Strengthening Governance in Government Plans and Economic Reforms

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Executive Summary

This paper examines governance as the decisive factor shaping the success or failure of government reforms and current government plans in Yemen. It starts from a central premise: Yemen's reform crisis is not primarily a crisis of planning or vision, but a crisis of structural weakness in the governance system that should regulate policy design, implementation, monitoring, and accountability. Yemeni experience, before and during the war, shows that reforms without a clear governance framework become formal decisions that are selectively implemented, stripped of substance, or unable to deliver sustainable impact.

The paper demonstrates that the implementation gap represents the central challenge facing government reforms—a gap resulting from overlapping mandates, multiple decision-making centers, weak institutional coordination, absence of effective accountability, lack of transparency and data, as well as the chronic disconnect between financial and institutional reforms. It also shows that corruption in the Yemeni context is no longer an isolated administrative phenomenon but has become part of deeper dysfunctions in the state's political economy, making its treatment possible only through comprehensive governance reforms, not through discrete oversight tools.

Through analysis of a case study involving clearly formulated reforms that later stalled in implementation, the paper concludes that political decisions alone are not enough to ensure execution in the absence of an integrated governance system. Weak effective executive authority, the absence of a clear accountability chain, undeclared institutional resistance, and poor alignment between reforms and institutional capacities all contribute to disruption and operational paralysis.

Based on this diagnosis, the paper proposes a practical governance framework for reforms in Yemen. The framework treats reform as a continuous political-institutional process rather than an isolated technical or financial intervention. It is built on the need for a unified national reference for reform governance, clear mechanisms for assigning roles across institutions, a workable balance between centralization and local governance, and the integration of transparency and information systems at the core of the reform cycle. It also adopts a gradual approach that builds trust and reduces implementation resistance.

In light of this framework, the paper presents a package of practical recommendations to strengthen the governance of government reforms. These include adopting a unified national framework for institutional performance governance, strengthening financial governance through budget discipline and expenditure control, establishing a unified digital data system, and activating central and local accountability mechanisms based on clear performance standards, while also allowing regulated exceptional tools for economic crisis management. The paper emphasizes that these recommendations can succeed only through clear role distribution among the central government, local authorities, the private sector, civil society, and international partners, within a single national framework that leads the reform process without replacing state institutions.

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The paper concludes that governance is not a procedural issue or an external condition, but rather the most realistic entry point for reconsidering government plans and transforming them into effective tools for economic recovery and institutional stability. Without systematically addressing governance gaps, government reforms will remain vulnerable to stumbling regardless of their technical quality or the support allocated to them. Building a clear and implementable governance system represents a genuine opportunity to rebuild trust between the state and society, improve resource utilization efficiency, and put Yemen on a more sustainable reform path.

Message to Decision Makers (Executive Note)

Why this paper now?

The Yemeni government today does not primarily suffer from a lack of plans or weak vision; it suffers from a chronic inability to convert approved decisions and plans into tangible results. Experience shows that this pattern undermines the credibility of political decision-making and reduces reforms to low-cost rhetorical commitments for actors who do not intend to comply.

What does this paper show?

This paper proceeds from a clear premise: the reform crisis in Yemen is a governance implementation crisis, not a policy crisis. Government reforms, regardless of their technical quality or political level, will not be automatically implemented in the absence of a governance framework linking decision, implementing entity, resources, follow-up, and accountability.

What does political decision-making require now?

Addressing this gap does not require launching new plans. It requires specific decisions that reorganize how reforms themselves are managed, strengthen the implementation and accountability chain, and protect political decisions from undeclared institutional disruption.

Risks of inaction

Continuing the current situation means the persistence of implementation gaps, erosion of domestic and international confidence, and transformation of reforms into accumulated political and administrative burdens. This paper presents a practical framework for reform governance without creating parallel structures or suspending accountability rules, preserving the role of state institutions and enhancing their implementation capacity.

