





Crisis reports
Yemen

Yemen at a glance

The crisis and the response

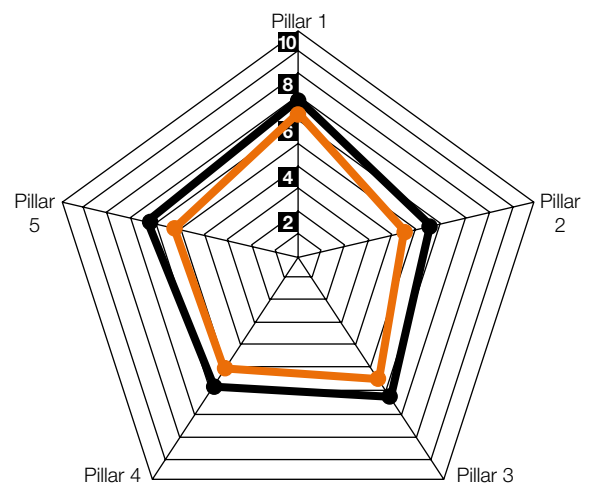
- There are now at least 340,000 IDPs displaced by conflict in northern Yemen: return prospects are limited as the conflict has become regionalised.
- The international community seems powerless to prevent further closure of humanitarian space as both sides violate international humanitarian law and prevent the free flow of assistance.
- Yemen struggles, with minimal international funding, to cope with the continuing influx of Somali refugees.
- Multiple shocks have exacerbated the vulnerability of families and left millions trapped in hunger and poverty.

Donor performance

- Humanitarian funding has dropped: by October 2010 only 49 percent of the 2010 CAP had been covered.
- Donors are preoccupied with a development agenda despite the humanitarian crisis.
- Less than ten percent of the US\$4.7 billion pledged for 2007–2010 at a major donor conference in Yemen has been provided.
- Primarily focused on the al-Qa’ida presence in Yemen, most Western donors have remained silent about government human rights abuses, do not push for humanitarian access and lack knowledge of *GHD Principles*.
- Substantial Gulf aid to the government and non-state actors is untransparent and unquantifiable – as is US support for the Yemeni military.

Key challenges and areas for improvement

- Donors need to engage more with in-country humanitarian actors, Yemeni civil society and opposition forces committed to democratic transition.



— Yemen
— All Crisis Average

HRI 2010 scores by pillar

- Pillar 1** Responding to needs
- Pillar 2** Prevention, risk reduction and recovery
- Pillar 3** Working with humanitarian partners
- Pillar 4** Protection and international law
- Pillar 5** Learning and accountability

- Donors should see linkages between geostrategic objectives and humanitarian and development assistance: counter-terrorism objectives are best realised through fostering good governance and enabling the Yemeni state to provide basic services.
- Coordination between traditional donors and Gulf donors is essential to build capacity for early warning, contingency planning and recovery.
- The many aid actors who continue to see Yemen primarily through a development lens must acknowledge the scale of immediate life-threatening needs.

Yemen

Can donors avert state collapse?

Yemen is wracked by a chronic and under-reported humanitarian crisis. There are fears of state collapse in the only Least Developed Country in the Arab World and the most populous nation in the Arabian Peninsula. With an estimated population of 23 million growing at a rate of 3.56 percent per annum, and with one of the world's most extreme water shortages, analysts doubt whether Yemen, despite its fertility, will ever again be food self-sufficient. Modest oil resources – which have been providing three quarters of national income and which have been grossly misappropriated – are in sharp decline, threatening the informal patronage networks and unrecorded payments to tribal leaders which have held the disparate country together. The increasingly autocratic regime of President 'Ali 'Abdullah Saleh – who has been in power since 1978 – is threatened on several fronts: by a major conflict in the north against a rebel force known as the Houthis; renewed demands from southerners who wish to reassert independence; al-Qa'ida-inspired terrorism and unrest sparked by the collapse of government services, reduction in state subsidies (especially of petrol), intensifying food insecurity and high youth unemployment. Yemen is thought to have the world's greatest proliferation of small arms. In addition to a very large population of Somali refugees, Yemen is further destabilised by having to cope with a major internal displacement crisis.

The international community seems powerless to halt Yemen's slide into anarchy and to assert the right to supervise crucial upcoming parliamentary elections in 2011. The Yemeni government and most of the international community remain committed to a development/security agenda which they insist is the solution to the country's ills. Members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) – a regional body bringing together oil-rich states in the Arabian Peninsula – are increasingly focusing on what to do about Yemen. However, the GCC is divided, especially by tensions between Saudi Arabia – now a pro-Saleh protagonist in the Houthi war – and Qatar which has sought a mediatory role. The GCC has not responded to suggestions that it should provide a safety valve by easing labour permit restrictions on Yemenis. Western donors, particularly the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK) – concerned at the prospect of a lawless Yemen providing a haven for Islamic terror – have been generally quiescent about Saleh's stalled democratisation, disregard for human rights, censorship of the press, disappearances, the use of live fire against peaceful demonstrators seeking regional autonomy and government transparency and plans to transfer power to his son. The Humanitarian Response Index (HRI) team was repeatedly told of concerns at lack of donor leverage over the Yemeni government which has exploited Western support for counter-terrorism to suppress domestic opposition.

Neither regional states nor the West have managed to coordinate policies to combat arms trafficking, piracy, trafficking of children and women for purposes of economic or sexual exploitation and clandestine migration into Yemen and onwards to Saudi Arabia. After being ignored under the Bush Administration, the Obama Administration – responding to a terrorist act plotted in Yemen in December 2009 – has boosted military assistance and aid to Yemen. Donors continue to see Yemen through a developmental lens and have been slow to recognise the extent of the crisis and respond sufficiently. The overall response to Yemen's needs – both from traditional and neighbouring donors – remains disappointing.

