision-makers in the target governorates (Abyan, Aden, Shabwa, and Lahj in the south and Dhamar, Ibb, Taiz, and Sana'a in the north). These dialogues were designed to: (1) present community priorities, outcomes, and the lessons learned from the community dialogues and projects to higher decision-makers; (2) discuss priorities at the governorate level and recommendations for addressing them, including roles and responsibilities of local and regional offices, as well as citizens; and (3) discuss how to improve communication mechanisms between communities at the grassroots level and government officials and decision-makers.

In the intra-south dialogue, which took place in August 2020, service delivery problems were cross-cutting across the four governorates. Participants cited weak electricity, ac-

cess to water, and health systems as particularly dire needs. They also discussed the lack of and weakness in emergency response systems for addressing crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, other disease outbreaks, and destruction of communities from flooding. Participants also discussed some issues facing specific governorates, such as the proliferation of illegal drugs in Aden, the lack of agricultural infrastructure in Abyan, and the prolonged closure of Attaq University in Shabwa. Finally, participants also discussed broader "national" topics such as ensuring security, stabilizing the currency, the desire to see the ROYG operate from inside Yemen, ending the civil war, reconstruction, and fair resource distribution. In discussing mechanisms for addressing such needs, participants noted that the local authorities typically suffer from a lack of both financial resources and technical capacity, too often leading to dependence on international organizations to address issues, which is not sustainable. The ability of religious actors to mobilize the public around specific issues was also highlighted—for example, many played a powerful role in raising the public's awareness about issues likes drugs and the COVID-19 outbreak.

Participants in the intra-north dialogue, which took place in September 2020, discussed similar issues, with lack of service delivery likewise emphasized as the most pressing need for communities, particularly with regard to health services, street repairs, water systems, and electricity supply issues. Northern participants also discussed similar national-level topics, such as the ongoing negative impact of the war and the continued freeze on the payment of public sector employee salaries.

6   **National-Level Dialogue**—The final dialogue took place in September 2020, and brought together current and former local and national government officials along with community representatives from civil society organizations, religious leaders, tribal leaders, judges, participants involved in the 2013 National Dialogue Conference and the National Reconciliation Committee, and other key stakeholders including participants in the previous community and regional dialogues. Emphasis was placed on the involvement of people whose relationships of influence enable communication with key national-level decision-makers within major stakeholder groups, such as the ROYG, Ansar Allah, the STC, and major political parties, such as Islah. During this dialogue, outcomes and priorities from the community and regional dialogues and the community projects were shared with national-level stakeholders, and participants discussed key needs and recommendations for addressing them. Such recommendations are shared subsequently in this paper.

7   **Dissemination of Outcomes within Yemen**—Dissemination of outcomes and recommendations from this National-Level Dialogue began in late September 2020 and is ongoing. It has included outreach to policymakers and community members through face-to-face meetings and WhatsApp messages that participants in the regional and local community dialogues sent to their contacts throughout Yemen.

Impact on Communities

Participation in the above program activities impacted the involved communities at various levels, leading to outcomes such as the following:

▶ *Resolving long-standing community problems and conflict through teamwork across community sectors*—This has included providing critical water sources to communities in need, helping girls return to school through providing sanitation and safety apparatuses, and limiting the spread of disease through improving sewage systems and waste disposal. In Sana'a, community members particularly highlighted that the water initiative facilitated through the project had reduced conflict between residents of two districts, as it enabled water to be provided daily rather than sporadically.

▶ *Inspiring additional community-led initiatives and government-led initiatives while enhancing community cooperation*—for example:

- In Lahj, community members and local officials were inspired to donate more than $8,000 in in-kind contributions to the sewage system rehabilitation project sponsored by ICRD, sharing ownership of the initiative and working together with project leaders to restore an essential service to their community.

- In Abyan, the successful completion of an initiative to install a veranda to protect students at a girls' school inspired one of the students' parents to fund the building of an additional classroom at the school to alleviate the crowding of students.

- In Sana'a, community members witnessing the installation of water supply tanks, supported through the program, began gathering community donations to purchase a water tank vehicle to help sustain the water supply regularly. The water project also inspired other neighborhoods to replicate the same initiative.

- In Shabwa, a community project to install lighting for safety and crime reduction at the night market inspired willingness by local merchants and other community members to contribute to providing additional lighting in other areas. Additionally, the successful completion of this initiative, the positive reception by the community, and the advocacy of the facilitators led the local government to provide support for additional lighting installation.

