

Position Paper

Role of Yemeni Women in Local Authority

Between Representation and Marginalization - Taiz Governorate



December 2025

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Executive Summary

In Yemen, years of conflict, political instability, and deep-rooted social norms have significantly limited women's participation in governance. Although women are present in local authorities, their roles often remain symbolic, with little real influence on decision-making processes. Studying the role of women in local government is crucial to understanding these challenges and identifying ways to promote more inclusive, effective governance that reflects the needs of all members of society.

The United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, adopted in 2000, emphasizes the vital role of women in conflict prevention, resolution, and peacebuilding. It advocates for the increased representation and participation of women at all decision-making levels. Taiz governorate in Yemen provides a pertinent case study to analyze the progress and challenges in implementing this agenda, particularly concerning women's representation and participation in local authorities.

Taiz, one of Yemen's most populous governorates, has faced severe conflict and humanitarian crises. Women in Taiz have endured significant hardships due to prolonged conflict but have also shown remarkable resilience and leadership in peacebuilding efforts. Despite these efforts, women's representation in local governance remains limited.

Excluding women from local authority positions has significant implications for governance, accountability, and peace efforts. This exclusion not only perpetuates gender inequality but also undermines the effectiveness and inclusivity of decision-making processes.

Despite the existence of policies that protect women's rights, the lack of clear political will, legislative weaknesses (absence of mandatory quotas), and the failure to develop clear implementation plans and action indicators are the main reasons hindering women's political and leadership participation. True empowerment of women requires a shift from merely enacting laws to their effective implementation, and a review of legal texts to align with international obligations. The amendments should also call for real political participation at decision-making levels (local and national) beyond the quota system, with a top priority given to protecting women from all forms of violence and discrimination.

Increased female representation in local authority ensures diverse perspectives are considered in decision-making processes, particularly on issues affecting women and girls. The interviewed representatives of women-led CSOs stated that increase women representation in local authority improves the image and credibility of institutions (governments, political parties, parliaments); contributes to socio-economic development; expands the pool of women willing to run for office; promotes better understanding of gender equality issues in society; increases public trust in the political system; and impacts the policy agenda. Recognizing and supporting the valuable, albeit informal, contributions of women in conflict prevention and mediation, often conducted within existing gender roles, is vital for strengthening their overall influence.

This position paper is part of a four-year program titled “Yemen Humanitarian Program for those Affected by Crises/Conflicts and Disasters Among Internally Displaced People and Host Communities”, which aims at creating a more just, inclusive, and sustainable Yemen by empowering women, youth, and marginalized groups in two districts in Taiz governorate, namely, Al-Ma’afar and Ash-Shamayatain districts; implemented by Sheba Youth Foundation for Development (SYF), in partnership with Oxfam, with support from Danida.

Introduction

Developing this position paper on the ‘*Role of Yemeni women in local authority, between representation and marginalization*’ comes as part of SYF’s program to outline its stance on the gap between formal representation of women in local authority and their actual influence on governance. To achieve this, a research study led by an independent consultant, during the period from August to September 2025, in 2 rural and 2 urban districts in Taiz governorate in Yemen.

The data for this position paper were obtained through a research methodology that employed qualitative and quantitative data collection approaches. The study draws on primary and secondary data that collected evidence on women's participation in local authority; daily challenges and key cultural, security and legal obstacles hindering women’s active participation in the local authority in Taiz governorate, the institutional support received by women, as well as ways and strategies for further active participation in local authority. In total, through the Key Informant Interviews and consultation sessions, the research has been able to reach out to 45 female and 14 male participants, in addition to 40 women in local authority through the online survey.

Primary data included conducting (i) 16 in-depth interviews (KIIs) with women in local authorities, representatives of women-led CSOs and government officials; (ii) Five face-to-face consultation sessions with women human rights activists, political leaders, representatives of national and international NGOs (43 participants in total, 72% female); and (iii) an online survey that was completed by 40 women from local authorities in 4 target districts (2 rural and 2 urban districts). Secondary data involved desk review of published and grey literature on the role of Yemeni women in local authority between representation and marginalization. The data collection started on 26 August 2025 and completed on 4 September 2025. Data from the KIIs and consultation sessions were analyzed using thematic analysis and narrative analysis techniques to categorize responses to open-ended questions. Data from the online survey was analyzed quantitatively to show data disaggregation by location, urbanity status and age group. Quotes from participants included in this paper are illustrative of the perspectives raised during the consultations or individual interviews. Models of successful women leaders in local authority (i.e., case studies) have given their consent for publication.

Advancements In Implementing UNSCR 1325

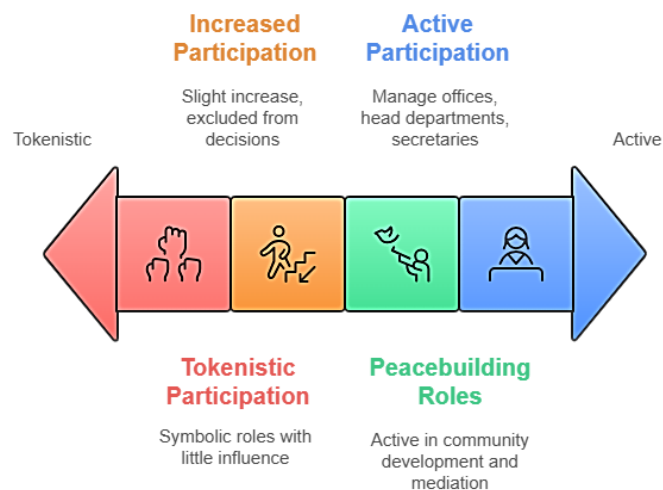
The United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, adopted in 2000, emphasizes the vital role of women in conflict prevention, resolution, and peacebuilding. It advocates for the increased representation and participation of women at all decision-making levels. Taiz governorate in Yemen provides a pertinent case study to analyze the progress and challenges in implementing this agenda, particularly concerning women's representation and participation in local authorities.

Women's Representation and Participation in Taiz Governorate

Taiz, one of Yemen's most populous governorates, has faced severe conflict and humanitarian crises. Women in Taiz have endured significant hardships due to prolonged conflict but have also shown remarkable resilience and leadership in peacebuilding efforts. Despite these efforts, women's representation in local governance remains limited.

Current status

Women's participation in local authority ranges from tokenistic to active.



