



4. Research Findings: Southern Transitional Council

4.1. The STC's Understanding of the WPS Framework

The Southern Transitional Council (STC) was formed in 2017 from a wide mix of political actors united by the common cause of restoring the state of the south. The intellectual and political diversity of the STC represents an environment conducive to addressing many issues, including women's issues. When it comes to the WPS framework, interviewees noted that there is a kind of general awareness amongst the members of the STC, both men and women, especially among the leaders. The exception is a small group of women who are well informed about UNSCR 1325. These women represent a good starting point for the STC's work to assume its responsibility to encourage women's political participation and its commitment to protecting the rights of women and girls.

Interviews with STC members, as well as FGDs with representatives of CSOs (including those affiliated with the Supreme Coordination Council of CSOs formed by the STC), indicated that the limited knowledge of WPS among STC decision-makers has made it difficult for women's political rights and women's and girls' rights to protection to be sufficiently represented. This situation has affected the effectiveness of the framework's implementation on the ground, and seems especially urgent for addressing the hopes that women and girls in the south have for the STC to play a greater role in reducing their suffering in light of the exacerbation of violations of their political, civil, and economic rights as a result of the 1994 war, ongoing conflict, and the humanitarian crisis which began in 2015.

4.2. Official Policies and Commitments to the WPS Framework

The regulations of the STC and its National Assembly include provisions supporting women's representation and empowerment, including granting women a 30% participation quota in various bodies. However, the situation of conflict and humanitarian crisis that accompanied the emergence and development of the STC have undermined the efforts of the STC leadership to achieve this goal, despite the strength of their internal policies. In an effective step to overcome this gap, the STC recognised the need for integrated partnership with civil society and women's groups to implement the WPS framework and fulfil women's rights to participation and the rights of women and girls to protection at all different stages, including during conflict and humanitarian crisis, in order to avoid postponing the role and participation of women in the STC and in public life.

Interviewees and FGD participants did emphasise the STC's efforts to create a Coordination Council for Civil Society Organisations through which the STC supports women's organisations and activities related to WPS. This Council is headed by a woman and is open to organisations whose leaders are not members of the STC. The Council adopts programmes targeting youth and women, especially economic empowerment projects.

Research participants also stressed the importance of the "consultative meeting" held 4–8 May 2023, when the STC conducted consultations in Aden, with social, political, and trade union representatives, including women leaders. It is worth mentioning that the consultative meeting is one of the main activities within the STC's process of restructuring and institutional reform, which came in response to an initiative of the STC, announced by its chairman, Aidaroos Al-Zubaidi. According to an opinion article published in Al-Ayyam newspaper by one of the participants in the southern consultative meeting, the meeting's documents stipulated a federal civil state, partnership, separation of powers, the rule of law, equality between citizens, rights and freedoms, and the status and role of women.²⁴

The consultative meeting issued a statement that stressed, among its recommendations, the necessity of paying attention to youth and women, as they are main pillars of society, and of supporting them to reach higher positions in decision-making. The drafting and approval of the "National Charter" document in May 2023 was the most important outcome of this consultative meeting. The document includes several commitments related to WPS, most notably:

1. Ensure equality and equal opportunities for all citizens politically, economically, socially, and culturally and work to issue legislation regulating this.
2. The family is the basic unit of society based on religion, morals, human values, respect for the human being and love of the homeland, and for this purpose the efforts of the political, social, professional, and elite forces and components and the Constitution and legislation of the desired southern state should pay special attention to improving the developmental, educational, and economic status of the southern family.

This will ensure:

- Securing the requirements of social, cultural, economic, and health care for the family, especially pregnant mothers, children, and persons with special needs;
- Enabling women to exercise all their political rights and participate positively in public life side by side with their male peers;
- Paying attention to women and youth and ensuring special care in the stages of restoration and state-building, in order to ensure their partnership in achieving this and in all leadership and institutional frameworks, sports events and activities, etc., developing plans and programmes in this regard, and supporting the restructuring of associations and unions for women, youth, and students in all directorates and governorates of the south and at the national, sectoral, and professional levels.

24 Qasim Daoud Ali, *A Reading of the Outputs of the Southern Consultative Meeting and Its Place in the Current Priorities Matrix*, Al-Ayyam newspaper, 2023. Available at: <https://www.alayyam.info/news/9G296A80-RKBR8A-7F0C>.

4.3. Current Situation and Practices Related to WPS

Women are present in the various leadership bodies of the STC, but their numbers do not reach the 30% quota stipulated in the STC's regulations. For example, the STC has 10 senior districts, only two of which are led by women. The National Assembly, which serves as the parliament, has 303 members, 36 of whom are women, or about 12%. The same applies to other levels of leadership.

