



BUILDING CONFIDENCE THROUGH SSR

Lessons Learned from Yemen

2021

The Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance - DCAF is an international foundation whose mission is to assist the international community in pursuing good governance and reform of the security sector. DCAF develops and promotes norms and standards, conducts tailored policy research, identifies good practices and recommendations to promote democratic security sector governance, and provides in-country advisory support and practical assistance programmes.

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– Geneva Centre for Security Sector
Governance
DCAF Geneva
P.O. Box 1360
CH-1211 Geneva 1
Switzerland
info@dcaf.ch
www.dcaf.ch
Twitter @DCAF_Geneva

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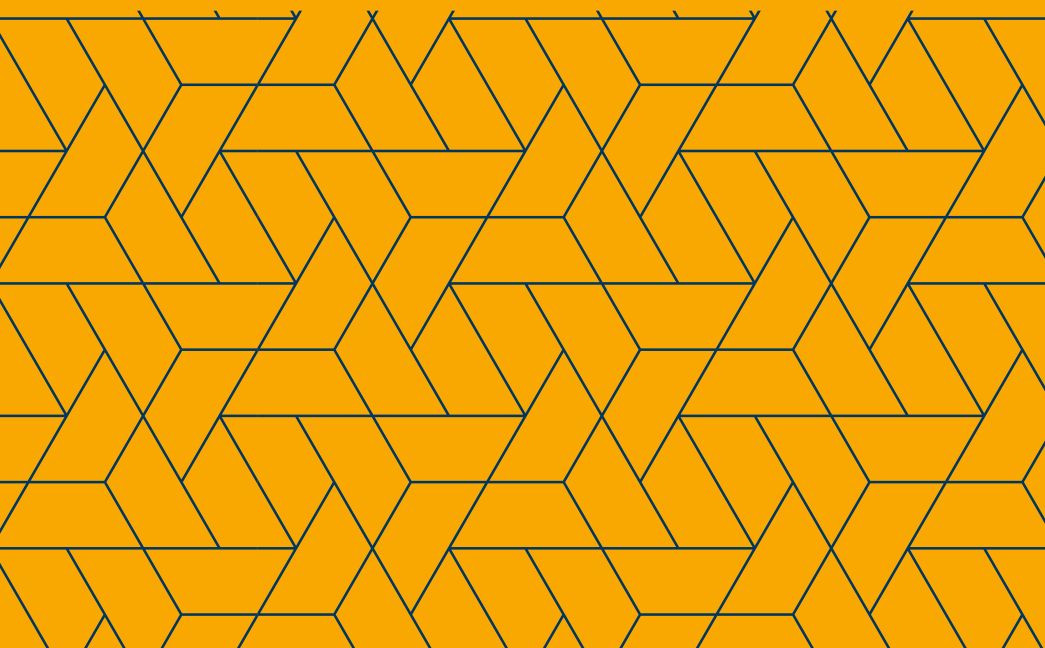
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Acronyms

EU

European Union

DDR

Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration

GoY

Government of Yemen

MENA

Middle East and North Africa

OESGY

United Nations Office of the Special Envoy for Yemen

SSG

Security Sector Governance

SSR

Security Sector Reform

STC

Southern Transitional Council

UNSC

United Nations Security Council

Executive Summary

Since 2019, DCAF has been engaged in a project in Yemen which focuses on building the foundations for peace through security sector reform (SSR) around a series of dialogues with key parties to the conflict. While SSR is generally understood to play an important role in contributing to long term stability, security and peace, it is not often integrated at such an early stage of a peace process. Insights from the project thus far can therefore be valuable to policy makers and practitioners considering how to address security issues during what can often be a complicated and protracted transition from conflict to peace.

The project is being implemented throughout a period in which the situation in Yemen has experienced both positive and negative developments. Given the complex nature of the current context in Yemen, it is obviously too early to draw any conclusions about the longer-term evolution and outcomes of SSR in Yemen. However, it is possible to offer initial observations which may be relevant not only to future developments in Yemen but also to other countries in the midst of negotiating their own conflict to peace transition.

Creating inclusive space for dialogue

- A broadly inclusive process is essential. Those most directly affected by and able to influence security must be at the table if sustainable solutions are to be developed. In the case of Yemen, this has meant including not only national-level parties to the conflict but also tribal leaders and local security actors.
- There is significant value in building the capacity and confidence of stakeholders, including women, to participate in discussions and analyse their role in bringing about the transition to peace.
- International partners should not underestimate the importance of offering a safe and neutral space for dialogue around security needs. Yemeni participants noted on multiple occasions that this was one of the most valuable contributions of this first phase of SSR dialogues.

Security provision

- Inclusive and jointly designed short term security arrangements to help end the conflict are key elements to enable peace agreements.
- Although complex, it is possible to find entry points to improve local security and accountability even in the absence of a wider ceasefire agreement.
- Similarly, in the absence of an official process for disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR), it is possible to explore options for functional rather than structural integration. In other words, parties can use shared security needs and a desire for the provision of basic security services as a starting point, rather than immediately turning to questions of how various forces can be merged or integrated.