Representation In Formal Local Authority

- **Representation of women in the formal local authority and government bodies is still limited.**

The vast majority of interviewees and participants of the consultation sessions agreed that women's representation in the formal local structures (i.e. formal local authority and government bodies) is still limited. In addition, the anecdotal evidence collected during interviews and consultation sessions highlights the importance of representing women in the different bodies of local authorities which will enhance local development and improve decision-making process. The data suggests, inter alia, that ensuring women's representation requires raising awareness among all segments of society, especially women, providing training, financial support and encouraging women's participation.

The quantitative data from online survey confirms that women's representation in the senior positions of local government bodies is limited. Overall, 63% of the survey participants (25 out of 40 female

respondents) reports limited level of women's representation in the senior positions of the executive offices of the local authority in their districts.

Respondents from urban areas are more likely to agree that women's representation in the local government bodies is limited than respondents from rural areas, 68% and 57% respectively, with respondents from Al-Mudhaffar district more likely to agree that women's representation in local government bodies is limited. This might be attributed to the fact that women in urban areas have greater aspirations than women from rural areas, with the dominance of the traditional Yemeni gender norms, especially in rural areas, that characterize women as a weak creature that always needs to be protected by man, alongside the stereotypical expectations that 'women are expected to take care of the children, cook, and clean the home'. The limited abilities of women resulting from the limited opportunities of learning in the past few decades might be another contributor.

- **Level of women's representation in the senior positions of the local government bodies has increased slightly from what it was ten years ago.**

The interviewed women from local authorities and representatives of women-led CSOs stated that women's representation in the senior positions of the executive offices of the local authority has increased slightly. Despite the increased number of women in the senior positions in local government bodies, women are often excluded from formal decision-making processes. The slight increase in women's representation in local government bodies was also confirmed by the women who completed the online survey. Overall, 58% of the survey participants (23 out of 40 female respondents) agrees that women's representation in the formal local authority in their districts has increased slightly.

Respondents from rural areas are more likely to agree that women's representation in the local government bodies has increased slightly during the last ten years than respondents from urban areas, 62% and 53% respectively, with respondents from Ash-Shamayatain district report the highest level of agreement that women's representation in local government bodies in their district has increased in the last decade. The district has seen a rise in high-level appointments of women in decision-making roles over the past few years, where women are active participants in the management of six executive offices, namely, the District Culture Office, District Public Health and Population Office, District Education Office, District Industry and Trade Office, District Duties Office and District Legal Affairs Office, alongside women serve as departments' heads and secretaries almost in all executive offices.

Participation in formal local authority

- **Women's participation in formal local authority is often limited, and their voices are not fully heard.**

The vast majority of interviewees and participants of the consultation sessions agreed that women's participation in the formal local authority is limited due to a combination of factors including the ongoing conflict, deeply entrenched patriarchal structures, and discriminatory laws and practices.

The quantitative data from online survey confirms that women's participation in formal local authority is limited. Overall, 48% of the survey participants (19 out of 40 female respondents) reports limited level of women's participation in local authority in their districts. Respondents from rural areas are more likely to agree that women's participation in formal local authority is limited than respondents from urban areas, 57% and 37% respectively. This might be attributed to the fact that women in urban centers may have greater access to education and participation opportunities. Women in rural areas often face greater

restrictions due to increased poverty, limited access to services, and stronger adherence to traditional customs, making their path to representation even more challenging.

- **Women's participation in the formal local authority is tokenistic, with limited impact on power dynamics and decision-making.**

The interviewed women from local authorities and women-led CSOs stated that although women are present in local authorities, their roles often remain symbolic, with little real influence on decision-making processes.

The data available from grey literature confirms that the number of women in local councils is low, with the absence of provisions in the local authority's legislation that guarantee the support and enhancement of women's chances of success and participation in local councils, such as obliging parties to specify a percentage of women in their lists of candidates or allocation of a percentage of local seats for women.

- **Level of women's participation in the formal local authority has increased slightly from what it was ten years ago.**

The anecdotal evidence collected during interviews with women from local authorities and women-led CSOs indicates that despite the increased number of women in senior roles at the executive offices of the district local authorities, women are often excluded from formal decision-making processes.

The slight increase in women's participation in local authorities was also confirmed by the women who completed the online survey. Overall, 65% of the survey participants (26 out of 40 female respondents) agrees that women's participation in the formal local authority in their districts has increased slightly. Respondents from rural areas are more likely to agree that women's participation in formal local authority has increased slightly, compared to respondents from urban areas, 71% and 58% respectively.



Women's Participation in Local Governance Across Urban and Rural Areas in Taiz Governorate

Urban areas: opportunities and obstacles

In urban areas of Taiz, women often encounter a more conducive environment for engaging in local governance. This stems from several factors:

- **Education:** Higher literacy rates and access to diverse educational opportunities. Urban women tend to have improved access to education, fostering critical thinking and enhancing their capacity to engage in political discourse. Furthermore, their exposure to more progressive gender norms challenges traditional stereotypes and encourages greater societal acceptance of women in leadership roles. The presence of civil society organizations provides crucial support through advocacy, training, and networking opportunities, further empowering women to participate in local governance structures.
- **Exposure:** Greater awareness of progressive gender norms and women's rights.
- **Civil society:** Active presence of organizations advocating for women's empowerment and providing platforms for participation.

Despite these advantages, urban women continue to face significant obstacles:

- **Limited networks:** Restricted access to influential political networks and decision-making circles. Even with higher education and greater awareness, urban women often struggle to penetrate established political networks dominated by men. This lack of access limits their ability to influence policy decisions and secure positions of power. Moreover, resource disparities further disadvantage women, as they may lack the financial means to effectively compete in political campaigns or implement impactful community projects. Overcoming deeply ingrained social biases remains a persistent challenge, requiring sustained efforts to promote gender equality and challenge discriminatory attitudes.
- **Resource constraints:** Unequal access to financial resources and other essential support for political campaigns and initiatives.
- **Social barriers:** Persistent societal biases and discriminatory practices that hinder women's advancement in leadership positions.