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Introduction

Governance in Government Reforms and Plans

In the Yemeni context, governance is no longer a normative slogan or an aesthetic concept used in policy documents to satisfy international partners. It has become a core issue that directly affects the state's capacity to plan, implement, and survive institutionally. Yemeni experience before and during the war shows that weak governance was not merely a consequence of crisis; it was one of the structural drivers of state fragility, institutional erosion, and repeated reform failure, even during periods when resources and external support were relatively available.

Over the past decades, Yemen has witnessed repeated waves of economic and financial reform plans, yet most failed to produce sustainable outcomes. This was not necessarily due to weak technical diagnosis or a lack of vision. Rather, it reflected a chronic disconnect between planning and implementation, the absence of a governance system capable of steering public decision-making, weak role clarity and accountability, and poor protection of policy from political and vested-interest capture. Experience shows that plans without a clear governance framework quickly become formal documents that are selectively implemented and emptied of substance through informal practices.

This weakness deepened during the conflict years as Yemen's political economy was reshaped by multiple decision-making centers, overlapping authorities, and expanding rent-seeking and corruption networks. In this context, corruption is no longer a narrow administrative or financial issue; it has become a structural phenomenon linked to the partial capture of state functions and the redirection of public institutions toward narrow interests at the expense of the public good. As a result, the government's ability to implement its own policies has weakened, even when decisions are issued at the highest levels, as seen in recent experiences with economic reform priority plans.

Recent national discussions, including those within the Development Champions Forum (DCF), reflect an important shift in how reform is understood. The central question is no longer simply, "How do we design better reforms?" It is now, "How do we manage reforms in a state marked by weak governance and multiple power centers?" This shift reflects growing recognition that the core problem is not policy design alone, but the absence of a realistic governance system capable of translating policy into action, linking resources to results, holding implementing entities accountable, and managing relations between the central government and local authorities, the state and the private sector, and the government and international partners.

This paper is based on discussions held during the thirteenth meeting of the Development Champions Forum in Amman, Jordan (November 30-December 2, 2025), Presidential Leadership Council Resolution No. (11) of 2025 approving the Comprehensive Economic Reform Priority Plan, an analysis of local and international models of public-policy and reform governance, and a review of research papers and policy briefs previously issued by the Forum. It analyzes governance as the regulatory framework for government reforms, not as a secondary or complementary element. The paper also seeks to unpack the relationship between weak governance and stalled reform plans, and to identify the operational gaps that prevent governance principles from being integrated into planning and implementation in Yemen's real institutional context.

Accordingly, this paper does not treat governance as an end in itself, but as a necessary means for rebuilding trust, improving resource utilization efficiency, and ensuring that government plans become effective tools for recovery and stability, not merely circumstantial responses to crises or external support conditionalities.

First The Governance Challenge in Government Reforms - Between Planning and Implementation

Yemeni experience shows that the core challenge in government reform is not the absence of plans or weak declared political intent, but the chronic inability to translate decisions and plans into measurable results. Most previous reform programs were marked by a wide gap between what was agreed at the political leadership and central government level and what was actually implemented by institutions, sectors, and governorates. At its core, this gap reflects weakness in the governance system that should link planning to implementation and translate public policy from formal text into enforceable practice.

In the Yemeni context, governance has overlapped with political and administrative authority structures in a complex manner. The state suffers not only from weak technical capacities or lack of resources, but from multiple decision-making centers, overlapping lines of authority and responsibility, and duality of roles between formal and informal institutions. Consequently, many reforms transformed into selective procedures applied to some entities but not others, or emptied of their substance through undeclared exceptions, or used as political negotiation tools rather than binding general policies.