- In Ibb, a community water reservoir project inspired the governorate Office of Water and Environment to become involved, leading to an increase in the water collection capacity from 2 to 10 meters and to plans to create two additional committees to coordinate water projects among different districts and to protect the security of water structures.

▶ *Empowerment of and support to women as vital community leaders and actors*—Women's and girls' roles in society have been improved through their leading roles and direct contributions to both the community dialogues and the initiatives addressing vital community needs. With women's engagement throughout the project, religious leaders, in particular, are now more actively promoting the significant role of women in developing their communities and the importance of girls' education.

► *Building trust in the community dialogues as a mechanism for future problem-solving*—In Sana'a, for example, community members have already expressed interest in replicating this sort of community dialogue because, as one local participant stated, "it is successful and it discusses the needs and interests of people." In Ibb, participants recommended that the dialogue mechanism be expanded to involve other districts and more decision-makers, allowing more citizens to share their needs and priorities.
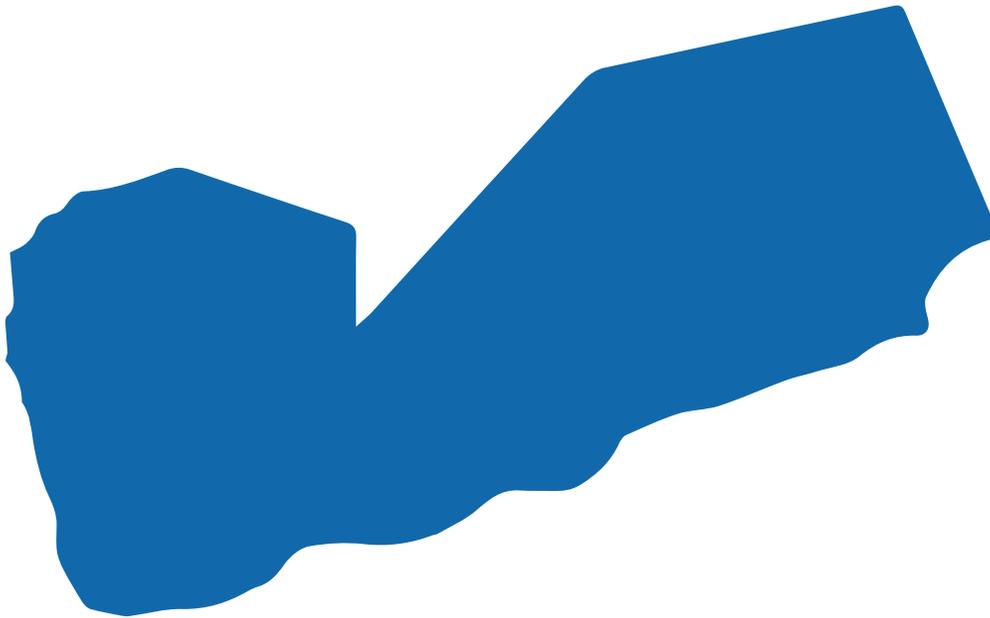
Recommendations for Policy-Makers from the Initiative

Recommendations from the National-Level Dialogue:

While other recent national-level dialogues have focused on direct discussions for how to end the civil war, this National-Level Dialogue (NLD) took a different approach. By elevating critical community needs to national-level decision-makers and those who influence them, and including civil society representatives directly in the discussions, the NLD provided a platform for stakeholders affiliated with or related to major parties to the conflict to discuss less-contentious issues related to the shared needs of the Yemeni public, with the goal of bringing these needs and recommendations for addressing them into national decision-making and peace talks. The NLD also provided a 'safe space' for key stakeholders from different political backgrounds who had never met before to begin developing relationships and channels for communication.