Rural areas: exacerbated challenges

In contrast to urban areas, women in rural Taiz face a more challenging environment that significantly restricts their participation in local governance. These challenges are rooted in:

- **Educational disparities:** Limited access to quality education and high rates of female illiteracy. The lack of educational opportunities in rural areas perpetuates a cycle of disadvantage for women. High illiteracy rates limit their ability to access information, understand their rights, and effectively participate in

- **Traditional gender roles:** Entrenched patriarchal norms that confine women to domestic roles and limit their public engagement.
 - **Economic dependency:** Financial dependence on male family members, restricting their autonomy and decision-making power.
- political processes. Traditional gender roles further constrain women's participation, as they are often expected to prioritize domestic responsibilities over public engagement. Economic dependency on male family members further restricts their autonomy and decision-making power, hindering their ability to advocate for their own interests and contribute to community development.
- **Women participate actively in local authority and government bodies both in urban and rural areas.**

The anecdotal evidence collected during interviews with representatives of local authorities in the target districts suggests the active participation of women in local authorities both in urban and rural areas. In Al-Mudhaffar district, women participate in local government and its executive offices, but to a very limited extent. There are two women in the District Local Council and several women occupy leadership positions in the district's executive offices. In Ash-Shamayatain district, women are active participants in the management of six executive offices. Women also serve as departments' heads and secretaries almost in all executive offices. Recently in Al-Ma'afer district, decisions have been issued to assign and appoint women in the district as directors of executive offices (e.g. Director of the Women's Department in the district local authority office, and Director of District Culture Office). In addition, contracts have been signed (i.e., temporary contracts, not permanent employment) with female cadres in the finance and civil status office.

Local authority leaders who participated in the KIIs believed that the obstacles preventing women from fully participating in local appointments include, but are not limited to, the partisan quota system for local appointments, the customs and traditions of conservative Yemeni society that are compatible with male dominance and male tyranny, the lack of experience and skills necessary for women to assume leadership positions due to the lack and absence of qualifications and training for working women to become effective leaders, in addition to the existence of economic, personal, psychological, and legal obstacles that limit their effective and full participation.

Local authority leaders who participated in the interviews believed that women's participation in local government in Taiz Governorate could be enhanced - particularly in the context of the ongoing conflict - by calling on political parties to activate a 30% quota system for women when nominating cadres for leadership positions and/or employment within the framework of the quota system under which power has been shared since 2013, in addition to working to provide a safe environment for women to work, creating capacity-building and economic empowerment programs for women, and enhancing community awareness through awareness campaigns on the importance of women's role in decision-making, peace, and community building.

Marginalization

Women in local government are largely and completely marginalized, and even their demands are not raised or heard. Even when women are elected and/or selected for senior positions, their voices may be marginalized within local councils and/or executive offices, and they may face challenges in implementing their policies. The anecdotal evidence collected during interviews and consultation sessions highlights gender-based discrimination where women suffer from persistent social and cultural discrimination. Furthermore, the ongoing armed conflict and changes in the religious environment, including a rise in radical religious rhetoric, have led to the marginalization of women, with some experiencing threats and violence. The data suggests, inter alia, addressing gender stereotypes (e.g., women are expected to take care of the children, cook, and clean the home) that impair equality in family relations, through implementing comprehensive policy and awareness raising initiatives that should be designed to deal with stereotypical attitudes about the roles and responsibilities of men and women in family and society.

The interviewed women from local authorities provided notes in relation to women's representation in local government bodies. The data extracted from these notes indicates that women's roles in local authority are defined by both representation and marginalization, where the conflict has created opportunities for women to step into specific public roles, yet they remain with limited impact on power dynamics and decision-making. The data suggests that efforts to support women's participation require robust financial, technical, and political support to build capacity, ensure meaningful representation at all levels, and challenge harmful cultural norms that undermine their public roles.

The limited institutional support further exacerbates the existing marginalization of women. The quantitative data from online survey confirms that the institutional support (i.e. training, funding, advocacy and protection) received by women in local authority is limited. On average, 50% of the survey participants (20 out of 40 female respondents) reports limited level of institutional support received by women.

The anecdotal evidence collected during interviews and consultation sessions indicates that the role of women in local authority in Taiz, particularly within the context of the ongoing conflict, presents a complex picture of both representation and marginalization. While women are increasingly stepping into leadership roles due to the conflict, they often face significant barriers to full participation and influence. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive efforts to promote women's representation, participation, and protection from violence and discrimination. The assassination of a female leader in Taiz city, during the course of this study, highlights the existing pattern of threats against women in public service. This tragic event draws attention to the necessity of protection and support for women in such roles.

The anecdotal evidence collected during interviews and consultation sessions highlights the causes of marginalization, including, inter alia, the following:

- Structural barriers: Traditional gender roles, cultural norms, and societal expectations continue to restrict women's access to education, economic opportunities, and political participation.
- Lack of awareness and empowerment: Many women are unaware of their rights and opportunities, and lack the skills and resources to effectively participate in local governance.

- Discrimination and violence: Women face various forms of discrimination and violence, including domestic violence, sexual harassment, restrictions on their movement and freedom of expression.
- Political instability and conflict: The ongoing conflict has created an environment of insecurity and instability, further limiting women's ability to participate in local governance.

"Women in local government are largely and completely marginalized, and even their demands are not raised or heard. Men's view of working women is strange, for example, why do women work?"ⁱ

"The role of Yemeni women in local government and decision-making positions is a thorny and complex issue, influenced by factors that limit their participation. Many challenges have led to the marginalization of their role at the present time, despite the fact that Yemen has long been known for its women's role, with Queen Bilqis and Queen Arwa being prime examples."ⁱⁱ

Impact of Excluding Women from Local Authority

Excluding women from local authority positions has significant implications for governance, accountability, and peace efforts. This exclusion not only perpetuates gender inequality but also undermines the effectiveness and inclusivity of decision-making processes.

Weakened governance

- **Lack of diverse perspectives:** Women bring unique perspectives and solutions to governance issues due to their different life experiences. Excluding them limits the diversity of viewpoints, leading to less comprehensive policy-making.
- **Underutilized talent:** By not involving women in local authority roles, Yemen fails to utilize the full potential of its population. Women's skills and talents remain untapped, which can weaken the overall governance system.
- **Limited focus on social issues:** Women are more likely to prioritize social issues such as education, healthcare, and family welfare. Their exclusion means these critical areas may receive less attention and resources.

Decreased accountability

- **Reduced representation:** Women's perspectives and needs are less likely to be represented in local governance, leading to policies that do not fully address the concerns of all citizens.
- **Inequitable resource allocation:** Without women in decision-making roles, resource distribution may be biased, favoring interests that do not align with the broader population's needs.
- **Lack of transparency:** Women often advocate for transparency and accountability in governance. Their exclusion can result in less oversight and increased opportunities for corruption.

Hindered peace efforts

- **Missed opportunities for conflict resolution:** Women often play crucial roles in peacebuilding by acting as mediators and advocates for dialogue. Their exclusion limits the potential for sustainable peace initiatives.

- **Increased gender violence:** Excluding women from local authority can exacerbate gender-based violence, as there are fewer advocates to address and prioritize these issues within governance structures.
- **Unbalanced power dynamics:** A governance structure that excludes women reinforces patriarchal norms and power imbalances, making it harder to achieve lasting peace that benefits all members of society.

