

Building Holistic Security

Addressing Security Risks of Women Peacebuilders Through Partnerships

CASE STUDY: YEMEN

Highlighting the need for increased and flexible funding for women peacebuilders in Yemen

This case study is part of the Building Holistic Security: Addressing Security Risks of Women Peacebuilders Through Partnerships report created by the Women PeaceMakers program.

Addressing the risks women peacebuilders face

Women peacebuilders inevitably face risks and insecurity in their daily work. International partners have an important role to play in supporting their safety and protection. Understanding women peacebuilders' roles and the types of risks they face is the first step in ensuring an adequate response. This case study forms part of the [Building Holistic Security: Addressing Security Risks of Women Peacebuilders Through Partnerships](#) report, focused on how international partners can better partner with women peacebuilders to address the risks and insecurity they face in the different facets of their work.

The report addresses how international partners who wish to work with women peacebuilders and support them in addressing the risks and insecurity they face need to recognize the scope and nature of peacebuilding work, which is often cross-cutting, overlapping with humanitarian response and development work. Understanding the nuances and breadth of women peacebuilders' work is crucial to identifying the risks they face and providing them with effective legal, political and financial protection — and is thereby essential to creating partnerships that mitigate and address these risks.

This report is co-created as part of the Women PeaceMakers Fellowship, led by the voices and perspectives of the 2020-2021 Women PeaceMakers Fellows. This report provides both a global analysis and context-specific case studies.

Since 2002, the Kroc IPJ has hosted the Women PeaceMakers Fellowship program. The Fellowship offers a unique opportunity for women peacebuilders to engage in a cycle of learning, practice, research and participation that strengthens peacebuilding partnerships. The Women PeaceMakers Fellowship facilitates impactful collaborations between women peacebuilders from conflict-affected communities and international partner organizations. The Fellows also co-create research intended to shape the peacebuilding field and highlight good practices for peacebuilding design and implementation. This case study was created as part of this process and is also featured in the full [Building Holistic Security: Addressing Security Risks of Women Peacebuilders Through Partnerships](#) report.



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Yemen Case Study: Disconnection between the priorities of donors and women peacebuilders

CASE STUDY

By Muna Luqman

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Context

The nine-year-old conflict that has been raging in Yemen is between the internationally recognized government, backed by a Saudi-led military coalition, and Houthi rebel forces (aka Ansar Allah), supported by Iran. The country's humanitarian crisis and conflict are said to be the worst in the world, causing widespread hunger, disease and attacks on civilians. The crisis has also led to disruptions in economic activities with a substantial reduction in jobs, private sector operations and business opportunities, due to insecurity and lack of supplies and inputs, leading to massive layoffs to the country's workforce in both formal and informal sectors.¹ The fragmentation of existing central economic institutions like the Central Bank of Yemen, in combination with these conflict conditions, has impaired normal distribution of food imports and aid, essential to Yemenis. Airports, seaports and major commercial operations have been adversely affected by escalating conflict and destruction of infrastructure (roads, facilities, etc.). This dramatic deterioration of conditions has translated into a significant increase in poverty. For many, joining a militia or other conflict-related economic activities remains the only gainful opportunity in a "war economy." The conflict and the ensuing economic crisis are among the main drivers of Yemen's deepened food insecurity.

Yemen has ranked at the bottom of the table for gender equality in the World Economic Forum *Global Gender Gap Report* for years and ranked 155 out of 156 countries in the 2021 report.² Yemeni women are almost entirely absent from political life — in 2021, less than one percent of parliamentarians were women, and no women served in ministerial positions.³ The participation rate of women in the labor force is 6.3 percent.⁴