Security governance

- A consistent focus on key principles of good security governance such as accountability, inclusiveness or respect for human rights can provide a common starting point for discussions among conflicting parties and serve as a solid foundation for more detailed technical arrangements.
- There is considerable value in building on existing security governance structures to allow parties to the conflict to explore approaches which will help manage mistrust and mitigate mutual fears.
- Security is integral to sustainable peace. Addressing security sector governance and reform concerns at an earlier stage of peace processes shows potential to provide incentives for conflicting parties to make short and longer-term concessions, based on the joint consideration and design of measures which are built into rather than external to a peace agreement.

1 | Introduction

Security Sector Reform (SSR) has played an important, if historically undervalued, role in the process of peacebuilding and peace negotiations. Whereas emphasis on traditional peacebuilding in the past has tended to focus primarily on political negotiation between conflicting parties, increasingly the critical role of SSR, and particularly with the interplay between SSR and Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR), is recognised as a key element for establishing the foundations of durable peace agreements.

DCAF, as an organisation whose mandate is to “improve the governance of security sectors around the world through nationally-owned, inclusive, and participatory reforms based on international norms and good practices”¹ has ventured into the realm of peacebuilding on relatively few occasions in the past. One of the most novel recent approaches began in 2019 with the launching of a new project by the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Division entitled “Yemen: Building Peace Through Security Sector Reform”, funded, until the time of writing this review, exclusively by the Government of Canada.² As the first phase of this project draws to a close, it is timely to reflect on the achievements of the project thus far and the lessons it may offer.

This paper thus reflects on experiences and lessons learned from the dialogue sessions hosted by DCAF in a variety of locations in Jordan and Switzerland and, more recently, on-line, with a view to contributing to the communities of practice working on SSG/R and peacebuilding. It is hoped that this analysis of the project’s achievements and challenges will provide practitioners of SSG/R some guidance

on applying the lessons identified to other conflict situations around the world. By the same token, the paper reflects on specific opportunities for the next phase of DCAF’s Yemen project.

The project was also an example of close cooperation between DCAF and the UN system. The UN plays a key role in formulating an international consensus on the role of SSR in peacebuilding, explicitly outlined in Security Council Resolution 2151. This was the first thematic UNSC Resolution on SSR, and resulted from an open debate convened by Nigeria, which spearheaded the resolution, in 2014. Subsequent UNSC discussions on the nature of conflict resolution and peacebuilding commonly refer back to this Resolution, which emphasises that SSR should not be regarded as a stand-alone activity but rather as part of a wider strategy to sustain peace and prevent violent conflict. Specifically, SSR has to consider other issues, including access to basic services such as education and health care. Since the adoption of resolution 2151 in 2014, the Security Council has gradually integrated more SSR considerations in its work, including through country-specific resolutions mandating peace operations to implement an increasingly wider range of SSR tasks.³

SSR also arguably forms the basis of good governance within the framework of Goal 16 on peaceful and inclusive societies in the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals. As one of 17 overarching development goals established by the Member States of the UN, Goal 16 sets out the objectives for effective, accountable, and transparent institutions.

¹ DCAF website, <https://www.dcaf.ch/>.

² DCAF Project Funded by Global Affairs Canada (incorporated as the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development)

³ “Security Council Report” (November 2020): SSR and the UN.

2 | Overview of the Conflict in Yemen

A short review of the historical context of the conflict in Yemen today is useful not only for a deeper understanding of the drivers of the conflict, but, more importantly for the purposes of this study, an understanding of the impact of the conflict on Yemen's security sector and the challenges the DCAF dialogues had in addressing those issues. As in most conflicts in the region, if not globally, Yemen's conflict is rooted in deep historical grievances and rivalries for power which date back centuries, the latest manifestation of which came to a head in the recent past with the eruption of the Arab Spring in 2011. Problems of poverty and economic underdevelopment combined with corruption and mismanagement, the usual suspects in generating conflict in most of the MENA region, created the necessary explosive elements for an outbreak of renewed violence.

The regional context during the early phase of the Arab uprising was one of spreading popular protests in the MENA region which provided the combustible element that precipitated the popular uprisings and subsequent violent response of the security forces in Sana'a in March 2011. The immediate result of the violence was that the regime of united Yemen's first President, Ali Abdullah al Saleh, splintered into several factions, with the army also fracturing into different camps. Shortly after violence erupted, the Gulf Cooperation Council put into place a transition plan in 2012 which saw Saleh step down, leaving him the necessary space to undermine the succeeding government formed by his Vice President since 1994, Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi, and still wield influence over the military, especially the powerful and well-equipped Republican Guard. With growing popular discontent and the failure of the UN-sponsored National Dialogue