Participation in Peace Processes

- **Women in Taiz are actively involved in peacebuilding, mediation, and community development at the local level, demonstrating their skills and engagement.**

However, this informal participation often lacks the formal structures and power to translate into meaningful change. At the local level, women are often the most peacemakers by conveying the real needs of local communities to decision-makers, by resolving community conflicts and by leading the change at community level. The anecdotal evidence collected during interviews with women from local authorities and representatives of women-led CSOs suggests that women in Taiz have been instrumental in grassroots peace initiatives, often organizing community dialogues and advocating for ceasefires. However, their involvement in formal peace negotiations and policy-making remains insufficient.

The anecdotal evidence collected during interviews, with women from local authorities and representatives of women-led CSOs, indicates that there is a lot of success stories that tells women's influence at local level. Examples of these successes include, inter alia:

Success Stories from Rural Areas of Taiz Governorate

The rural areas of Taiz Governorate, Yemen, are brimming with inspiring stories of success, particularly highlighting the roles of women in community development and conflict resolution. Here are some notable achievements:

Al-Ma'afer District

Women in Community Participation

In Al-Ma'afer district, women have taken on significant roles in community participation and local government, functioning as mediators to resolve conflicts. For instance:

- Mrs. Rawda Al-Mushammer played a crucial role in mediating a dispute over paving the road to Al-Nashama Market.
- Mrs. Bushara As-Senwi helped resolve a conflict concerning a well in the Al-Kala'ebah sub-district.
- Mrs. Najat As-Senwi was instrumental in settling disputes related to water projects in the As-Sannah area.

These women also spearheaded an initiative in 2017 to address the halt in teachers' salaries by establishing a charitable fund, enabling teachers to continue their work. Training and support from organizations like the Sheba Youth Foundation for Development and Oxfam were pivotal in these successes.

Community Dialogues and Water Projects

Bashara As-Senwi mobilized local community dialogues to resolve a longstanding dispute over the Shubat Kala'ebah Water Project. Her efforts led to the project's revival after a 35-year hiatus. The key to success was the inclusive participation of women and Bushara's exceptional communication skills.

Community and Political Engagement

Social Cohesion and Support Initiatives

In Al-Ma'afer district, initiatives have focused on roads, social cohesion, displaced persons, and education. Despite challenges such as partisan quotas, the community's intrinsic motivation has driven these successes.

Ash-Shamayatain District

Cultural and Developmental Leadership

Hiyam Abdullah, Director of the Culture Office, has made significant strides by leading the technical committee to prepare a strategic plan for 2023. She also spearheaded a women's initiative to activate the Productive Family Center and led teams to represent Taiz in cultural festivals. Her efforts in resolving community disputes through development projects have been commendable.

Administrative Innovations

Rima Abdul-Halim Shamsan, working in the Industry and Trade Office's secretariat, successfully modernized the office's systems by creating a database and organizing archives. Her determination to overcome challenges has led to marked performance improvements.

Women's Political Alliance

In Ash Shamayatayn, activists launched the Women's Parties Alliance, the first of its kind aimed at integrating women's voices into political parties. This initiative, supported by civil society organizations, underscores the political influence women can wield locally and beyond.

These stories from Taiz Governorate illustrate the transformative power of community-driven initiatives and the pivotal roles women play in fostering development and peace.

Success Stories from Urban Areas in Taiz Governorate

The Taiz Governorate in Yemen has witnessed remarkable success stories from women who have broken barriers and contributed significantly to their communities. These stories highlight the perseverance, strength, and resilience of women who have defied societal norms and made impactful changes.

The martyr Mrs. Iftihan Al-Mashhari: A Trailblazer in Local Authority

Mrs. Iftihan Al-Mashhari's journey to a leadership position in the local authority is a testament to her determination and courage. Despite facing numerous challenges, she stood firm against societal customs and traditions that often hinder women's progress. Her success is attributed to her unwavering resolve to continue working despite oppressive obstacles. Her story inspires many to pursue leadership roles regardless of societal expectations.



Ms. Ola Al-Aghbari: Champion of Water Restoration

Ms. Ola Al-Aghbari made significant contributions to peace and infrastructure in Taiz by playing a pivotal role in restoring water access. Her efforts, both personal and institutional, had a profound impact on the city. Her success was driven by her belief in her cause, the empowerment of women, and collaboration with others who shared her vision. Her work demonstrates the power of collective efforts and the importance of women's roles in governance.

Mrs. Sabah Rajih and Amani Al-Jubani: Advocates for Women's Rights

Mrs. Sabah Rajih has been instrumental in resolving cases of abused women, showcasing her commitment to justice and equality. Similarly, Amani Al-Jubani, an activist for women with disabilities, has worked tirelessly to advocate for this marginalized group. Both women have faced and overcome societal challenges, standing as symbols of resilience and dedication to women's rights.

Women's Participation in Development Planning

Women in the Taiz Governorate Office have actively participated in preparing operational and development plans, such as the socio-economic development plan. Their success was bolstered by regional and international support, advocacy, and adherence to international laws like Resolution 1325, which emphasizes women's participation in peace and security. Though material logistical support was a challenge, their efforts highlight the critical role of women in shaping development strategies.

Shadia Mohammed Saeed: Founder of a Protection and Rehabilitation Center

In response to the bombing of the central women's prison, Shadia Mohammed Saeed, a member of the local council in Al-Mudhaffar district, opened a protection and rehabilitation center in 2019. The center provides shelter, training, rehabilitation, and empowerment for affected women, including those who are displaced, abused, or survivors of violence. Success factors included the awareness and dedication of the work team, cooperation with various agencies, and the pressing need for such centers in the current climate.

Female Leadership in Al-Qaherah District

Over the past decade, women in Al-Qaherah district have made substantial strides in public life, taking on roles in institutions, markets, and local authorities. Their nearly complete representation in these areas is due in large part to the emergence of female leaders in senior positions, such as general directors. This shift reflects the growing acceptance and support for female leadership in traditionally male-dominated areas.

These success stories from Taiz Governorate illustrate the power and potential of women when given the opportunity to lead and make a difference. Their achievements serve as a beacon of hope and progress for future generations.

Models of Successful Women Leaders

Individual Case Study 1

Najah Hamid, a distinguished leader with a master's degree, has served as the Director General of General Department of Women's Development in the local authority office in Taiz Governorate for four years. Her tenure has been marked by significant accomplishments and notable challenges.

Achievements in Women's Development

Najah's leadership has led to the establishment of women's development departments in several rural districts, supported by grants from the Political Development Forum and Berghof Foundation. She has made substantial contributions to building the capacity of department managers, creating an extensive database of women in the governorate, and formulating a project matrix for economic and social planning.