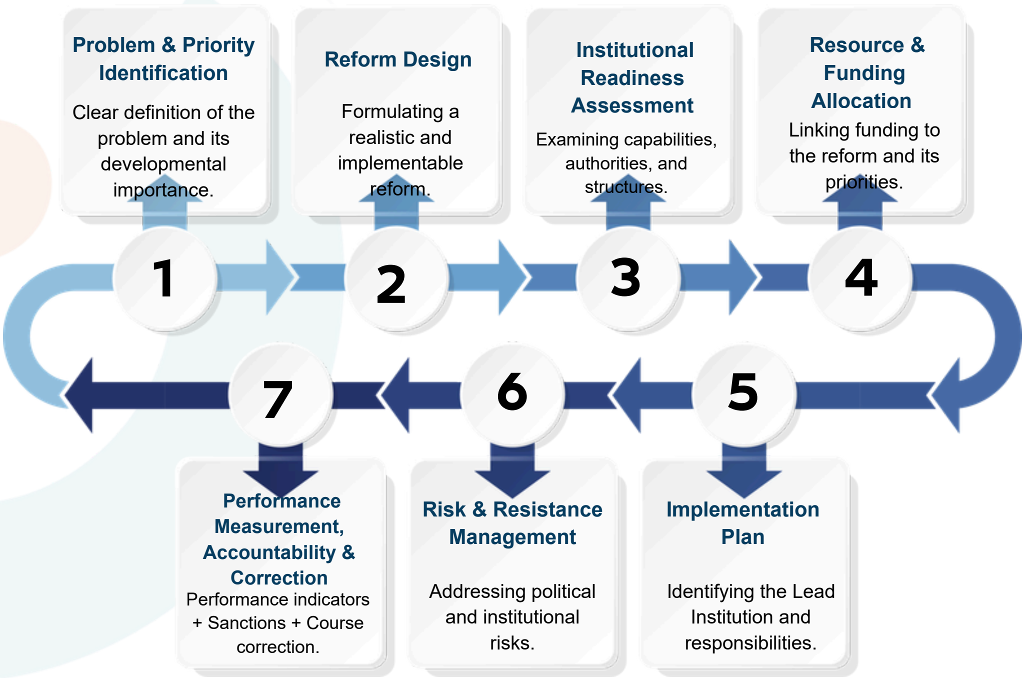
This challenge has been exacerbated greatly by the years of conflict, as the war economy produced patterns more complex than weak governance. The problem is no longer confined to weak coordination between ministries, but has become linked to the existence of overlapping interest networks within state institutions, and outside them, networks that produced a rent-seeking and corruption system benefiting from the continuation of dysfunction, resisting any reforms touching rent sources or seeking to recalibrate public resource flows. In this context, implementation of government reforms has become hostage to informal power balances, not necessarily reflecting the state's legal or regulatory structures.

This paper therefore centers on a core question: How can government and economic reforms be designed and implemented in a way that is workable in an environment of weak governance and multiple decision-making centers, without falling into the trap of formalism or short-term fixes?

This question generates a set of sub-issues, most notably:

- The limits of what government plans can achieve in the absence of an effective accountability system.
- The required balance between financial centralization and local governance.
- The role of oversight bodies in a fragile political and institutional context.
- How governance can be transformed from an externally imposed condition to an internal tool for improving government performance.

his constitutes the foundational analytical chapter from which the paper proceeds to discuss governance not as an abstract concept, but as a practical framework for re-linking government reforms to Yemeni institutional and political reality.



Reform Governance = Linking Decisions to Responsibility, Resources, and Accountability.
The absence of this integrated accountability chain leads to the erosion of public decision authority and transforms reforms into theoretical commitments that carry no real cost in the event of non-compliance.

Second Governance Gaps in Government Plans and Reforms

Yemeni experience shows that the governance challenge lies not in the absence of plans or shortage of strategic documents, but in structural and methodological gaps that accompanied the process of preparing government plans and implementing economic reforms. Specialized discussions in the thirteenth meeting of the Development Champions Forum revealed that these gaps recur almost systematically, regardless of sector or implementing entity, indicating a structural deficiency in the economic governance system itself, not individual or circumstantial failures.