Reflections from two participating government actors are indicative of the positive response to this approach:

► *"The dialogue [NLD] helped [participants] meet cordially instead of meeting on the battlefield or in hostile discussions. Also, there was an exchange of experiences and information, and each of us listened to the opinion of the other without mutual accusations . . . despite our differences in political trends and the multiplicity of our dialects and our culture."* – District Director and Tribal Leader

> ▶ *"The national dialogue [NLD] gave space to raise issues, discuss them, and put forward possible solutions. The importance of the debate at this time, I think, is an urgent necessity. It gave a picture of the situation in many areas of Yemen." –Deputy Governor*

Overwhelmingly, the group acknowledged that it is difficult to talk about the future and how to address local needs at the current moment because, in the eyes of many, the future is dependent upon a political settlement.[3] However, participants discussed a number of recommendations which, if implemented successfully and collaboratively, could help to both address critical local needs in the immediate term and help move Yemen closer to a political settlement and broader peace by building knowledge, institutions, relationships, and trust among key parties. While participants were generally supportive of most of the final terms of the 2013 National Dialogue Conference, immediate economic and service provision needs are of the utmost importance today.

While NLD participants discussed a wide range of topics, the conversation particularly focused on the effects of the war on local governance structures and the overarching factors that should be addressed by local and international actors, both in the context of a political agreement, and looking forward to Yemen's future.

Key points emphasized by participants during the NLD were that: (1) the conflict has created severe deficiencies in service delivery that will not disappear simply with a political agreement, and (2) the lack of vital services—such as water, electricity, and education—generally stems from several main causes:

1 Basic lack of resources from both domestic and international development/aid sources.

2 Lack of sustainable structures for delivering critical services. Some local structures have been replaced or sidelined by temporary, unsustainable structures set up by non-state actors (such as the STC) or international organizations (this problem is worse in the south). These structures are generally formed outside of the law and supervision of local authorities. They are often subject to the life-cycle of the grant or program they are under, and their service delivery disappears as soon as the program ends due to lack of resources and legal structures for sustainability.

3 Generally weak capacity of local officials and institutions to solve service delivery problems. Officials often lack technical knowledge or are appointed based on political affiliation, not technical expertise (both in the north and south).

Many of the following recommendations are geared toward addressing these problems.

There was wide agreement among NLD participants on the need for decentralized governance and for local bodies to have power to deliver services. However, the future of a federalized state that allows for decentralization under the terms of the National Dialogue Conference is still a source of disagreement among the main political actors. Nevertheless, the recommendations that emerged from the NLD can help Yemeni decision makers international organizations and donor countries, and those at the negotiating table develop practical ways to build effective and inclusive institutions at both the local and national levels in a future Yemen.

The recommendations below do **not** represent points for which consensus was reached among all participants in the NLD, nor specific recommendations being advanced by ICRD, but rather a broad selection of potentially actionable ideas presented during the NLD discussion that were shared by various members of the group:

Conflict Mitigation Recommendations:

1. **Resolve issues between the key political actors (e.g. the ROYG, STC, Ansar Allah, and political parties like Islah and the GPC)** at the local level. Given the current fragmentation of the country, local-level agreements could build much-needed trust and models for collaboration in addressing urgent needs, which could help pave the way for a larger political settlement while, at the same time, enabling more timely delivery of critical services to citizens.

   The formation of the Taiz Joint Committee, agreed upon as part of the Stockholm Agreement, and which was intended to include civil society and other local leaders from Taiz to collaborate on shared needs such as opening roads, was regarded by some participants as a model that could be explored and adapted elsewhere. While this initiative has yet to be effectively implemented in Taiz, participants felt that it could be an example for how similar initiatives could be designed elsewhere in Yemen to provide stability and facilitate humanitarian relief. Collaborative bodies composed of civil society, religious actors, and other local leaders could participate, approaching issues from a local lens in order to diffuse heated local tensions and create communication and collaboration channels.

2. **Renew a focus on increasing efforts for trust-building through prisoner exchanges and road openings in places like Taiz where both Ansar Allah and the ROYG are present.**

3. **Enforce the terms of the Riyadh Agreement between the ROYG and the STC.** This agreement aimed to resolve conflict between the ROYG and the STC in the south, including by forming a new technocratic government and integrating STC forces into the Ministries of Interior and Defense. While this agreement was signed in November 2019, to date it remains largely unimplemented.

4. **Encourage media discourse that fosters trust among parties to the conflict.** This could involve coverage of joint efforts to address citizen needs, reducing promotion of unfounded accusations of blame in the media that can enflame hostilities, and enhancing media personnel's awareness of the role they can play in de-escalating tensions and building social cohesion.

5. **Reduce the risk of a massive oil spill from the Safer oil tanker located off the coast of Hudayda.** Without needed maintenance, the tanker could lead to an unprecedented environmental and humanitarian disaster at the regional level.