Her involvement in preparing the women's plan within the social and economic development plan for Taiz Governorate (2024-2026) highlights her strategic role. This process received sponsorship from organizations and the MoPIC Office, facilitating engagement with donors and decision-makers at both local and international levels. Regional and international support and advocacy have been crucial to her success.

Challenges and Obstacles

Despite these successes, Najah faced administrative and financial hurdles. Decisions were sometimes stalled due to financial constraints, caused by scarce resources and weak coordination between local authorities and donor agencies. Additionally, the lack of genuine partnerships between women's organizations and those working in women's rights remains a daily obstacle.

Overcoming Barriers

Najah believes that challenges can be overcome through advocacy, coordination, communication, and legal avenues. She emphasizes the importance of creating a healthy partnership environment. Her administrative role involves making decisions regarding women's development at both district and governorate levels, preparing plans and policies, and coordinating with private organizations and stakeholders.

Social and Cultural Challenges

Social and cultural barriers, such as extremist religious discourse and traditional customs, pose significant challenges to women's participation in local government. However, Najah notes that society generally does not object to women's participation, and barriers can be addressed through awareness-raising and education.

Institutional Barriers

Institutional challenges include a weak budget, male-biased decisions, and the inadequate implementation of laws. To address these issues, laws and regulations must be enforced, UN resolutions supported, and women provided with sufficient operational budgets.

Resource and Capability Challenges

Scarcity of resources and weak capacity-building programs hinder women's participation. Building partnerships with international and local organizations, developing empowering programs, and advocating for women's rights are essential strategies to overcome these obstacles.

Institutional Support

Currently, institutional support for women in local authorities is limited to projects such as training, awareness-raising, and education programs. However, there is minimal support from local authorities themselves.

Personal Requirements for Strengthening Leadership

To enhance her role in the local authority, Najah identifies the need for an adequate operating budget to implement more administrative projects and enforce laws. She also calls for expanded networking between organizations, the private sector, and official bodies to foster comprehensive development.

Najah Hamid's journey exemplifies the resilience and determination required to advance women's roles in local governance. Her story is a testament to the power of leadership, advocacy, and strategic partnerships in overcoming barriers and achieving meaningful progress.

Individual Case Study 2

Najat As-Senwi stands as a remarkable example of a woman overcoming significant societal and institutional barriers to emerge as a leader in her community. As the Director of the Culture Office in Al-Ma'afer district, Taiz Governorate, she navigates the complex landscape of local governance with determination, advocating for women's participation despite numerous challenges.

Experience in Local Governance

For four years, Najat has served as the Director of the Culture Office within the local council. Her tenure has been marked by a lack of basic infrastructure, such as office space, and operational expenses, which impedes the implementation of cultural projects. Despite these constraints, she has championed women's participation through organizations like the Saba Youth Foundation, instilling a passion for civic involvement.

Challenges Faced

Institutional and Financial Barriers

Najat identifies several shortcomings that hinder her work, including:

- **Low Operating Expenses:** Limited funding restricts the office's ability to function effectively.
- **Lack of Infrastructure:** The absence of a dedicated cultural office and basic amenities.
- **Staff Shortages:** Insufficient personnel to support the office's mission.

Societal and Cultural Hurdles

Cultural norms and traditions pose significant barriers to women's participation in local governance. Women are often marginalized, with their roles confined to traditional boundaries. This exclusion is

evident in the underrepresentation of women in decision-making positions and the pervasive stereotypes that question women's capabilities in leadership roles.

Overcoming Barriers

Najat emphasizes the importance of several key factors in overcoming these challenges:

- **Family and Community Support:** Encouraging environments are crucial for women's success.
- **Training and Qualification:** Providing women with the skills and knowledge necessary for leadership roles.
- **Awareness and Education:** Raising consciousness about the significance of women's participation in all aspects of life.

Strategies for Empowerment

Najat advocates for a multi-faceted approach to enhance women's roles in decision-making:

- **Equitable Representation:** Ensuring women hold leadership positions in local governance.
- **Policy and Legislative Support:** Developing laws that guarantee women's participation.
- **Economic and Social Empowerment:** Providing resources and opportunities for women to thrive.
- **Awareness Campaigns:** Continuously educating society on the importance of gender equality in governance.

Addressing Societal Stereotypes

Stereotypes that undermine women's capabilities in leadership are prevalent. These include perceptions of women as unsuitable for politics and the belief that their roles are confined to domestic spheres. Najat argues that these narratives can be dismantled through:

- **Awareness-Raising:** Educating communities on the value of women's contributions.
- **Empowering Women Leaders:** Strengthening women's capacities to influence decision-making.

Najat As-Senwi's journey highlights the resilience required to navigate and overcome the obstacles faced by women in local governance. Her efforts underscore the necessity of continuous advocacy, education, and support to ensure women's equitable participation in decision-making processes. By fostering an environment that values women's contributions, communities can benefit from diverse perspectives and more inclusive governance.

Individual Case Study 3

Hiyam Abdullah, a university graduate, has held the position of Director of the Culture Office in Ash-Shamayatain district of Taiz Governorate for seven years. Her work in the local authority encompasses a wide range of administrative and leadership roles within the Culture Office. This case study explores her journey, achievements, challenges, and the potential pathways for enhancing women's participation in decision-making processes.

Leadership and Achievements

Abdullah's leadership has been instrumental in revitalizing the cultural sector within her district. Her responsibilities include managing the work team, distributing tasks, preparing annual plans, implementing cultural activities, and coordinating with various civil society organizations. Her initiatives

have led to the successful organization of festivals and events that promote community awareness and preserve cultural heritage. Despite limited resources, she has managed to secure financial support to implement various cultural initiatives, particularly involving women and youth.

Overcoming Challenges

Throughout her tenure, Abdullah has faced numerous challenges, primarily due to limited resources, political and economic conditions, and societal attitudes towards culture. Some of the significant obstacles include:

- Insufficient funding and resources.
- Weak institutional structures and lack of specialized staff.
- Challenges in securing approvals and support for cultural activities.
- Limited community awareness and participation in cultural initiatives.

To overcome these challenges, Abdullah emphasizes the importance of strengthening coordination between local authorities, simplifying procedures, and increasing community engagement in cultural activities.

Women's Participation in Decision-Making

Abdullah's experience highlights the barriers women face in local governance, such as exclusion from budget preparations and lack of incentives. However, she underscores the significance of empowering women through training, increasing their representation in local councils, and leveraging international funding that mandates gender-based participation.