1-The Gap in Linking Planning and Governance

Government plans in Yemen show a clear weakness in integrating governance principles at the planning stage itself. In many cases, plans are built around sectoral or financial objectives without clearly defining accountability mechanisms, performance indicators, or institutional roles for implementation and follow-up. As a result, governance is treated as a formal add-on rather than as a framework that shapes plan design from the outset.

2-The Gap in Authority Distribution and Role Overlap

Yemeni experience highlighted that overlap of mandates between ministries, authorities, and local authorities, and recently the contestation of authorities over Yemeni geographic space, represents one of the biggest obstacles to reform implementation. Government plans typically assume the existence of a clear administrative hierarchy, while reality reflects multiple decision-making centers and weak horizontal and vertical coordination.

The absence of clarity in role distribution leads to:

- Duplication in decision-making.
- Mutual disruption between entities.
- Shifting responsibility upon stumbling instead of holding the relevant entity accountable.

3-The Gap in Accountability and Follow-up

Despite many government plans nominally including follow-up and evaluation provisions, these mechanisms often remain weak or non-operational. This is due to:

- Absence of measurable performance indicators.
- Weak periodic reporting systems.
- Failure to link implementation outcomes to clear administrative or legal consequences.
- Weakness of financial oversight institutions (Central Organization for Control and Auditing - COCA), and anti-corruption and legal, judicial, and parliamentary accountability institutions.

4-The Gap in Transparency and Data Availability

Government plans and economic reforms suffer from chronic deficiency in reliable and updated data, whether at the level of revenues, expenditures, or institutional performance. Available data is often:

- Incomplete.
- Difficult to access.
- Or confined within specific entities.

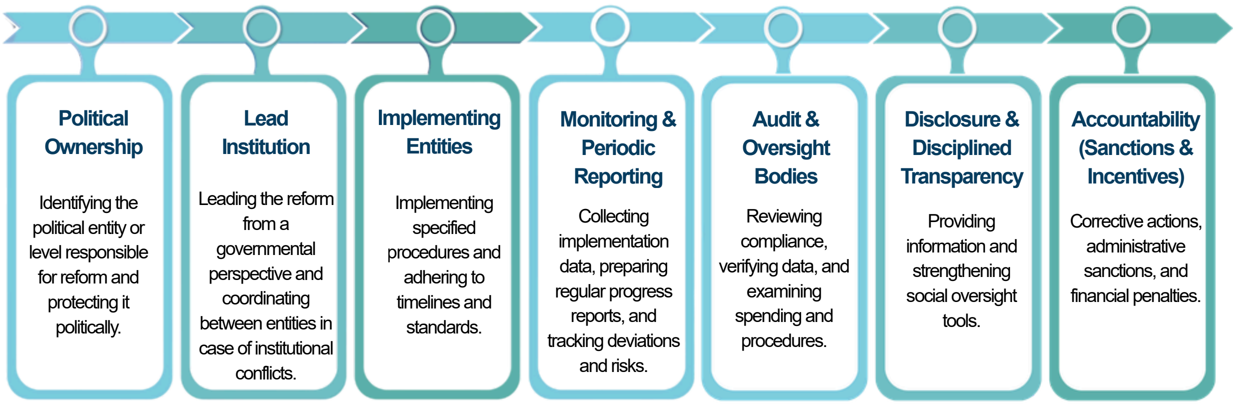
5-The Gap in Aligning Reforms with Institutional Reality

One of the most prominent governance gaps is that many reforms are designed according to external normative models or recommendations, without adequate adaptation to Yemeni institutional reality. This leads to:

- Imposing procedures exceeding existing institution capacities.
- Undeclared resistance from implementing entities.
- Or selective implementation that empties reform of its substance.

The Accountability Chain in Governance of Government Reforms

The accountability chain below demonstrates that the core dysfunction in implementing reforms does not lie in the absence of decisions, but rather in the breakdown of the pathway due to weak follow-up, disclosure, and effective accountability. When there is no institutional cost for non-compliance, reform decisions become theoretical obligations that can be bypassed, regardless of how clear they are or their political level.