Apart from women's access to decision-making positions in the STC structure, the circumstances of the STC's establishment and functions imposed by the context of conflict and humanitarian crisis have influenced the STC's foreign policy practices in ensuring women's access to decision-making positions in political, peace, and security processes. For example, women have been absent from the delegations that participate in political negotiations between the STC and the IRG, as well as at the signing of the Riyadh Agreement on 5 November 2019. Participants in interviews and FGDs thought that women's participation in such negotiations would be important, as their aim is to restore the Southern State²⁵ and its institutions, where women played a leading role. On the other hand, an absence of women has also been reflected in the power-sharing agreements in the various political, military, security, and economic arrangements. For example, women were excluded from the formation of the government in 2020, whose members were appointed by the president in consultation with the Prime Minister and political movements, provided that the ministerial portfolios consist of 24 ministers equally between the southern and northern governorates. This was the first time since 2001 that the Yemeni government was without any ministerial representation of women.

Participants in the FGDs attributed some of the STC's exclusionary practices towards women to the fact that the civil and political process has been eroded in response to the expansion of military operations, including the militarisation of civilian institutions, which has affected women the most in terms of participation and protection.

The information provided in the FGDs suggests a complex and concerning situation regarding women's leadership opportunities in the STC. While the existence of regulations and systems supporting women's political empowerment is a positive step, the reality seems to fall short of these aspirations.

The male and female interviewees of the STC largely seem to agree with the FGDs, as they state that the STC has already created regulations, internally and externally, for the political participation and empowerment of women, but their participation remains ineffective on the ground.

Regarding the rights of women and girls to protection in the context of conflict and humanitarian crisis, interviewees and FGD participants stressed that the STC adheres to and follows the laws in place, but that it does not have protection mechanisms appropriate to the current situation in the country. At the time the laws were made – years before the current crisis – they were perceived to be effective for protecting citizens. The concern is that they were more fitting to stable political, social, and security context and institutions, whereas, in the current situation, circumstances have changed dramatically and there are incidents of SGBV by individuals and actors. At the same time, public security institutions are more vulnerable than ever before and are no longer able to effectively enforce the law. Allegedly, even the norms of community protection that until recently prevailed in Aden are no longer followed.

²⁵ With the Southern State STC refers to South Yemen, which was an independent state that existed between 1967 and 1990, until the union of South and North Yemen on 22 May 1990.

4.4. Actors and Factors Conducive to the Implementation of the WPS Framework

☰ Political Agreements:

In a 2022 agreement between the IRG and the STC the parties agreed to form a joint delegation for peace negotiations with Ansar Allah,²⁶ and some of those interviewed reported that the STC delegation will include a woman. Whatever the outcome and given that such negotiations may still be far away, this constitutes an opportunity to advocate for the inclusion of a woman in the delegation, and perhaps even for more than one woman to be represented in that body, as these negotiations are pivotal in deciding the future of Yemen and the south.

☰ Restructuring Process:

The restructuring process of the STC represents a good opportunity to activate the STC regulations, which stipulate that women should have 30% representation and participation in various public bodies. This would require uniting the ranks of women leaders within the STC, engaging them in coalition building, and lobbying for access to decision-making positions. The restructuring also represents an opportunity to incorporate mechanisms to protect the rights of women and girls from violations, especially during conflict and humanitarian crisis.

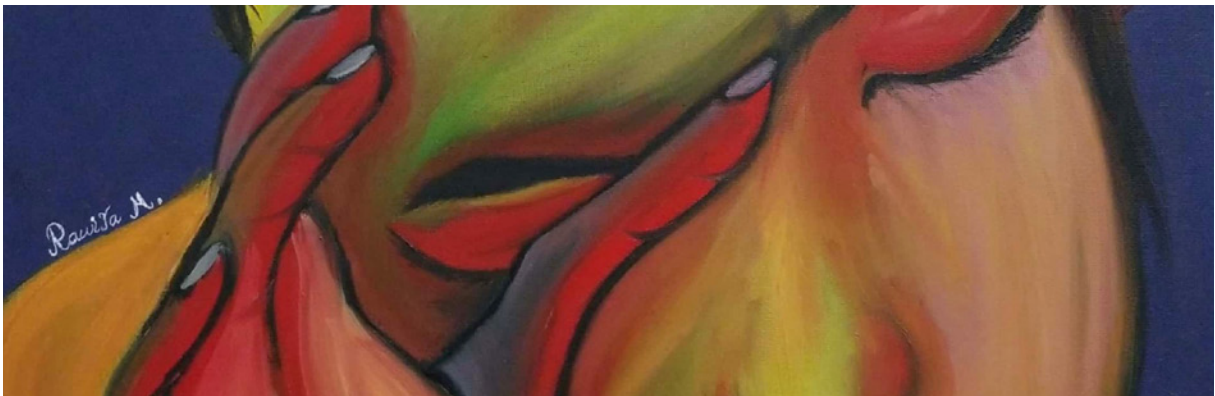
☰ International actors:

International actors have a strong presence in the Yemeni scene and a wide influence on decision-makers. This represents a positive factor for women's empowerment, because it is easy to reach these parties and convince them of the need to support the WPS framework. The STC is one of the movements that pays the most attention to the international community.