Strategies for Inclusion

- **Increasing Women's Representation:** Encouraging more women to join community committees and local councils.
- **Capacity Building:** Providing training programs to equip women with leadership skills and knowledge in governance.
- **Raising Awareness:** Conducting campaigns to change societal attitudes towards women's roles in decision-making.

Addressing Social and Cultural Challenges

The patriarchal culture and prevailing stereotypes pose significant barriers to women's effective participation in local government. These include societal views that confine women to traditional roles and the reluctance to accept women in leadership positions. Abdullah suggests that these challenges can be mitigated by:

- Clearly defining roles and responsibilities.
- Promoting values of teamwork and open communication.
- Supporting women through leadership blocs and advocacy for their rights.

Institutional Barriers and Resource Constraints

Institutional barriers such as weak accountability, inadequate funding, and lack of empowerment programs hinder women's participation. Abdullah advocates for:

- Improved communication and coordination mechanisms.
- Allocation of resources to support women in leadership roles.
- Development of a preliminary database to identify and address the needs of women leaders.

Enhancing Support for Women Leaders

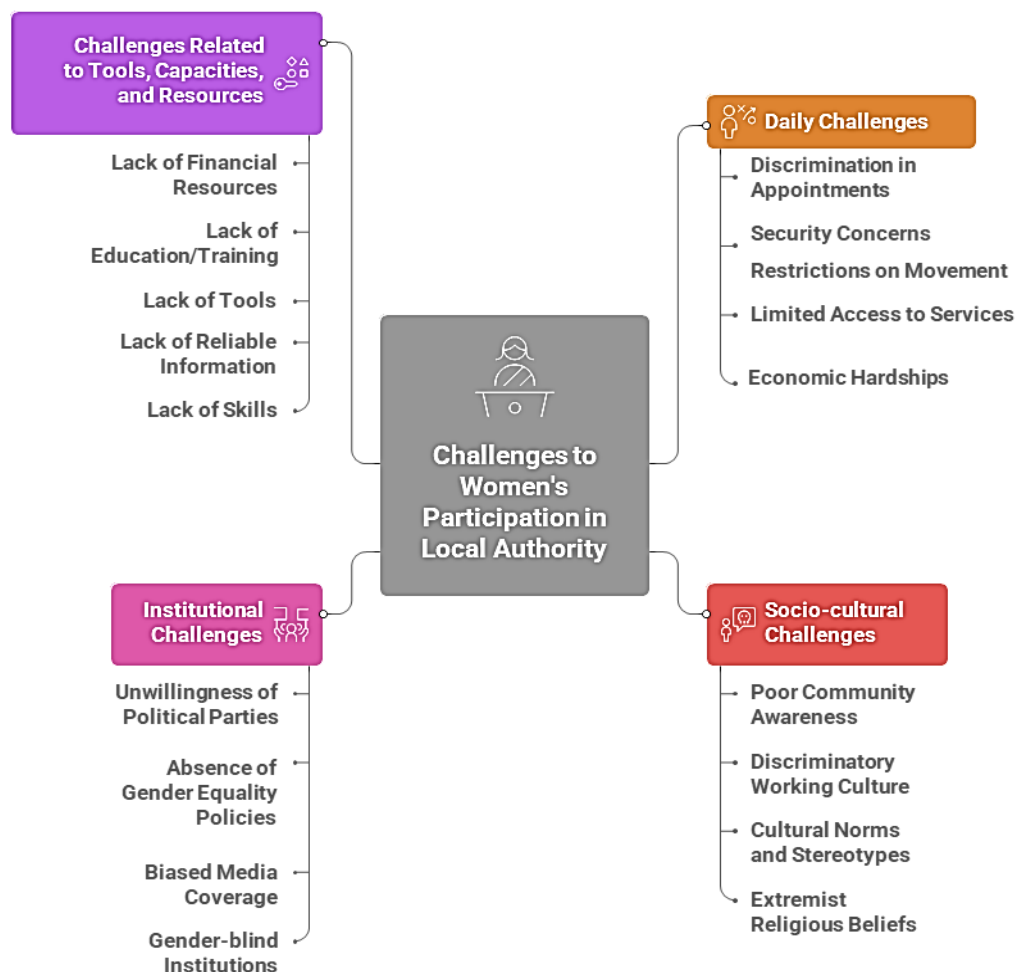
To bolster the role of women in decision-making, Abdullah recommends:

- Establishing a cultural center under women's management to enhance financial resources.
- Activating laws and international conventions to protect women's rights.
- Strengthening networks and exchange programs at various levels.

Hiyam Abdullah's experience as the Director of the Culture Office exemplifies both the potential and obstacles faced by women leaders in local governance. Her leadership journey underscores the need for systemic changes to enhance women's participation in decision-making processes. By addressing these challenges and leveraging available opportunities, women like Abdullah can continue to make significant contributions to their communities and beyond.

Challenges and Barriers

Key Challenges and Barriers Facing Women's Active Participation in the Local Authority



Discrimination in New Local-Based Appointments and Career Promotions

Discrimination in new local-based appointments and promotion is the most outstanding daily challenge facing women's active participation in the local authority in Taiz governorate. A large portion of the interviewees and participants of the consultation sessions agreed that the discrimination in the new local-based appointments and promotion is one of the key daily challenges facing women to actively participate in the local authority. Other key daily challenges highlighted by the interviewed women from local authorities include the security concerns with the continued conflict, the restrictions on movement (e.g. Mahram requirement, harassment, etc.), and the limited access to basic services. The quantitative data from online survey completed by women from local authority confirms the extent to which these challenges or obstacles hinder women's active participation in the local authority:

- ❖ 63% of the survey respondents agree that discrimination in new local-based appointments and promotion poses a challenge or obstacle that hinder women's active participation in the local authority to a great extent.

- ❖ 53% of the survey respondents agree that security concerns with the continued conflict poses a challenge or obstacle that hinder women's active participation in the local authority to a great extent.
- ❖ 43% of the survey respondents agree that limited access to basic services poses a challenge or obstacle that hinder women's active participation in the local authority to a great extent.
- ❖ 35% of the survey respondents agree that restrictions on movement (e.g., mahram requirement, harassment, etc.) poses a challenge or obstacle that hinder women's active participation in the local authority to a great extent.

While gender dynamics vary, both urban and rural areas in Taiz exhibit challenges, with women in rural communities often facing exacerbated access to basic services and mobility restrictions on daily basis.