Conference held between 2013-2014 to forge a peaceful transition, Ansar Allah, a predominantly Zaydi amalgam of different tribal and political groups from the north of the country dominated by the Houthis which had been politically and economically marginalised by the Sunni-led government in Sana'a, found an opening for taking over the capital in 2014. Since that point they have gradually taken control over large swathes of the country moving from north to south.⁴

Given the Shi'a origins of the Houthis, and fearing the hand of Iran behind them, Saudi Arabia and a coalition of other Sunni Arab states began a military intervention in Yemen in March 2015 to restore the authority of President Hadi. The attempts at finding peace through talks held in Kuwait in 2016 and in Stockholm in December 2018, as well as to establish a national unity government (between the Government of Yemen - GoY and the Southern Transitional Council - STC) through the Riyadh agreement of 2019, gave rise to hopes that there was a growing consensus for peace. But the peace-making initiatives undertaken by the UN Office of the Special Envoy for Yemen (OSESGY), established by the Secretary General in 2012, have so far yielded very little in terms of long-term conflict resolution possibilities. Even the ceasefire announced for the city of Hodeida, critical for the unloading of the country's food imports, has been less than fully respected. In the report of the Special Envoy for Yemen to the Security Council on 14 December 2020 the Envoy declared that there has been virtually no progress in concluding a joint declaration—under negotiation since March 2020—for a nation-wide ceasefire, a series of economic and humanitarian confidence-building measures, disengagement of fighters, exchanges of prisoners, and the resumption of peace talks.⁵

⁴ "Making Sense of the Yemen War", Elisabeth Kendall, Engelsberg Ideas: <https://engelsbergideas.com/essays/making-sense-of-the-yemen-war/>.

⁵ Ibid

With the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020, there was an initial hope that the health crisis would provide an opportunity for warring parties to put aside their differences and focus on a ceasefire. The result, however, was a further escalation of hostilities and a move by Ansar Allah to oust the Government of Yemen forces once and for all from Yemen. As recently reported in an article published by the Carnegie Endowment for Peace, “the UN-led talks have continued virtually but the combatants’ commitment to seeking a reduction in violence has also proved to be more virtual than real”.⁶

To some extent, the UN’s limited progress in implementing its mandate in Yemen has been because of the limitations imposed by UNSCR 2216 which restricts the UN to negotiating only between Ansar Allah forces and the Government of Yemen, leaving other important conflict actors, particularly those in the South who have for many years fought for independence and received external military and economic support out of the process. Fragmentation of Yemen into a greater number of disconnected entities ruled by warlords with shifting alliances, and the birth of new local independence movements, have been a consequence of the conflict, consequently making peacebuilding even more challenging. Clearly, the longer the conflict persists, the further the fragmentation and the greater the difficulty there will be in finding solutions to the conflict.



⁶ Carnegie Endowment for Peace, Ahmed Nagi, “Yemen’s Devastating War Continues Despite an Unchecked Pandemic” <https://carnegie-mec.org/2020/12/17/yemen-s-devastating-war-continues-despite-unchecked-pandemic-pub-83475>.

3 | Impact on the Security Sector in Yemen

The fragmented political picture in Yemen has spawned an equally fragmented array of security actors. Since the beginning of the conflict, the security sector has been roughly divided along the lines drawn between the two main protagonists in the conflict: the Saudi Arabia-backed Hadi government, the so-called “legitimate” (i.e. internationally-recognised) government, located in Riyadh, and the Iranian-backed Ansar Allah based in Sana’a. In addition to the two main parties to the conflict, security forces are also affiliated with the Southern Transitional Council mainly based in Aden in the South where they established control, and organisations affiliated with the Al Islah Party, strongest in Marib, Taiz and Al Jawf. Outside of these more formal and informal forces, in what constitutes a third layer of security sector forces, lies an assemblage of customary justice systems managed by traditional tribal entities, whose role and influence is further emphasised as such customary systems are enshrined in law.

On top of this extraordinarily complex mixture of alliances and affiliations lies a panoply of local militias and warlords funded largely through smuggling and other illicit operations. In addition, the conflict has provided opportunities for various extremist groups affiliated with Al Qaeda and Islamic State to expand their presence in Yemen. All of these entities are able to flourish in the absence of the state and its security structures and for whom the return of the power of the state would be anathema to their economic and political fortunes. Neither too much war nor too much peace is in their interests. For Yemeni citizens, the result is unequal access to security. This access, due to the mixture of state-controlled, legitimate vs illegitimate, and regional and tribal forces, is largely dependent on geographical location and tribal affiliation.