Governance and Service Delivery Recommendations:

1. **Activate local councils by providing them with much-needed training, expertise, and finances**. Some local council officials have held their seats for many years, as elections have not taken place for a long time. While elections may not be feasible in the short term, increasing support for local structures by international organizations could create capacity and trust in state bodies, instead of relying solely on civil society for aid. Assessments of the capacity needs of local councils and other service delivery bodies should be conducted, followed by linkages of these bodies with donors who can not only provide funds but facilitate specialized knowledge transfer to build local expertise. Other recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of these local bodies included ensuring salary payments for local councils, formation of specific crisis management committees within local authorities, greater involvement by women in these bodies, and strengthening of monitoring and accountability mechanisms.

2. **Do not enact the muhasasa system (quota system assigning people to specific positions based on their political affiliations) proposed by Saudi Arabia and the UAE to solve issues of security and governance between the STC and the ROYG**. Rather, the qualifications and capacity to fulfill the requirements of the job should be prioritized. A representative political solution or the appointment of unaffiliated technocrats who possess the relevant skills to key positions is preferred.

3. **Support and stimulate initiatives to build communication and collaboration between the private sector, local and international organizations, and local authorities.** Such initiatives should prioritize critical needs, such as service delivery at the community level and the building of sustainable structures within the legal framework, rather than temporary parallel structures, which are unlikely to be sustained after specific projects end.

4. **Convene a meeting among all of the governors in both the north and the south in order to discuss some of the main political issues** (e.g. service delivery, international funds, courts and justice delivery), while also including representatives from local and international organizations.

5. **Update mechanisms for assessing citizens' service delivery needs in each local directorate,** and ensure that donors are connected with these mechanisms and their findings.

6. **Support the establishment of cooperatives** (e.g. in water management, agriculture) at the local level as a way to address local needs without reliance on the central state.

7. **Strengthen mechanisms for accountability and transparency in all sectors.**

Water Management Recommendations:

The efficient allocation and conservation of clean water was one of the most critical priorities cited across the governorates. While it is more important in some governorates than others, there is a continuing national crisis around water management that has been exacerbated

by the influx of IDPs in places like Dhamar. In other areas, the biggest problem is the lack of any functioning local authority to protect water resources. This can lead to individuals interfering with water systems to divert water for their own personal use, pollution of water sources, conflict over limited water access, and other socio-economic problems, such as children being forced to drop out of school to walk long distances each day to fetch water for their families. Local water management bodies were created by the World Bank in places like Lahj, but these often lack resources and support and thus become inactive.

1. Form local water management bodies under the auspices of the governorate to sustain engagement on these issues even after specific aid programs end. Local authorities, civil society, and other stakeholders should collaborate through these bodies, but they should be institutionalized as part of the legal and governance frameworks for sustainability.

2. Prioritize the maintenance and enhancement of water infrastructure. Lack of such infrastructure has exacerbated water shortages in some parts of Yemen and flood damage in others. Given the vast increases in the amount of rainfall this year, particular attention should be paid to water infrastructure such as dams and water reservoirs. Drainage, flooding, and sewage issues are extremely important to address, especially in areas with IDPs.

3. Create emergency management teams at the governorate level to address water-related crises. These teams can work with local authorities to prepare for floods and natural disasters so that they are ready to provide needed help to communities. They can also facilitate rapid responses to such disasters, including taking actions such as quick drainage of water to avoid creation of damp areas that breed mosquitoes which spread deadly diseases.

Education Recommendations:

Participants in all of the dialogues expressed deep concern about the educational system in Yemen, in light of the extent of the damage inflicted upon the education sector as a result of the war.

1. **Rehabilitate damaged schools and withdraw armed groups from educational facilities.** In particular, address overcrowding, so that neither host communities nor IDPs are excluded from classrooms or have reason for conflict over educational resources, and provide washing stations and bathroom facilities for female students so that schools are accessible to girls.

2. **Pay the salaries of teachers** to help normalize the education process and reduce the reliance on temporary instructors, who are paid less and do not possess the same qualifications as salaried teachers.