Poor Community Awareness on Women Rights

Poor community awareness on women rights and the importance of their participation' is the most outstanding socio-cultural challenge that hinder women's active participation in the local authority at district and governorate levels. The quantitative data from online survey shows that 'poor community awareness on women rights and the importance of their participation' is the most outstanding socio-cultural challenge that hinder women's active participation in the local authority at district and governorate levels. Followed by 'the discriminatory or sexist working culture in Government, Parliament, National/ Sub-national legislature and local authority'; the 'cultural norms and stereotypes about women in society'; and the 'extremist religious beliefs /interpretation about women in society'.

Unwillingness of Political Parties to Promote Women in Their Ranks

Unwillingness of political parties to promote women in their ranks is the most outstanding institutional challenge hindering women's active participation in the local authority at district and governorate levels. The quantitative data from online survey shows that the following institutional challenges and/or barriers hinder women's active participation in the local authority at district and governorate levels to a great extent, as presented below in a descending order:

- Unwillingness of political parties to promote women in their ranks.
- Absence of gender equality policies / legal regulatory framework (e.g., constitution/ election law) promoting women's participation in the local authority.
- Biased media coverage of women.
- Gender-blind institutions (government, parliament, political parties) and processes (elections, judicial appointments).
- Legal discrimination of women.

Lack of Financial Resources for Projects Serving Women

Lack of financial resources for projects serving women is the most outstanding challenge related to tools, capacities and resources hindering women's active participation in the local authority at district and governorate levels. The quantitative data from online survey shows that the following challenges or barriers related to tools, capacities and resources hinder women's active participation in the local authority at district and governorate levels to a great extent, as presented below in a descending order:

- Lack of financial resources for projects serving women.
- Lack of education/training for women's leadership skills development.

- Lack of tools (manuals and guidelines) on gender equality and women's participation.
- Lack of reliable information/ research on gender equality issues, including a lack of sex-disaggregated data.
- Lack of skills among women.

Funding Challenges for Women-Led and Women's Rights Organizations

Women-led and women's rights organizations play a crucial role in advocating for gender equality and providing essential services to women in a country facing ongoing conflict and humanitarian crisis. However, these organizations encounter numerous funding challenges that hinder their ability to operate effectively and achieve their objectives.

Limited Access to Funding Sources

One of the primary challenges faced by Yemeni women-led organizations is limited access to funding sources. Many international donors and agencies are hesitant to invest in regions experiencing instability due to the perceived risk of funds being misappropriated or the inability to ensure accountability. Additionally, local organizations often lack the capacity to meet the stringent requirements set by international donors, further limiting their access to potential funding sources.

Bureaucratic Hurdles

These organizations frequently encounter bureaucratic hurdles when attempting to secure funding. The process of applying for grants and funding is often complex and requires significant administrative resources, which many small organizations lack. Furthermore, the political and economic instability in Yemen can create additional layers of bureaucracy, making it even more challenging for women-led initiatives to navigate the funding landscape.

In addition, donor trends control the narrative of Yemeni WROs and CSOs by prioritizing donor-defined themes over locally identified needs, which can lead to an overemphasis on certain issues like gender-based violence (GBV) while neglecting other crucial grassroots findings. This dynamic often sidelines local organizations due to a lack of resources, expertise in proposal writing, and inability to navigate donor structures, resulting in a loss of contextual relevance and sustainability for initiatives driven by local needs and knowledge.

Lack of Networking Opportunities

Networking opportunities are crucial for securing funding and creating partnerships; however, Yemeni women-led organizations often have limited access to such opportunities. The ongoing conflict and cultural restrictions can isolate these organizations from international networks and forums where they could advocate for their cause and connect with potential donors.

Inadequate Capacity Building

Many women-led and women's rights organizations lack adequate capacity-building resources. This deficiency can prevent them from effectively managing and utilizing funds, meeting donor requirements, and demonstrating their impact. Without investment in capacity building, these organizations struggle to develop the skills needed to secure and manage funding efficiently.

Policies And Laws

The participants of consultation sessions provided notes in relation to the official policies and laws related to women's representation in local government bodies. The qualitative data extracted from these notes suggests, *inter alia*, that women's rights, representation and participation are based on three pillars: the constitution and national laws, the international obligations, and the outcomes of the national dialogue: (i) the constitutional framework and national law establish complete equality, as Article 4 of the constitution stipulates that all citizens are equal in rights and duties without discrimination. Article 42 also guarantees the right to political participation (such as nomination and election); (ii) the Local Authority Law, which requires allocating 15% of women's representation in local council seats (under Law No. 4 of 2013), in addition to the general legislative framework (Law No. 4 of 2000 and its regulations); (iii) other laws, such as the Civil Service Law, which stipulates non-discrimination in obtaining public office. Protection and legislation also include laws on political parties, elections, penalties, and civil and personal status laws.

Results of desk review for the official policies and laws related to women's representation and participation in local government highlight the following:

Legal Framework

- The Yemeni Constitution: stipulates the principle of gender equality in rights and duties and prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender.
- Personal Status Law: guarantees women's rights in marriage, divorce, and inheritance, but requires amendments to enhance equality.
- Nationality Law: grants Yemeni women the right to pass on their nationality to their children.
- Penal Code: criminalizes violence against women and protects them from sexual harassment.
- Labor Laws: guarantee the rights of working women, including equal pay for equal work and protection from unfair dismissal.

International Conventions

- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW): Yemen has ratified it, obligating the state to prevent discrimination against women in all areas.
- Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action: calls for the empowerment of women in all areas, including participation in decision-making.

Yemeni women are legally entitled to participate in local governance. The 1991 constitution grants them the right to vote and be elected to local councils. Results of desk review shows that the first local council elections in Yemen were held on February 20, 2001, and more than 22,000 candidates representing various political parties and organizations and independents competed for the seats of the local councils in various governorates and districts, and the results of those elections showed that 6283 candidates won in the district councils and 417 candidates in the provincial councils in the primary and supplementary elections, and the number of winners in these elections did not exceed 18 out of 35 women. ⁱⁱⁱ

"It is important to ensure women's representation in local councils, despite challenges including cultural restrictions and lack of support. In reality, women's representation in local councils is limited. Ensuring women's representation requires raising awareness among all segments of society, especially women, providing training, support, and encouraging participation. The positive impact of women's representation is to enhance local development and improve decision-making." iv

In addition, the participants of consultation sessions provided notes in relation to the amendments to laws including:

- Amend the Law of Local Authority to ensure the adoption of a quota system as an initial step towards women's representation in local government.
- Amend the Elections Law to explicitly stipulate the inclusion of women on all electoral lists.
- Amend the Penal Code with regard to provisions concerning crimes of sexual assault and defamation.
- Amend the Political Parties Law to explicitly stipulate the inclusion and empowerment of women in the leadership structures of political parties.
- Enact and pass a law to combat violence against women.
- Enact and pass a law to activate the women's quota. Some women's voices are calling for the abolition of the 30% women's quota, arguing that it is no longer fair and limits women's participation in decision-making to a specific level.
- Enact and pass a law criminalizing defamation and incitement campaigns against women.
- Amend the Personal Status Law to strengthen women's rights in general.
- Amend the Civil Service Law's regulations on appointments to public office to make them binding on executive bodies to apply the feminist quota system in the new recruitments, appointments and career promotions.