4 | Project Objectives and Approach

DCAF began preparations for the Building Peace Through SSR project for Yemen during the course of 2017. After consultations organised by DCAF with a number of different Yemeni individuals linked to the main conflicting parties following the December 2018 Stockholm Agreement, there was a consensus that mutual mistrust and fear were deepening, rather than diminishing, thus preventing progress in further political negotiations. Knowing that security is one of the main stumbling blocks and constitutes a serious challenge to finding a solution to the conflict, the project was built on the premise that without a shared understanding of the transitional security arrangements that would be acceptable to all parties and which addressed their mutual distrust, it would be highly unlikely for there to be any kind of political breakthrough in the negotiations. The settlement of differences during a transitional period therefore would entail progress being made towards agreement on a common vision of governance structures that could ensure the efficiency of security guarantees and their effectiveness. In this way, it was hoped that the parties would be encouraged to make concessions in the short term, based on the reassurances provided for the medium and longer term.⁷

The objectives of the project were constructed around the creation of a platform in which security sector reform and governance in Yemen could be discussed with the different parties to the conflict, with a view to outlining a framework for new security arrangements that would provide the parties with additional key elements necessary to move toward a peace settlement. The project

foresaw helping participants to propose transitional security arrangements while the longer-term peace agreement was being worked out. Key principles of good security sector governance were also at the heart of DCAF's approach to the project. Both the dialogue sessions themselves and any future solutions discussed have been grounded in a focus on accountability, transparency, responsiveness and, especially on inclusiveness and respect for human rights, two principles which will be particularly important for future solutions and to which Yemeni participants showed clear commitment throughout the sessions.

The Dialogues were initially structured into two main and parallel tracks, and were subsequently expanded into a third track at the request of the participants:

- ▶ Analysing and discussing security arrangements for the immediate and transitional periods. These would refer to arrangements that allow progress in the UN-led political talks towards peace.
- ▶ Identification of the key components of a future longer-term Yemeni vision for security sector reform and governance.
- ▶ Capacity building sessions on specific issues identified by the participants and development of specific knowledge tools, including research and studies, to inform the dialogue sessions. These would in turn enable the participants to consider different options and ensure an opportunity for them to analyse comparative experiences in other conflict countries.

⁷ DCAF Project Document: "Yemen: Building Peace Through SSR".

The ultimate ambition of the Dialogues was to help build a legitimate and trusted security sector that plays a role in peacebuilding and can sustain and protect future peace agreements, while providing services to all citizens within a framework of respect for the rule of law and human rights. More specifically, the Dialogues were to look at such issues as:

- ▶ Requirements and conditions for ceasefires across the country
- ▶ Conditions for the transitional redeployment or repositioning of forces
- ▶ Management of weapons and their deployment/use
- ▶ Medium-term standing down of forces and reintegration plans
- ▶ Governance structures of the security sector during the transitional periods
- ▶ Oversight mechanisms and guarantees
- ▶ Application of security arrangements, both nationally and locally
- ▶ Mechanisms and options to address grievances, lay the basis for fair and efficient transitional justice, and compensation of the most vulnerable and affected by the conflict, including rebuilding trust in the justice system.⁸

Indirectly, it was intended that the Dialogues would help the participants to articulate options and proposals that could be fed back into the political talks led by the UN. It was hoped that success in achieving the project's objectives outlined above would provide the foundations for a longer-

term engagement which would focus more on a structural reform of the security sector in Yemen.

For its first phase, the project foresaw the holding of 6-8 dialogue sessions held over a year on both transitional and longer-term issues. The first meeting of the Dialogue process was held as a pilot project in March 2019 in Jordan, followed by the first core group meeting in November 2019 in Switzerland, and then the second core group meeting in February 2020 in Switzerland (including 14 senior security and political figures), immediately followed by another meeting with a group of 11 tribal leaders and sheikhs representing influential tribes and families from across conflict-affected areas. Two on-line sessions were also held in June and August 2020. In addition, two on-line meetings were organised in October and November 2020 to increase the level and quality of women's contributions to SSR dialogues, organised around the core group.

As several dialogue sessions emphasized the importance of local security, particularly in the absence of a ceasefire agreement, in March 2021, an online session was held with stakeholders from the Taiz region to explore local security cooperation. This session was also preceded by a pre-meeting with key actors to ensure the agenda for the formal session was well aligned with local priorities. In March 2021 also, another round of training was organised for Yemeni women, focusing specifically on the role of women in fostering ceasefire agreements and supporting their implementation and monitoring.

⁸ DCAF Project Document: "Yemen: Building Peace Through SSR".

5 | Lessons

5.1 Dialogue Process

Participation

Ensuring an inclusive dialogue process, which could ultimately lead to the development of more inclusive and responsive security institutions, was a priority for DCAF. The team therefore went to significant lengths to identify and facilitate the participation of a wide range of stakeholders, excluding of course criminal and terrorist groups. Given the multiplicity of actors, this was difficult and unavoidably resulted in some entities either not being represented or with limited representation. Nonetheless, the selected group provided a much wider array of security actors than that permitted for the UN under its Security Council mandate.

The group involved in the dialogues included representatives from the main parties to the conflict (Government of Yemen, Ansar Allah, Southern Transitional Council), as well as from the Hadhramaut and Al Mahara movements, in addition to security sector actors, academia, youth, women's groups, and tribal leaders. According to feedback, the inclusive nature of the process was one of the main reasons participants wished to continue the DCAF dialogues, underscoring the fact that there must be representation from all of the parties involved in the conflict if such dialogues are to succeed.