This chain represents the pathway that links political decision-making with implementation and accountability, and it reveals the breakpoints that lead to the failure of reforms.

These gaps demonstrate that the real challenge facing government plans and economic reforms in Yemen does not lie in formulating additional policies, but rather in rebuilding the governance system that governs the entire policy cycle: from planning, to implementation, to monitoring and accountability. Without addressing these gaps systematically, reforms will remain vulnerable to failure, regardless of their technical quality or economic importance.

Third Case Study Analysis (Presidential Leadership Council Resolution No. 11 for 2025)

Why do decisions and government reforms stumble despite their clarity?

Yemeni experience provides a clear example that issuance of government decisions, even when they have clear formulation and emanate from the highest political levels, culminating in "Presidential Leadership Council Resolution No. (11) for 2025 regarding approval of the Comprehensive Economic Reform Priority Plan," does not necessarily guarantee their implementation or achievement of their objectives. Practical experience has shown that many decisions linked to economic and financial reforms faced stumbling in implementation or significant variance in compliance levels between entities and institutions, a matter reflecting deeper deficiency than mere administrative or technical weakness.

One of the core reasons for this stumbling is the limited effective executive authority compared to what official decisions assume. In Yemeni reality, power centers are distributed inside and outside state institutions, with some entities operating according to political, security, or vested interest considerations not fully subject to traditional administrative hierarchy logic. Consequently, reform decisions transform from binding commitments to negotiation tools or power balance tests, where some are selectively implemented, deferred, or emptied of substance by others.

Case analysis also reveals that the absence of an integrated accountability chain represents a decisive factor in weakening implementation. While decisions issue from high levels, they are referred for implementation to multiple entities without a clear system linking performance to follow-up and accounting. With weak periodic reporting mechanisms and absence of real institutional cost for non-compliance, stumbling becomes a low-risk option for implementing entities, encouraging undeclared circumvention or inaction on instructions.

This case study confirms that the problem lies not in the decision formulation itself, but in the absence of an integrated governance framework that transforms the decision into an implementable and accountable institutional process. Without this framework, decisions remain vulnerable to stumbling regardless of their importance or the political support they enjoy.

Fourth Governing Principles for Integrating Governance in Government Reforms

Based on analysis of governance gaps and the previous case study, it becomes clear that the success of government reforms in Yemen requires adopting a set of governing principles that form a practical framework for designing and implementing reforms, not merely a theoretical or ethical reference.

The necessity of commitment to institutional realism when formulating reforms comes at the forefront of these principles. Effective reform is one that proceeds from accurate assessment of existing institution capacities, takes into account administrative, organizational, and political constraints under which they operate. Ignoring these constraints leads to reforms exceeding institutions' absorptive capacity, stumbling or being implemented partially without achieving their objectives.

The principle of clear authorities and responsibilities also emerges as a fundamental condition for governance. Absence of precise specification of the reform-leading entity, supporting entity roles, and coordination mechanisms between central and local levels, opens the field for disruption, accusation exchange, and responsibility shifting. Governance cannot function effectively in an environment lacking institutional clarity.

Linked to this is the principle of implementable accountability, which requires linking plans and reforms to clear performance indicators and regular follow-up mechanisms, with effective consequences in case of commitment or failure. Formalistic accountability, which suffices with reports without institutional impact, does not contribute to improving performance or strengthening discipline within the government apparatus.

Yemeni experience also confirms the importance of integration between financial and institutional reform. Financial measures cannot achieve their objectives in isolation from organizational and administrative reforms within relevant institutions, including updating organizational structures, work systems, and building human capacities, and developing government information systems. Separation between the two tracks leads to burdening the administrative system with loads it cannot absorb.

Gradualism in implementing reforms is considered a critical element in a fragile and complex environment like Yemen, where it contributes to the phased approach in reducing change resistance, allowing opportunity for testing policies and correcting paths, and building trust gradually between the state and other economic and social actors.