☰ The speech of restoring the Southern state:

In the interviews, participants repeatedly spoke about the importance of the STC's discourse on reinstating the Southern state, which could include the restoration of the leading role of women in the south. During the Southern state, women had an active political presence and participation in various official and popular bodies, and obtained all their rights. Importantly, there was a family law in the south that was among the most progressive laws in the Arab region, and it was always mentioned among women as a primary source of protection, empowerment, and safety for women and girls.

This law can serve as a basis for opening a dialogue among women and in the various events and activities organised by the STC to raise the issue of restoring the social context and the legal system of the Southern State that protected women's rights and was committed to broad participation.



²⁶ This agreement followed the 2019 Riyadh Agreement which had as a main objective to put an end to military confrontations between the IRG and the STC.

4.5. Opportunities and Recommendations

There are a number of opportunities that the STC could seize to build a strategy to implement the WPS framework, most notably:

☐ **The presence of women in decision-making positions**

The presence of women in senior bodies, whether in the state or in the bodies of the STC, is a factor that can have a positive impact on women's rights to participation and protection. For women to have a meaningful influence on decision-making, their roles and political abilities and skills need to be sufficiently strengthened. This requires effective communication between women in decision-making positions, women's organisations, and those generally working to advocate for women's issues and to implement the WPS framework.

☐ **Internal dialogue on hindrances to women's participation**

All interviewees and FGD participants stressed the need for the STC's leadership, both male and female, to review their position and the resulting practices that have reduced women's active participation in political and leadership roles, and to engage in internal dialogue to develop solutions to political and security concerns and mechanisms to enhance women's participation and leadership even in situations of conflict and humanitarian crisis. Participants affirmed that knowing and adopting the WPS framework can present an important opportunity for the STC to emerge from this crisis. Adopting the framework would help the STC identify effective avenues for overcoming the political and security challenges that hinder women's participation and leadership. It would also contribute to overcoming humanitarian and economic difficulties brought about by the successive collapse of the value of the currency, high prices, and poor services, which all hinder the achievement of the STC's political aspirations, along with women's aspirations.

☐ **Develop cooperation for women's and girls' protection**

Participants believe that the STC should take protection into account, especially in the STC's current restructuring phase, to ensure that protection measures are responsive to the conflict situation and the humanitarian crisis the country is going through. Participants pointed to the efforts and experiences of many CSOs, women's groups and international organisations in promoting women's protection as an avenue for a solution, and noted that joining existing work and efforts could complement their efforts on the ground. Working together could support the inclusion of protection mechanisms in the National Charter and in the restructuring process of the STC. Participants also noted that benefit could come from the UN programme for the implementation of the NAP for WPS in the Aden Governorate, which focuses on reforming security institutions to be gender responsive. It is worth mentioning that this programme is in partnership with the MOSAL, which is headed by a minister from the STC.

☐ **Capacity-building for women in the STC**

Interviewees and FGD participants saw that one of the most important opportunities would be to enhance women's meaningful political participation through the development of their political capacities and skills. As one of them expressed, "If women's political capacities and skills are weak, even if women get 60% representation in the STC and the government bodies, 30% of men will still be the decision-makers."

CSO participants added that women need to develop their abilities and skills in formulating political visions, conducting political dialogues, and forming political alliances. Currently, women are still invited to participate in visioning discussions or proposals and attend dialogues or join political alliances which are pre-developed by male leaders. To really activate the role of women in politics and leadership, it is important to balance the roles to have women who are able to develop political projects and invite male leaders to discuss these, and vice versa. Strengthening the role of women's political leadership in this way will provide effective opportunities to advance on the implementation of the WPS framework.

≡ Provision of material and logistical support for women's efforts

In addition, participants cited the importance of material and logistical support as a conducive factor for implementing the WPS framework, as improving working conditions for women politicians helps them to be able to play an active role in the peace and security process. For example, donors and international organisations can allocate budgets to support women's activities in the ceasefire process, support them in visiting prisons and detention centres, or holding dialogues, all of which require covering the costs of transportation, coordination, communication, etc.

≡ Unifying efforts

An important factor for implementing the WPS framework is for women to have a thorough knowledge of women's rights and understanding of women's issues as a whole. By organising together and unifying efforts from women's initiatives and organisations, women can better defend issues and maintain an influential voice. Work can also be done to strengthen relationships with other bodies that support women's rights, such as the judiciary. Working with various political movements or entities would also contribute to enriching knowledge and practice, provide opportunities for an exchange of experiences, and support agreement on common programmes of action within the WPS framework.