Tribal leaders and sheikhs represent a vital tier of important stakeholders who can enable the implementation of security measures on the ground, which in turn can enable the creation of more peaceful conditions and facilitate longer-term reforms. This is particularly relevant in Yemen, where large tracts of the country have never experienced a strong presence of state

institutions. The question of involving tribal groups in a separate, but parallel dialogue process, while much appreciated by the UN observers and DCAF staff, i.e. the outsiders, was not unanimously supported by the Yemeni participants interviewed.

Some felt that involving these leaders would give too much importance to their overall value and effectiveness in peacebuilding as they were considered secondary if not tertiary players in the conflict, with limited power. Moreover, it was feared that they could become a distraction to the main political process - international organisations are at times accused of undermining national ownership by collaborating with informal security actors.⁹ Others felt that, while indeed their power was limited compared to the main political factions, tribal leaders could play an important role in respecting observance of any ceasefire which may be agreed to.

It is clear that early inclusion of SSG/R considerations in peace processes also requires broad inclusion of stakeholders who influence security. The selection of these stakeholders, however, needs to carefully take into account regional and other aspects of representation as well as alignment with the different parties to the conflict. As one interviewee pointed out, "DCAF has a special niche in the peacebuilding area, both in terms of its experience with SSR and in its ability to mobilise tribal leaders unlike any other international organisation. This has been severely lacking since the holding of the National Dialogue."

Similarly, it is widely agreed that **women's participation in the security sector contributes to building inclusive and legitimate institutions** and the UN encourages member states to develop context-specific security sector reform strategies

⁹ "Proceedings of the High-Level Roundtable on SSR and Sustaining Peace in the lead up to the High-Level Meeting of the UN General Assembly on "Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace", April 2018

that mainstream a gender perspective and increase women's representation at all levels of the security sector.¹⁰ This is indisputably a part of DCAF's approach to the Yemen dialogues and the programme was designed to ensure a meaningful participation of women in the meetings. In early 2020, a gender assessment conducted under the present project suggested two ways of ensuring active female participation in Yemen dialogues incorporating SSR/G components: 1) gathering inputs (e.g. through consultations or in written form) from female participants to work in to the main dialogue sessions and 2) providing training to selected female Yemenis to enhance their capacities to contribute as active participants to the main dialogue sessions.

While it may seem obvious, it is worth highlighting that location affects participation (i.e. the venue at which dialogues were held). The team explored a number of possible dialogue locations in or near the region in order to facilitate participation and minimise costs. It was important to ensure a sense of independence and freedom from undue political influence. However, the issuance of visas and fulfilment of other requirements turned out to be difficult in most locations and in the end led to all (pre-COVID) in-person dialogue sessions being held in Switzerland (except the first exploratory early session, held in Jordan in March 2019). The DCAF team was very grateful for the ability to host discussions in a location that all participants considered to be both safe and neutral; however, the increased costs associated with hosting an event in Switzerland did impact participation. For future events, DCAF will continue to explore options in the region combined with more frequent online dialogues.

When COVID-19 made travel impossible, the team was also pleased to note the willingness of participants to continue the dialogues in an online

format, which certainly could not have been assumed, considering the sensitivity of the subjects under discussion. In fact, online sessions opened new possibilities for participation, to include stakeholders on the ground in Yemen who would never have been able to travel but could participate online. However, when possible, a combination with in-person meetings remains preferable to build greater trust and enable longer, more intensive discussions.

Finally, consistent participation – essential for continuity and trust building – remained a challenge throughout dialogue sessions. In a volatile environment, last minute changes to participant lists were not unusual and meant that part of the valuable time allocated for dialogue sessions had to be dedicated to reviewing previous discussions and ensuring all participants had a similar understanding. Given the pressures facing most participants, it is impossible to eliminate this challenge completely. However, more regular use of online meetings would allow for more frequent dialogue sessions and help to maintain momentum that could mitigate some of its effects.

Building capacity and confidence

While SSG/R is built on clear principles, it can also be a complex subject and many participants requested additional technical support and skills building to prepare them for future dialogue sessions. In particular, participants sought a better understanding of the main concepts and their practical application as part of peace processes in comparative experience, including, for example, confidence building, integration, monitoring mechanisms for ceasefires and other security arrangements (repositioning of forces, management of weapons, transitional security structures, etc.), but also key principles of good security sector governance, such as oversight and accountability.

¹⁰ "Guidance on Gender and Inclusive Mediation Strategies" (United Nations, 2017).

It became clear that capacity building should extend beyond the Core Group in order to pave the way for more inclusive discussions in the future. In October and November 2020, DCAF focused on training 18 Yemeni female experts already active in the ongoing reform of the security sector. Participants represented a variety of geographic areas, reflected major ideas of parties to the conflict and included ex-Ministers, ex-Ambassadors, high-level activists, local practitioners (security providers), human rights defenders and politicians. Topics covered included the gendered aspects of security arrangements, DDR, ceasefire and transitional justice, with the aim of increasing the capacity of participants to better identify suitable entry-points to de-escalate the conflict.