Finally, it is impossible for governance to succeed in government reforms without engaging actors outside the government apparatus, foremost among them the private sector, civil society, and international partners. The role of these actors is not limited to financing or oversight, but extends to supporting institution building and enhancing transparency and expanding the accountability base, ensuring that reforms become a national ownership not merely a circumstantial response.

Fifth The Proposed Framework for Reform Governance in Yemen

The need for a Yemen-specific governance framework for reforms stems from the fact that traditional reform-management models - which assume a linear administrative hierarchy and automatic compliance - are no longer valid in a context marked by institutional fragility, multiple decision-making centers, and intertwined political and economic interests. The proposed framework therefore does not seek to redefine governance as an abstract normative concept; it seeks to build a practical system that regulates the reform cycle from design through implementation and follow-up, while acknowledging the constraints that shape state action in Yemen.

This framework treats government reform as a complex political-institutional process, not merely a technical or financial exercise. It assumes that successful reform requires clarity about where decisions are made, how implementation will proceed, what follow-up tools will be used, and where authority begins and ends, along with a minimum level of political and institutional consensus around reform objectives and priorities. In practice, this means moving from isolated top-down decision-making toward a continuous reform-governance process managed through clear and declared mechanisms.

The proposed framework emphasizes the need for a central entity to lead reforms from a governance perspective, not an executive one. Its role should be coordination, conflict resolution, compliance follow-up, and periodic reporting, without replacing ministries or implementing institutions. This intermediary role, highlighted in DCF discussions, is critical to addressing fragmented responsibilities while avoiding overburdening any single institution beyond its mandate and capabilities.

The framework also reconnects reforms to local realities by regulating the relationship between the center and governorates on clear financial and administrative governance principles. Instead of treating local authorities as mere implementing outlets, it assigns them defined tools and accountable responsibilities within a unified national framework that ensures financial discipline and common standards. Forum discussions emphasized that this balance between centralization and decentralization is essential for reducing implementation resistance and improving compliance.

The integration of transparency and information systems is a structural pillar of the proposed framework. Reform governance cannot function without reliable shared data on revenues, expenditures, and implementation progress. The framework therefore assumes the development of government information systems that support internal follow-up first, followed by gradual and regulated disclosure, thereby strengthening accountability without exposing institutions to unmanaged political or security risks.

Finally, the proposed framework deals with reform as a gradual path, in which trust is built through tangible outcomes, not through comprehensive promises. Gradualism, as Yemeni experience and accompanying discussions showed, is not a retreat from ambition, but a condition for sustainability in a complex transitional environment.

Sixth Practical Recommendations Package for Strengthening Governance of Government Reforms in Yemen

This package of recommendations aims to translate the proposed reform governance framework into practical procedures implementable, addressing the existing deficiency in planning, implementation, and accountability, and re-linking government reforms to institutional and political reality in Yemen. The recommendations proceed from the principle that reform governance is a participatory responsibility, requiring clarity in roles, integration in policies, and gradualism in implementation, and regulated support from partners.

A Recommendations Directed to Central Government

1- Affirming Political Will Supporting Governance and Combating Corruption

The paper confirms that any reform governance framework will remain limited in impact unless supported by clear political will translated into effective practices. This requires sending clear signals to state and society institutions that authority is serious in strengthening governance, combating corruption and rent-seeking networks that benefited from the war economy, and establishing effective integrity and accountability systems, enhancing compliance and reducing reform resistance.

2- Adopting a Unified National Framework for Reform Governance and Government Institution Performance

The paper recommends adopting a binding national framework that organizes the reform cycle from planning through implementation and follow-up, with unified standards for performance governance across ministries and public authorities. This framework should include clear performance indicators, periodic reporting, and regular accountability mechanisms, turning governance from a general principle into a set of measurable and implementable commitments.