Judiciary Recommendations:

① **Rebuild judicial infrastructure damaged during the conflict.**

② **Build the capacity of the judicial and security service providers.**

③ **Provide the necessary security protection for judges and judicial personnel.**

Communication Recommendations:

① **Formalize and enhance regular channels for communication and cooperation among local government, civil society, and religious actors.** The community dialogues and local projects in this program illuminated the need for regular mechanisms for communication among these key actors that do not exist at a formal level in most governorates. Participants recommended that regular meetings be activated involving governors and local directors to discuss the issues and needs of the local community. They cited Shabwa, where the governor has regular direct contact channels with local councils, district directors, and other stakeholders, as a potential model for other governorates.

Recommendations for the International Community

Based upon the findings of both the NLD and the program as a whole, ICRD makes the following recommendations to the international community to support peace and stability in Yemen at both the local and the national levels.

① **Support initiatives to resolve conflicts and reduce violence at the local level even while working toward a national-level peace agreement.** Do not wait until a national agreement is reached to begin local peacebuilding initiatives, as the latter does not depend on the former and can actually help to pave the way for a national-level agreement. The adage "all politics is local" is very apt in Yemen. Addressing local conflicts can reduce drivers of violence among parties to the national conflict and their supporters, as well as create opportunities for trust-building and collaboration among such actors at the local level. When opposing parties such as the ROYG and the STC, for example, see that collaboration for the common good is possible on local issues, it encourages them to explore possibilities for collaboration at higher levels, and creates pathways for such collaboration to happen.

Additionally, evidence suggests that many Yemenis who join or support violent extremist groups do so not because they have bought into the ideology of such groups, but rather because they see such groups as their best hope for achieving critical security, economic, service, justice, or psychological and identity needs. Empowering local communities to provide nonviolent alternatives for fulfilling such needs, and resolving conflicts that hinder the fulfillment of these needs, can reduce reliance on and support for violent extremist groups and other armed actors.

International donor support should build the capacity, access to resources, and sustainable mechanisms of local actors—including local authorities , local CSOs, and religious

actors—to resolve such conflicts peacefully, building upon Yemeni social norms and tribal practices that support nonviolence where appropriate.

2 **Support critical service delivery through strengthening of local governing bodies and legal structures—focusing not only on financial resources but the building of technical capacity.** Aid and services should be directed through sustainable structures such as local authorities, local security bodies, the legal system, and local NGOs. Working with these structures within the legal framework, while building their capacity, can achieve sustainability beyond the end of time-bound program funding, in contrast to simply focusing on humanitarian aid delivery by itself, the impact of which is less likely to be sustained after specific projects and donor grants end.

Provide critical technical training and expertise for local authorities, so that they are equipped not only to receive aid funds, but to facilitate effective service delivery that responds efficiently to the critical needs of their communities. Prioritize capacity-building in areas such as conducting community needs assessments, maintaining effective communication channels with constituencies, coordinating efforts of various technical experts and service providers, managing resources, implementing effective responses to crises, collaborating with civil society, evaluating effectiveness of initiatives, and maintaining accountability while reducing corruption. Support knowledge transfer of lessons learned and best practices to inform higher-level governance at the governorate and national levels.

Support initiatives that build communication and collaboration between local authorities and civil society—particularly CSOs, religious leaders, tribal leaders, and other key community stakeholders. Such initiatives should provide tangible benefits to communities in critical areas of need, such as service delivery and conflict resolution. This will help build trust in local institutions and demonstrate models for effective collaboration that can be shared with other communities, while promoting transparency.

3 **Enhance the role and collaboration of religious actors and CSOs in addressing local problems.** Given their deep ties to and influence in their communities at the grassroots level, religious actors and CSOs often have the most direct understanding of immediate community needs, and the ability to raise public awareness and mobilize public action regarding specific issues. In Lahj, for example, while local health offices had limited capacity to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak, CSOs and religious actors worked with social activists and local business leaders to establish isolation centers and provide support to local hospitals. Preaching by local imams was particularly effective in mobilizing the public to support the isolation centers and hospitals, as well as in supporting sustainability of water access, waste disposal, education, and other initiatives elsewhere through raising public awareness and support. It is important to support efforts to both build the capacity of religious actors and CSOs in addressing community needs and to enhance their cooperation with local authorities in a way that supports effective and sustainable service delivery.

4 **Support the rebuilding and enhancement of judicial infrastructure and justice mechanisms.** Judicial institutions—including courts, police, prosecutor's offices, and prisons—have been greatly damaged during the war. Strengthening the judicial system will help Yemenis gain access to justice, which will deter violence and reduce incentives

to engage in violent acts to resolve issues. It will build peace at the local level, which will make communities more likely and better equipped to contribute to and sustain a national-level peace process.