This activity was well-received by the trainees as well as OSESGY, which requested similar sessions be conducted in 2021 and noted that some outcomes of the discussions would be incorporated into their work on the peace process. Moreover, immediately following this activity, some of the participants added the topic “role of women in SSR/G” to the agenda of a UN Women workshop on the occasion of the anniversary of UNSCR 1325. These sessions provided a platform for knowledge-based-exchange and resulted in the creation of a network of Yemeni women trained in SSR whose inputs will feed into future dialogues. This in turn can enhance the project outcomes by promoting broader collaboration and consultations with women’s networks for information gathering, drafting security policies, strategising, and feeding into the national peace and security process led by the UN.

Earlier in the dialogues, DCAF also offered examples of security and early SSR measures implemented in other conflict settings. While this led to considerable debate and evoked some scepticism as to whether such measures would

be possible in the Yemen context, it served the purpose of supporting participants in beginning to envision steps which might be taken even in the absence of a ceasefire. It was noted that participants would benefit from having additional time to consider comparative experiences and other concepts between dialogue sessions. Therefore, the next phase of the project will build in additional pre-dialogue briefings and consider additional sessions with specific interest groups which would focus on security issues of particular relevance to SSR and could contribute to more productive dialogue sessions. The latter step would build on the approach already taken during the first phase of the project, in which DCAF conducted intensive consultations with parties to the conflict between dialogue sessions.

Cooperation and complementarity with the UN

Close cooperation with the Office of the Special Envoy (OSESGY) has been central to DCAF’s approach to the Yemen project. DCAF is not a mediation or negotiation organisation, as participants had to be reminded throughout the dialogue sessions. Instead, DCAF has played a role which is complementary to that of OSESGY by creating a space in which a wide range of stakeholders could come together to conduct informed discussions on shared security concerns and begin to develop a common vision for future governance of security in a way that understandings could eventually be drawn back into the formal UN-led peace process. The ability to consider security issues outside of the political peace talks has created some space to discuss issues of fundamental importance to sustainable peace even as political talks have stalled.

Certainly, DCAF and the UN have different approaches, and the presence of UN

representatives in dialogue sessions always has the potential to affect dynamics (according to participants perceptions of the UN's role in Yemen). At the same time, OSESGY is a key stakeholder and their involvement and expertise have greatly benefited and added to the project's legitimacy. While it is important to maintain a clear distinction between the UN-led process and DCAF dialogues, it is equally important to recognise the value of OSESGY's engagement and ability to eventually reflect key dialogue outcomes in a formal peace agreement.

Setting the agenda

In the first phase of the project, the DCAF team wanted to maximise space for participants to propose topics and address whatever concerns were most pressing. This was useful in creating a locally led process and developing confidence that the dialogues would indeed provide an opportunity to address real concerns. However, given the diverse membership in the group, this approach also posed certain challenges when it came to addressing topics in a productive sequence and following them to a logical conclusion. Therefore, the next phase of the project will shift to a more structured approach to agenda setting, while still allowing flexibility for all parties to shape the agenda and raise urgent issues as needed.

5.2 Dialogue Topics

The timeframe in which the dialogues have occurred has been relatively short while the situation on the ground in Yemen remained extremely complex. It is therefore premature to discuss longer term SSG/R outcomes. However, Yemeni perspectives and certain topics covered in the first phase of the dialogues offer important insights into the value of bringing SSG/R considerations in during earlier phases of peace processes.

Dialogue as an outcome

DCAF staff and UN observers to the dialogues were naturally interested in achieving concrete progress wherever possible. Yemeni participants, on the other hand, noted that parties to the conflict being able to sit around the table in an environment of mutual respect to discuss sensitive security-related issues was a key measure of success. It was indeed noteworthy that parties were genuinely willing to enter into discussions of contentious security issues, highlighting the importance of tackling such issues as early as possible in a peace process.

Security cooperation

In the absence of a ceasefire, dialogue participants discussed whether it might be possible to envision immediate forms of security cooperation which could pave the way for a longer-term SSR process. DCAF offered examples from other conflict settings, which generated considerable debate around the question of whether even limited coordination would be possible prior to a broader ceasefire. While there was no consensus, several participants highlighted the importance of working at the local level and recognising the role communities and local leaders play in brokering solutions which might lead to the creation of local safe zones. Others emphasised the need to more closely monitor and document what is happening in different locations in order to build on local successes. The next phase of the project will therefore focus in part on exploring security coordination at the governorate level, in order to lend precision and relevance to the national dialogue. In his opening remarks at a more recent dialogue session conducted by DCAF, the UN Special Envoy put the emphasis on the need to involve local leaders in the search, design and application of local solutions for local problems.