The rate of violence against women in the context of the conflict is very high⁵; men and boys make up the vast majority of direct victims of armed conflict, forced recruitment and arbitrary detention, while women and girls are at greater risk from airstrikes, kidnapping and sexual and gender-based violence (S/GBV). Negative gender stereotypes, rigid gender roles, limited mobility due to gender roles and patriarchal attitudes, a discriminatory legal system and economic inequality have compounded women's vulnerability to violence. Since women are responsible for providing food and care in their homes, they have had to struggle with the challenges of limited access to food, water, sanitation and health care services — access that has steadily deteriorated as the conflict has continued.⁶ Displacement and the breakdown of protection mechanisms have dramatically increased the vulnerability of women and girls, with men and boys also experiencing higher levels of GBV. In addition, the increase in poverty has led to negative coping strategies such as child labor, child marriage, survival sex and begging. Yemeni women and girls are stepping into roles that are traditionally filled by men. Without a gender-transformative agenda, peace in Yemen will be impeded, and the rights of women and girls will remain in the shadows.

Key findings

The role of Yemeni women peacebuilders is key, as they can meaningfully provide insight into community-based resilience strategies. They were the first to warn of an impending crisis and call for a ceasefire to focus efforts on combating the COVID-19 pandemic, including trying to address basic needs, by disbursing salaries and providing clean water and electricity. Women across the country find themselves in charge of managing the poverty afflicting their communities and taking action to mitigate and respond to protection needs. One humanitarian worker interviewed said, “75 percent of our volunteers are women, because women have access to women, children and men, while men have only access to men. Women are in demand, they are dedicated and come on time, however, they get an incentive not a salary, around 50-70 USD per month.”⁷

Yemeni women-led organizations fill an important gap created by the collapse of Yemeni state institutions and the financial shift of international organizations to concentrate on humanitarian emergency relief. Consultations with local women peacebuilders show that the international pool of funds encourages only partially, and in a fragmented way, gender-responsive localized responses. The support provided by some donors does not include any form of protection or risk measures and lacks security elements for women peacebuilders.

The loss of men to conflict has led to an increase in female-headed households with women having to take on new roles that heighten their vulnerability. According to prevailing gender roles, men are recognized as the “protectors” of women and families. Without a male relative present, women are more vulnerable to sexual and physical violence. Within this context, an unchaperoned woman faces increased risks of violence at checkpoints. Even so, women peacebuilders are extensively involved in civil society in Yemen. However, especially in *de facto* Houthi-controlled areas, they face increased risks. Women-led organizations operating in areas under government control report difficulties with the renewal of licenses, as well as government requirements that their activities be supervised.

Yemeni women's rights actors at the grassroots level and in the diaspora use various strategies to work in this difficult context. Their efforts result in the release of detainees, conflict resolution for water and land disputes, and lives saved at the frontlines and in crossfire areas. They use different techniques to mobilize the community. An important finding is that women need to be included as part of the solution, not as passive beneficiaries of assistance. The role of local women peacebuilders and organizations is critical to paving the way to self-reliance, recovery and resilience for all Yemenis.

Too often, women are sidelined by international programming. Yemeni women remain under-represented in peace talks.⁸ United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions, such as 1325 and subsequent resolutions, reiterate the importance of women's participation in peace talks and peacebuilding negotiations, while other resolutions, such as 2216, include calls for ending violence in Yemen but not for the inclusion of women, thereby limiting women's participation in dialogue processes. Furthermore, international partners often come in with their own agenda and priorities, and this influences whom they support in terms of women activists and peacebuilders on the ground.

This study identified the following gaps:

