



الحركة السياسية  
النسوية السورية  
THE SYRIAN WOMEN'S  
POLITICAL MOVEMENT

# A Comprehensive Feminist Plan for Reconstruction in Syria conditioned upon of political transition

## Executive Summary

Discussions of reconstruction in Syria began a while ago at the international level and the topic is still subject to polarizations among different countries depending on the varying political interests and alignments, and strategic interests. These countries include regime allies and these encourage starting the reconstruction process, such as Russia and Iran; other countries tie reconstruction with the political solution in accordance with the Geneva talks, and these include European countries and the United States. Reconstruction in Syria is not limited to an economic process, but a political process first and foremost. Therefore, the regime has constantly used reconstruction as a bargaining chip to secure economic and material gains, on the one hand, and as an alternative means to continue its war, and exclusion and marginalization of all those who oppose it, on the other.

The regime disregarded any humanitarian or social aspects in its approach to reconstruction. This was further accompanied by a problematic absence of any consideration of the gender cost of the war economy and limiting the economic implications of the war – hence reconstruction efforts – solely to infrastructure, and the effects on the real estate, investment, or complex economic sectors. In this regard, World Bank reports indicate that the cumulative economic losses and repercussions on the GDP due to violence and war in Syria since the beginning of the Revolution in 2011 are estimated at about USD 226 billion. According to the World Bank reports, the sectors damaged by the war in Syria and the cost of their reconstruction are as follows:

- Real estate (USD 111 billion loss)
- Industrial sector (USD 75 billion loss)
- Services sector (USD 45 billion loss)
- Public services (USD 24 billion loss)
- Transportation and communications (USD 18 billion loss)
- Agriculture (USD 15 billion loss)
- Financial services (USD 12 billion loss)

Based on these two levels of problems and the fact that reconstruction is often addressed (in most local, regional, and international political and economic reports) from a narrow political perspective, the Syrian Women's Political Movement (SWPM), in cooperation with the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), sought to identify the discourse of women in Syria on local levels about this issue. Thus, the SWPM conducted eight consultation sessions with 121 women in March 2019.

1- See the section on methodology of this paper.

2- It is noteworthy that men's participation was limited to one area in the first session, then a decision was made to make the participation available for women only, to ensure that men do not drive or influence the discussion, so that to get a feminist perspective on the issues being discussed.

These consultation sessions, which used a focus group discussion format, followed by a less structured discussion in which women deliberate over key issues. In the course of these discussions, women showed innate political and economic awareness, analyzed the economy of war and violence from a feminist point of view, and analyzed reconstruction as proposed by the regime from various angles, including economic, demographic, cultural, and social, while taking note of the key implications on economic, human, social, and cultural capital. The women also proposed comprehensive conditions for any future reconstruction plan and came up with an outline for an alternative participatory economic plan for reconstruction that is both inclusive and feminist.

In their analysis of the regime's approach to reconstruction and the social and demographic impact of the political economy pursued by the regime, the women held the view that the regime uses reconstruction to wage war of a new type on anyone opposed to it, especially refugees and IDPs in areas outside its control. Further, the women noted that the regime's timing and approach to reconstruction constitutes a lie or a political 'trick' to "restore its legitimacy in the region" and support its allies to receive funding, which would increase the regime's own wealth and that of individuals affiliated with it. The views and positions of the women in the consultations agreed with the political literature and analyses on reconstruction, which indicate that the regime's approach is based on interests and personal-wealth aspirations, as well as rewarding allies and 'punishing' opponents, particularly through granting projects to companies, organizations, and institutions that are regime affiliates or allies.

In terms of the new form of economic war the regime uses, the women highlighted the exclusionary and punitive practices against areas out of the regime's control, which the regime does under a legal cover. These practices create serious repercussions on the social, demographic, and cultural levels, which will lead to the prolongation of the conflict due to the increased sense of injustice, which may in turn lead to exacerbating social and demographic fissures among Syrians. In addition to the systematic policy of social, economic, and political exclusion of areas outside the regime's control, another form of economic punishment reaches regime-controlled areas. Women from those areas indicated that the regime makes citizens shoulder the cost of war and rebuilding the destroyed infrastructure and service structures through levying taxes, which mainly takes its toll on people and their families, their livelihoods, and food security. This could subsequently give rise to regional and inter-regional disputes and wars.

According to the women, the systematic deprivation policies pursued by the regime are translated to material, human, and cultural capital losses in all areas, in general, and those outside regime control in particular. In this regard, the women highlighted the deteriorating living conditions and high prices in all areas, and a rise in unemployment rates (in areas outside regime control), migration of qualified people due to security conditions, and compulsory conscription policy (in regime-controlled areas), all of which destabilize human capital. Added to that is the impact on children in terms of conscription of children, school dropout, and forced early marriage (for girls).

Based on the overall picture of the economy of war and violence outlined by the women from a holistic feminist perspective and their feminist analysis of the exclusionary and punitive dimension of reconstruction in its political, security, demographic, and economic dimensions, the women thought that any reconstruction efforts must only start after two key conditions are met: peaceful political transition, with rule of security, safety and ceasefire; and secondly, the implementation of gender-sensitive transitional justice mechanisms.

If these conditions are met, then we can start considering reconstruction, provided that it is based on priorities and pillars including participation and inclusion in identifying the needs of the people and women. The process should also include basic success factors such as accountability, in order to ensure sustainability of any future reconstruction plans. **The key priorities and pillars of the reconstruction plan from the women's point of view are:**

- Prioritizing public services and infrastructure, particularly those of the services sector (health and education) and utilities (water, electricity, and gas). These sectors must be prioritized over the real estate sector as they could, if developed in a balanced manner in all areas, promote social cohesion and overcome the sense of injustice and grievances among the areas;
- Identifying needs and available capacities, as outlining a reconstruction plan must be mainly based on identifying the needs of women, men, and youth, as well as identifying their capacities and qualifications, and investing them in the context of reconstruction to ensure utilization of local capacities

and workforce;

- Promoting and activating women's political and social participation in the reconstruction phase, building on the efforts and roles that women had during the conflict, and benefiting from the gradual and positive shift in norms, traditions, and perception of women and their work outside the house;
- Evaluating direct and indirect damages, as any reconstruction plan would not be authentic, sustainable, and realistic unless direct and indirect damages incurred by war, violence, bombardment, and conflict in Syria are assessed. Usually, moral, psychological, and indirect damages suffered by the families due to bombardment, death, violence, and an ongoing conflict are overlooked or ignored;
- Reforming and amending property laws by revoking the unfair laws and decrees issued by the regime since the beginning of the conflict, while ensuring international legal protection for women, so they can prove their property rights in case of husband's death or absence/disappearance;
- Promoting monitoring and accountability, and enhancing mechanisms of responding to complaints, in order to ensure efficiency and prevent waste and corruption, while employing the principles of competence, diversity, and selection based on merit rather than nepotism and imposition.

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The Syrian Women's Political Movement (SWPM)