Transitional security

It is too early to discuss any definitive measures related to demobilisation of different parties to the conflict. However, participants found value in beginning to think about transitional arrangements which would serve as a first step in a process of gradually reshaping the provision and oversight of security in Yemen.

With the provision of legitimate, inclusive and effective security as a top concern, participants discussed the concept of functional rather than structural integration of forces – in other words, focusing first and foremost on which security capabilities or services are required to meet the needs of the population, developing complementary roles for different security providers, and examining and revalidating lists of responsibilities. This could be complemented by developing simplified coordination mechanisms and channels and giving leaders of security bodies that operate in parallel on behalf of the different actors to the conflict (many times with overlapping mandates, roles and geographic scope) a key role in coordination and liaison. Accountability could also be emphasised through a shared code of conduct. The ultimate goal is to explore how security needs of civilians may be met more efficiently, and thus civilians' sufferings alleviated, without necessarily waiting for political and/or peace agreements to be established. At the same time, this has opened the door to explore creative ideas on how future and more traditional DDR measures may be designed and implemented, such as through rendering the continued recruitment of additional members by armed groups ineffective, or linking such coordination and security cooperation to an early incentives scheme that could form the basis to incentivise demobilisation processes in the future.

Governance structures

Many participants coalesced around the idea of a National Security Committee (or equivalent), the purpose of which would be to establish the division of responsibilities for security matters during a transition phase from conflict towards peace, and possibly longer. Such a committee would be an essential element not only for the transition period, but also in order to build the foundations for longer-term reform of the security sector. Coming to an agreement at least on the existence, as well as the general outlines and governing principles, of such a committee, was perhaps the single most important substantive achievement of the dialogues and would suggest that it is the starting point for getting parties to a conflict to begin discussion around SSR. That being said, the challenge that lies ahead for Yemen, and for any country in conflict that is moving towards a reform of the security sector, will be to deal with the specific questions which will determine the success of such a committee.

The specific role(s) of the committee would need to be determined, to include whether this would be an executive, policy making or supervisory body. Its relationship with other state and non-state institutions would need to be clarified. It would also be important to decide whether the committee would be established within or outside of the governance structure of the peace agreement. Similarly, there was discussion of whether such a committee would be established prior to or after a ceasefire is declared, with participants generally agreeing that the committee would only be effective if established as part of the formal peace agreement and after a ceasefire.

Given the multitude of players in the Yemen conflict, the composition of the committee will also require careful consideration. Some stakeholders are members of subdivisions or factions within warring groups, not to mention militias with no

formal recognition, and not necessarily recognised as such by other parties. Representation from all the regions is also important, particularly the South for which grievances with the North run deep. The critical role that tribal figures in Yemen can lend to SSR has already been mentioned, but it is also important to consider a role that they, or any other non-formal, traditional leadership in a country, could play in the committee or in supporting its mandate. Whether as a participant or as an implementor of the Committee's decisions, these groups can contribute to such activities as ceasefire monitoring and consolidation, exchange of prisoners, and the establishment of safe zones.

Once the parties have agreed upon which entities can form part of the committee, the question of which individuals, their level and function, must be agreed upon. Ministers, representatives of state security functions, independent experts knowledgeable of SSR, civil society, etc. are obvious choices, but what really seemed to matter is that all members of such a committee must agree on the other members, to ensure mutual recognition of the committee's representativeness and legitimacy. The Yemen case has shown that, while there can be agreement on which entities may be represented, there can be disagreement on the specific individuals selected to represent those entities which makes them unacceptable to others (e.g. given the role they may have played in the conflict involving human rights abuses or responsibility for atrocities). While none of these questions will be easy to answer, the establishment of a representative and inclusive national security committee could be an important step forward in developing a system of mutual accountability which could meet immediate security needs and lead to a gradual consolidation of security structures.

Participants in the dialogue sessions also considered the importance and usefulness of building on existing security governance structures, namely the Governorate and District

Security Committees, that have existed in Yemen since 1994 (as established by law, under the command of the Ministry of Interior, after the war between the north and the south). The composition, mandate, accountability mechanisms and roles of these committees would serve as a good basis for the establishment of interim and longer-term security bodies that are inclusive enough to allow all parties to mitigate their mutual fears as they form part of the decision making mechanisms (committees). These committees would also inform the articulation of the ultimate mandate of future security bodies, thus allowing them to undertake roles mainly geared towards addressing the security needs of all Yemenis more efficiently, based on lessons resulting from the evolution of such committees' mandate before and under the conflict.