- Donor funding criteria are often difficult for women-led peacebuilding organizations to meet. Some impose stringent conditions, including high annual budget requirements, which automatically exclude many women-led organizations.
- Most funding is short-term, service-oriented and designed to respond to emergencies, without support for gender-transformative outcomes and effective participation of women and girls in peacebuilding and leadership. Gender equality often cannot be addressed with short-term programming/funding — initiatives are needed along the humanitarian-peace-development nexus to make the impact more sustainable, and this requires long-term support to women's organizations.
- There is a disconnect between administrative requirements for traditional development programs and those for peacebuilding programming of local women peacebuilders, who are often not part of humanitarian coordination groups, despite their being first responders.
- Women-led organizations experience gendered barriers to meaningful and quality engagement with international partners in the following ways:
 - Coordination mechanisms do not officially require the participation of national and local women's organizations, beyond those receiving grants from international organizations.
 - International actors rarely recognize local Women's Rehabilitation Organizations (WROs) and Women-Led Organizations (WLOs) as first responders or rarely conduct a mapping of them in humanitarian or development settings, rendering it unlikely for them to be involved in coordination, despite their knowledge of the local context.
 - Efforts to strengthen the capacity of local actors are limited. There are no visible long-term funding modalities for capacity strengthening and operational support. The lack of a critical mass of women activists in coordination structures and consultations results in gender-unequal outcomes in humanitarian and peacebuilding needs assessments and other decision-making processes.
 - Cultural and language biases and patriarchal structures within UN agencies and international organizations pose additional challenges to women's meaningful engagement in coordination, while also complicating procedures and requirements.
 - The lack of donor policy coherence between humanitarian, conflict, peace and development work funding streams excludes women, who often work across these lines, from the process.
 - There is a disconnect between support programs and needs on the ground.
 - Country-Based Pooled Funds remain elusive for WLOs.

An important finding is that women need to be included as part of the solution, not as passive beneficiaries of assistance. The role of local women peacebuilders and organizations is critical to paving the way to self-reliance, recovery and resilience for all Yemenis.



Conclusion and recommendations

Supporting women-led organizations — especially through including and funding them — is key to promoting women’s contributions to peacebuilding and to protecting them from the innumerable risks they face. This support provides opportunities for local and national women’s organizations to apply their contextual knowledge and become change agents for gender equality, peacebuilding and humanitarian development, allowing WROs and WLOs to grow. In light of this case study’s findings, international partners should:

- Increase access to humanitarian funding, ensure its sustainability, and support the capacity of local WROs and WLOs for self-sustaining fundraising, prioritizing multi-year, flexible and sustainable funds, including opportunities along the humanitarian-peace-development nexus. Allocated funding should be flexible and fund core operational and technical costs. The flexible and equal funding and strategic partnerships demonstrated by ICAN civil society network and MADRE are good practice models that have had a huge positive impact on the work of women-led organizations in Yemen.
- Engage community committees in all program phases — design, implementation and evaluation — and ensure women are represented in community committees to channel their voices toward a more gender-sensitive humanitarian response approach.
- Enable partnerships between Yemeni women peacebuilders and international partners to support their advocacy, strengthen their alliances, and support the establishment of larger networks of women peacebuilders to qualify for and access humanitarian funding.
- Promote “long-term and predictable,” quality funding, avoid politicizing humanitarian access, and allow actors (particularly women-led organizations) to define their approaches and priorities and build institutional capacities.
- Ensure that financial aid is in line with humanitarian principles, is not exploited by armed groups, and has a gendered perspective.
- Incorporate multi-year, institutional, capacity-strengthening support for local and national responders.
- Develop a national database of WLOs and WROs working on humanitarian, peace and development nexus programming to provide peacebuilding initiatives, as well as development and scalable service delivery to affected women and girls during crises, and to facilitate the distribution of information on future funding opportunities.
- Develop a feminist humanitarian policy dedicated to prioritizing gender-transformative practices through partnerships and investments in WLOs and WROs in crisis contexts.
- Include local women peacebuilders in all program phases, from initial assessment through program design to final evaluation.

Endnotes

- 1 Kali Robinson, "Yemen's Tragedy: War, Stalemate, and Suffering," Council on Foreign Relations Backgrounder, updated May 1, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/yemen-crisis>.
- 2 World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2021* (WEF, 2021), https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf, 10.
- 3 World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2021*, 26.
- 4 World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2021*, 14.
- 5 In 2017, UNFPA had recorded 2.6 million women and girls at risk of gender-based violence.
- 6 Oxfam, *Speaking Up: The Role of Women in Building Peace in Yemen* (Oxford, UK: Oxfam, 2023), <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/speaking-role-women-building-peace-yemen>, 4-5.
- 7 Interview with humanitarian aid worker.
- 8 Oxfam, *Speaking Up*, 3-4.





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