While the justice system is divided at the national level, it remains comparatively functional at the local level, particularly in urban areas where many people still choose to go to court to resolve their disputes. Donors should invest in the justice system to address critical needs such as rehabilitating buildings and providing necessary equipment, as well as to provide greatly needed technical support and capacity-building—including training of administrative staff for courts, prosecution offices, and prison management.

Support should also focus on training security actors and prison staff on Yemeni laws that govern their mandate and on international humanitarian laws to increase their professionalism and reduce incidents of abuse. Engaging communities in dialogue with justice and security actors is a crucial component of this, as it helps to increase accountability and builds trust between communities and security actors. This is particularly important as community actors such as tribal leaders, religious leaders, and Akels (elders) have in the past helped security forces to address security threats and other problems.

5 **Support the participation of appropriate religious actors, tribal actors, and civil society representatives in informing national 'Track I' peace talks among government actors.** Such actors are often in tune with local needs at the community level, and can appeal to religious values and tribal customs that support peaceful resolution of conflict and care for basic human needs. They can thus help to provide a powerful moral imperative to moving the peace process forward based on pro-social principles and prioritization of citizen well-being across the north-south divide. They can also help to mobilize support at the local level for any national agreement.

Engagement of these actors may be done through Track II consultations to inform the UN Office of the Special Envoy to the Secretary-General on Yemen's efforts and help make the peace process more inclusive and reflective of the priorities of Yemeni citizens, rather than those of higher-level political actors only.

6 **Support trust-building measures between conflict parties at the local, governorate, and national levels.** This could take the form of providing safe spaces for parties to discuss issues and negotiate confidence-building measures, resources with which to implement trust-building initiatives, and monitoring of such initiatives. It could include support for Track II dialogue activities in governorates such as Aden, Taiz, and Shabwa or regions such as the west coast where there are particular ongoing tensions between different actors, as well as support for specific initiatives such as prisoner exchanges.

Conclusion

A national-level peace agreement in Yemen is unlikely to be effective and sustainable unless Yemeni citizens at the community level are able to coexist peacefully and meet their critical basic needs. The war has severely weakened their ability to do so, reducing local resilience against violence. Even as it works toward a national agreement, the international community should prioritize supporting critical needs at the community level—including through investing in strengthening local governance structures and service delivery mechanisms and supporting the resolution of local conflicts. Addressing these needs can reduce drivers of violence among parties to the national conflict and their supporters, as well as create opportunities for trust-building and collaboration among such actors at the local level, which can then encourage greater collaboration in peacemaking at the national level.

In support of this, donors should build the technical capacity of and provide infrastructure support for local government structures such as local authorities, justice mechanisms, and security institutions. To promote sustainability, support should build collaboration among key community actors—such as civil society organizations, religious leaders, and tribal leaders—in working with their communities to identify and prioritize needs, and advocate and collaborate with formal local government structures to meet those needs and sustain them beyond donor funding. Such an approach, which allows local ownership of service delivery, would ensure that community needs are met and sustained, help build trust and collaboration between local communities and local government structures, and strengthen transparency and accountability.

Stable communities will likely be better able to participate effectively in a national peace process, to mitigate violence at the local level even while the national conflict still persists, and to sustain peace in the country after a national agreement is reached. To build stable communities, it is imperative to strengthen local governance, ensure service delivery to address critical needs, and strengthen community participation so that Yemeni citizens can better advocate for their own needs and inform national processes in support of a truly sustainable peace.

Endnotes

1 United Nations World Food Programme, "Yemen: The world's worst humanitarian crisis," cited on November 2, 2020, https://www.wfp.org/yemen-crisis

2	Mohammed Ghobari and Mohammed Mokhashef, "Yemen separatists announce self-rule in south, complicating peace efforts," Reuters, April 25, 2020, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-south/yemen-separatists-announce-self-rule-in-south-complicating-peace-efforts-idUSKCN228003

3	Along with the national civil war, the immediate concern in the south is the ongoing conflict between the STC and the ROYG, which has been in part driven by public disappointment with the ROYG's ability to function as a governing body in providing public services in the south. Sustainable political settlements would thus need to address both north-south conflict and the intra-south conflict dynamics.