The role of external stakeholders

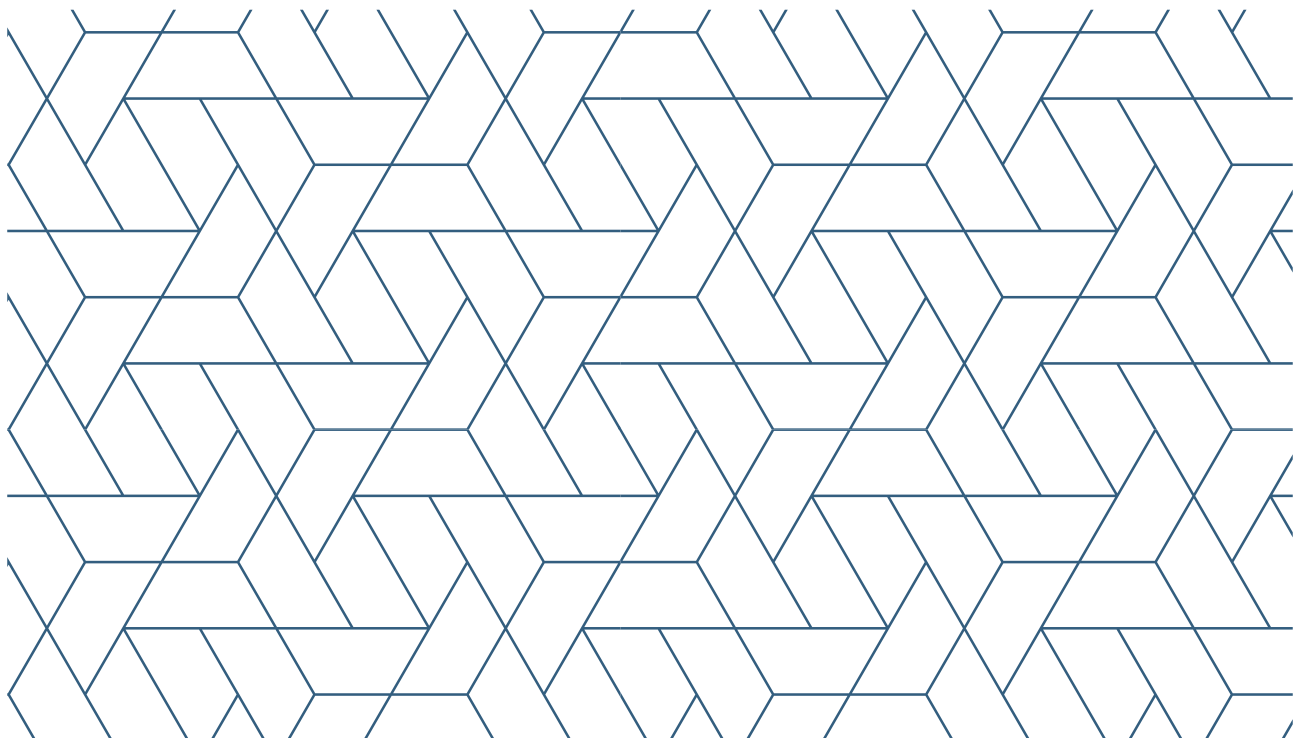
External stakeholders have played and will continue to play an influential role in the conflict in Yemen. Just as some may be playing a role in the conflict itself, the involvement of external stakeholders will be very important in bringing about a cessation of hostilities and ushering in an era of greater peace and stability. The dialogue sessions demonstrated that strong regional and international support will likely also be critical for the success of any SSR process. For example, ceasefire monitoring committees which may have participation and financial support from outside powers can be helpful in ensuring compliance. Likewise, the design and implementation of incentive schemes, or transitional justice mechanisms, may be costly and will certainly require regional and international financial support in order to ensure that transitional SSR measures lead to longer term efficiency of SSG in Yemen. Just as external actors have invested in the conflict, their priorities would need to be informed by the SSR milestones as defined by the Yemenis, so that they also invest in its sustainable resolution.

6 | Conclusion

During the period over which the dialogues were held, political and military conditions in Yemen passed through periods of optimism and pessimism. When the project began, political developments in the region gave rise to hope of finding a way out of the conflict which had a positive impact on the discussions. And conversely, when the political and military situation worsened and conflict increased, the levels of mistrust increased, and dialogue was remarkably a more challenging undertaking. In spite of this volatility, assembling a representative group of Yemeni security authorities and political representatives to discuss SSR and peacebuilding without being held hostage to the developments on the ground was no doubt a main success of the first phase of this project. Although not all the meetings met with the same level of success, the fact that they continued, and that there is a desire from all sides for them to continue, is perhaps the surest indication of progress.

The Special Envoy recently expressed an interest in following more closely the outcomes of the SSG/R dialogues and the role SSR can play in mediation efforts. And although the dialogues have not yet had a measurable impact on the peace process led by OSESGY, the importance of SSR in an eventual peace agreement is now better understood by the participants and their leadership and a good framework exists for defining next steps.

It is hoped that this review of the lessons learned from this project will be helpful not only to the ongoing peace process in Yemen but also in other contexts in which stakeholders seek to establish inclusive security arrangements as part of a transition from conflict to peace. While the situation in Yemen remains complex, there are reasons to believe that an early discussion of the value and principles of SSR can help parties to the conflict identify shared security needs, consider approaches to enhance accountability, and ultimately take concrete steps to develop a foundation for peace and security in Yemen.



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