3- Establishing a Leadership Mechanism for Reform Governance without Execution Centralization

The paper emphasizes the importance of assigning a central coordination unit to perform governance and follow-up functions without replacing ministries and implementing institutions. Its role would include coordination, conflict management, role clarification across institutions, compliance follow-up, and periodic reporting on progress and obstacles, helping address the weak horizontal and vertical coordination that has undermined previous reforms.

4- Strengthening Financial Governance as an Entry Point for State Reform

Strengthening reform governance requires strengthening financial discipline through regular general budget approval, controlling expenditure paths, and activating oversight tools for financial compliance in all government entities. Linking expenditure to national priorities with clear performance indicators is considered a fundamental step for addressing waste, reducing unofficial channels, and restoring confidence in public money management.

5- Achieving Integration between Financial and Institutional Reforms

The paper recommends that financial reforms not be implemented in isolation from organizational and administrative reforms within relevant institutions, including updating organizational structures, work systems, building human capacities, and developing information systems. This integration is essential for ensuring reform sustainability and reducing institutional resistance that often accompanies disconnected financial measures.

6- Achieving a Performance-Based Accountability System at Central and Local Levels

The governance system suffers from a clear accountability deficit, which requires activating effective accountability mechanisms based on defined performance standards and regular review cycles. This is necessary to link decisions and expenditures to outcomes, restore institutional discipline, and reduce the chronic gap between planning and implementation.

7- Developing a Unified Digital Government Data System

The paper recommends establishing a unified digital government data system that enables organized access to public finance and service-sector data and links government entities through a shared central platform. Such a system would strengthen transparency, improve decision-making quality, and support follow-up and evaluation on the basis of reliable information.

8- Adopting a Gradual Approach in Implementing Sensitive Reforms

Given institutional and political fragility, gradualism in implementing reforms is considered a fundamental governance option. This includes testing policies, correcting paths, and building trust gradually between the state and other actors, rather than seeking rapid comprehensive reforms that are difficult to sustain.

9- Providing Regulated Exceptional Tools for Managing Economic Crises

Given recurring economic bottlenecks and multiple decision-making centers, crisis management may require temporary exceptional tools, including a clearly scoped state of economic emergency, to unify crisis management, accelerate decision-making, and strengthen coordination between fiscal and monetary policies. These tools should enable the government to implement priority reforms in a timely manner while remaining subject to clear rules and oversight. .

B Recommendations Directed to Local Authorities

10- Redefining the Role of Local Authorities as Partners in Reform

The paper recommends moving from treating local authorities as subordinate implementers to recognizing them as partners in reform implementation, with clearly defined powers and accountable responsibilities within a unified national framework for financial and administrative governance.

11- Strengthening Financial Discipline and Transparency at Local Level

This requires subjecting local revenues to unified rules for remittance and expenditure, linking them to regular reporting systems, and reducing avoidance practices and unofficial channels.

C Recommendations Directed to International Community and Partners

12- Aligning International Support with National Governance Priorities

The paper recommends that international support focus on strengthening national governance systems, building institutional capacities, and improving follow-up and data systems, rather than settling for financing measures or disconnected projects.

13- Avoiding Creating Parallel Structures Outside State Institutions

External support should be designed in a way that strengthens existing government institution capacities without replacing or superseding them, ensuring reform sustainability after support ends.

14- Linking International Financing to Realistic and Gradual Reform Paths

The paper recommends linking financial support to realistic and measurable governance progress indicators, rather than to broad reform conditions that are not realistically implementable, thereby improving compliance and narrowing the implementation gap.

Executive Conclusion

This paper does not seek to offer an ideal reform model or a ready-made technical prescription. It proposes a realistic path that protects political decision-making from disruption and restores the idea of a state capable of implementation. Governance is neither an external condition nor an administrative luxury; it is a sovereign tool for organizing authority, directing resources, and rebuilding trust.

Investing in reform governance today is far less costly than managing reform failure tomorrow, and less risky than continuing the implementation gap that weakened the state and burdened it politically and economically.

For more information and previous publications: *https://DCFYemen.org*

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