For further active participation of women in local governance, the participants proposed the following supportive mechanisms:

- Establish Women's Studies and Research Centers: to provide reliable information/data on gender equality issues, with sex-disaggregated data, at governorate level.
- Establish Fellowship Programs within executive offices of local authorities that seek to promote gender equality, skill development, networking opportunities and policy influence.
- Establish Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms: to monitor and evaluate the progress of women's participation in local authorities and to assess the effectiveness of the implemented policies and make necessary adjustments on regular basis.
- Establish Feedback Mechanisms: to create channels for women to provide feedback on their experiences in local governance, ensuring their voices are heard and considered in policy adjustments
- Establish Financial Support Funds for Women: to provide the necessary support for immediate advocacy campaigns and to fund future women's election campaigns

Establish Accountability Mechanisms: to provide guides on establishing or advocating for accountability in women's participation in local authority.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to SYF, OXFAM, government and potential donors for future programming for enhancing the women's role in local authority in Yemen:

• Legal and Policy Reform

In addition to data from desk review, the participants of consultation sessions provided notes in relation to the official policies and laws related to women's representation in local government bodies. The data proposes amendments to laws, policies and the support mechanisms to promote women's effective participation and inclusion in local authority positions and decision-making centers. These include, inter alia, the following:

- Proposed amendments to laws: Women's empowerment require a complete shift from mere recognition of rights to the effective and fair implementation of laws, ensuring real leadership participation at all levels of political and administrative decision-making. Amendments to laws may include, inter alia, the following:
 - Amend the Law of Local Authority to ensure the adoption of a quota system as an initial step towards women's representation in local government.
 - Amend the Elections Law to explicitly stipulate the inclusion of women on all electoral lists.
 - Amend the Penal Code with regard to provisions concerning crimes of sexual assault and defamation.
 - Amend the Political Parties Law to explicitly stipulate the inclusion and empowerment of women in the leadership structures of political parties.
 - Enact and pass a law to combat violence against women.
 - Enact and pass a law to activate the women's quota. Some women's voices are calling for the abolition of the 30% women's quota, arguing that it is no longer fair and limits women's participation in decision-making to a specific level.
 - Enact and pass a law criminalizing defamation and incitement campaigns against women.
 - Amend the Personal Status Law to strengthen women's rights in general.
 - Amend the Civil Service Law's regulations on appointments to public office to make them binding on executive bodies to apply the feminist quota system in the new recruitments, appointments and career promotions.
- Proposed policy amendments: Achieving women's empowerment requires a comprehensive and integrated transformation based on three dimensions: legal reform that guarantees protection and equality; political and administrative empowerment that ensures women's participation in decision-making; and cultural and institutional change that consolidates their role as a key partner in sustainable development.

- Proposed amendments to support mechanisms: Women's full empowerment requires a comprehensive transformation based on: radical legislative reform that guarantees comprehensive protection and equal opportunities; effective political and administrative participation that eliminates discrimination and relies on competence; and institutional and cultural support through gender-sensitive planning and changing societal perceptions. For further active participation of women in local governance, the following supportive mechanisms are recommended:
 - Establish Women's Studies and Research Centers: to provide reliable information/data on gender equality issues, with sex-disaggregated data, at governorate level.
 - Establish Fellowship Programs within executive offices of local authorities that seek to promote gender equality, skill development, networking opportunities and policy influence.
 - Establish Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms: to monitor and evaluate the progress of women's participation in local authorities and to assess the effectiveness of the implemented policies and make necessary adjustments on regular basis.
 - Establish Feedback Mechanisms: to create channels for women to provide feedback on their experiences in local governance, ensuring their voices are heard and considered in policy adjustments.
 - Establish Financial Support Funds for Women: to provide the necessary support for immediate advocacy campaigns and to fund future women's election campaigns
 - Establish Accountability Mechanisms: to provide guides on establishing or advocating for accountability in women's participation in local authority.

• **Strategies, tools and resources**

The data collected through interviews with women-led CSOs and women in local authority, alongside desk review, suggests strategies that should the government, local authorities (and the local councils) apply to effectively promote meaningful participation of women and increase their representation in the local authority. Strategies by the government and local authorities include, inter alia, the following:

- Ensure a gender sensitive working environment and work towards gender sensitive institutions and policies.
- Take initiatives to promote better understanding of gender equality issues in society (discrimination, domestic violence, socio-cultural attitudes).
- Work to develop and implement gender equality in processes (e.g. elections/selections, new recruitment and appointments).
- Take initiatives to combat gender stereotypes.
- Ensure gender equal access to resources and infrastructure.

In addition, the data suggests strategies that civil society should apply to effectively promote meaningful participation of women and increase their representation in the local authority. Strategies by the civil society include, inter alia, the following:

- Work with the media to combat gender-based stereotypes.
- Engaging with executive and legislative powers to support the institutionalization of gender equality in structural and policy frameworks.
- Encourage women to enter politics and advance their careers.
- Shape positive public attitudes towards women in politics.

- Work with academia to educate and inform the public about the benefits of women's political participation.
- Work with political parties to support women candidates.

Furthermore, the data suggests **strategies that should be implemented by key actors** to combat socio-cultural barriers to meaningful participation of women and increase their representation in the local authority. These include, inter alia, the following:

- Create dialogue platforms focused on a religious discourse on women's rights.
- Adopt policies to promote work-life balance to address women's multiple roles.
- Conduct public awareness campaigns on the benefits of women's representation and meaningful participation in the public sphere.
- Work with media to combat gender-based stereotypes.
- Design and implement local/national accountability mechanisms for women's participation.



Moreover, the data suggests the tools and resources that would be helpful to support efforts to promote women's meaningful participation and representation in the local authority. These include, but not limited to, the following:

- Step by step guides for key actors on how to conduct gender mainstreaming analysis in their institutions.
- Examples of good practices and success stories, from local context, focused on overcoming institutional barriers.
- Examples of good practices and success stories, from local context, focused on overcoming socio-cultural barriers.
- Step by step guides for key actors on how to establish or advocate for local accountability mechanisms.

