While Yemen remains locked in a grand political dispute, its people bound by the competing ambitions of various factions and militias as they each argue power, legitimacy, and righteous politics, it is likely that peace will require more than a coming together of those warring parties ... Peace as it were, will call for an institutional rethink of the proverbial ‘generational gap’.

If we care to learn from the waves of protests currently engulfing not only the region: Sudan, Lebanon, Iraq but the world: Chile, Hong Kong and Barcelona, it is rather evident that if each country faces its own socio-political idiosyncrasies, all have a common denominator: a disenfranchised and disillusioned youth.

As our world has come to be defined by technological breakthroughs and fast-paced social changes governments were bound to face protracted challenges. As it happens those challenges have taken the shape of mass protests and a grand coming together of the youth against what it perceives as an antiquated system reflecting a by-gone era.

And though Yemen’s peace will undoubtedly be brokered when all actors - whether local or regional, will find enough common ground to formulate a political solution to their respective upsets, no resolution will be worth more its ink if Yemen’s generational gap remains unaddressed.

If statesmen can formulate a nation’s future, it is the people who will ultimately determine how such a future will manifest. Today Yemen needs a vision which will allow for its youth to look into the future with confidence, strong in the knowledge that tangible actions are being taken to address their most immediate needs.

Interestingly enough Yemen offers a perfect demographic mirror to what is fast becoming a global challenge - there are more young people than ever (41% of the world population) and almost all share a common fear of a future scarred and marred by economic inequalities, social grievances, and lack of true political representation.

Yemen has the most youthful age structure in the world outside of sub-Saharan Africa, with three-quarters of its population under the age of 30, and so Yemen sits today the most vulnerable state of them all - wide open to what will undoubtedly be a debilitating uprising.

If we keep in mind that war exacerbated poverty through a complete meltdown of all civil institutions, notwithstanding the pressure internal population displacement has had on cities such as Sanaa and Aden and it appears evident that Yemen’s political future and the very viability of its nation-state hinges on its political elite’s ability to meet such pressing socio-economic demands.

Over 20% of Yemen’s population is aged between 15 and 24 and, according to UN estimates, by 2025 will have increased by 69% - the second fastest growth rate in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Yemen also has high rates of illiteracy and together with Egypt and Iraq, makes up three-quarters of the 10 million illiterate youth in the region - two-thirds of which are girls.

Yemen’s pre-existing social deficit, the profound lack of basic services such as housing, education, healthcare, sanitation and jobs, has been compounded by political volatility, religious radicalisation, armed conflicts, shortages of food and water and dwindling of natural resources through mismanagement and corruption. And though those issues may remain for now thwarted by the politics of war, at least as far as the media are concerned, this is not to say that those realities will not ultimately determined the true face of post-war Yemen.
Youth bulges will continue to exacerbate pre-existing political and socio-economic problems putting any prospect of a lasting peace under serious strain - to believe otherwise today, in view of the violence witnessed in both Iraq and Lebanon equates to folly.

It has long been argued that a strong causality exists in between poverty and radicalisation - might it be political or religious, even more so among the youth, and more accurately still among the uneducated youth.

In the face of such challenges Yemen truly sits in the eye of a dangerous storm ... Needless to say that it does not sit alone. Whatever upheavals Yemen will face in the coming months and years will dramatically impact the Gulf region. One can only hope for the betterment of all.

Yemen’s saving grace exists in the state’s ability to apply itself to long-term development goals - preferably in keeping with the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Undoubtedly priority should be given to increase and strengthen educational and economic development opportunities for the youth, with a focus on improving female participation.

Funds should also be devoted to ensure increased educational access for girls, and employment opportunities should be centered on manufacturing, industry, services and other new, expanding sectors, beyond agriculture and civil service.

Beyond all manners of political disagreement, Yemen’s socio-economic reality must take precedent, and concrete steps taken to redress former failures.

After all, there will be little left to argue over if Yemen ceases to exist as a sovereign state, notwithstanding the sheer nightmare policing a failed state would turn out to be for Yemen’s most immediate neighbours.

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