The Houthi conflict

The Houthi insurrection began in 2004 as a local protest against the perceived declining influence in national affairs of Zaidis – a sect with origins in Shi'ism who dominated Yemen under the Imamate which was overthrown in 1962. The conflict has been punctuated with a series of ceasefires, during which both sides have regathered their forces. Following intermittent clashes between Houthi groups and the Yemeni government in July 2009, the situation in Sa'ada governorate escalated into a sixth round of hostilities. The governorates of 'Amran, Hajjah and Al Jawf have been particularly affected. A February 2010 ceasefire has been fragile and intermittent violence continues.

It has been suggested that, despite its chronic budget deficit, the Yemeni government may have spent up to a billion dollars in hard currency during the latest episode of fighting (Boucek 2010). Despite deploying the might of the Yemeni armed forces – and using Saudi and American assistance – the Houthis remain resilient, both militarily and – through spokesmen abroad and via the Internet – on the ideological front. Yemenis assert that underpaid soldiers have sold their weapons and ammunition to the Huthis.

The conflict has become regionalised. The intervention of the Saudi military alongside Saleh in 2009 is deeply destabilising in view of the long history of animosity between the two countries. The Saleh regime claims Iranian and al-Qa'ida support for the Houthis in an attempt to depict the conflict as an integral part of the War on Terror. This is not credible as Huthis, like other Zaidis, are just as hostile to al-Qa'ida's Salafism as they are to Saleh's regime (O'Neill 2010). Nevertheless, the taint has gained traction: Western media generally depict northern Yemen's conflict in terms of a Shi'ite "proxy war" (Salmoni, Loidolt & Wells 2010). Survival at any cost is the Yemeni President's greatest skill, and he has deftly relied on extremist elements to either confront or placate rivals (King 2010). He has also succeeded in imposing a virtual news blackout, preventing international journalists and most humanitarian workers from going to the conflict zone, threatening Yemeni journalists with reprisals if they report on the conflict and disconnecting mobile phone networks.

Unanticipated displacement crisis

The scale of displacement during the most recent round of hostilities took both the Yemeni authorities and the international community by surprise. As of July 2010, approximately 342,000 were registered as internally displaced people (IDPs), and more than 800,000 people had been indirectly affected by the conflict, including communities hosting IDPs and residents who had lost access to basic services. Only about 15 percent of IDPs live in camps or identified informal settlements, the remainder thought to be living with relatives or in rented accommodation. Most IDPs are from poor rural families and for many, of those it was their second or third displacement. The actual number of IDPs may be even greater, as the Yemeni government only registers those who are able to produce a valid identity card and the United Nations (UN) has identified substantial numbers of IDPs who either never had one or lost it during flight. Widows and orphaned or separated children are particularly likely to fall through the cracks (IRIN 2010a).

IDP returns have been limited to date: the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA) reports that only 14,000 are confirmed as having returned home (OCHA 2010a), although government figures suggest many more have done so. IDP returns have remained limited due to protection, food and livelihood concerns in places of origin. Many areas are littered with mines and unexploded ordinance and returning IDPs are given no support to reconstruct housing. IDPs are, additionally, very wary of the durability of the ceasefire. The Yemeni authorities have noted that provision of assistance to IDPs in places of displacement creates a 'stay' factor and has urged the international community to instead support its own reconstruction plan to enable return (IRIN 2010b). Critics note, however, that the government exaggerates the prospects for safe return as part of its propaganda to insist it, rather than the Houthis, is setting the agenda.

Human rights abuses and access constraints

The international community and UN are seemingly unable to stop the shrinking of humanitarian space. Limited and inconsistent access continues to place obstacles on humanitarian activities, particularly for IDPs in host communities or living in Sa'ada (IDMC 2010). Humanitarian workers are only allowed to provide assistance within a seven kilometer radius of the city of Sa'ada (OCHA 2010c). Both sides in the conflict have disregarded principles of international humanitarian law. Indiscriminate shelling and aerial bombardment by the Yemeni government and the Saudis has targeted civilians. Both the government and the Houthis have politicised delivery of humanitarian assistance by diverting aid to their respective supporters. To put pressure on the Houthis, the Yemeni military has blocked movement of commercial goods, including basic foods and fuel, an act that appears to constitute collective punishment. The Huthis have used captured Yemeni soldiers as human shields and allegedly prevented civilians from leaving to seek medical assistance. The government has taken no steps to investigate or hold accountable those responsible for enforced disappearances (Human Rights Watch 2010). At times, tribesmen not directly involved in the conflict have taken advantage of it, establishing roadblocks to block delivery of aid to pressure the government to provide employment or local services. Many areas affected by the Houthi displacement crisis have never known the rule of law from Sana'a and agencies have had to show patience and diplomacy as tribesmen have expeditiously hijacked vehicles and diverted humanitarian goods from intended beneficiaries (IRIN 2010c).

The human rights abuses suffered by the hundreds of thousands of refugees from the Horn of Africa – both during their, often fatal, passage across the Gulf of Aden or in Yemen – have gone largely ignored by the outside world. Somalis are given prima facie refugee status by the government of the only country in the Arabian Peninsula to have signed the UN Refugee Convention, but receive no support from the government and negligible support from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs). In violation of international law, Ethiopians are tracked down, arrested and deported to face unknown fates at the hands of the Ethiopian regime (Human Rights Watch 2009).

In southern Yemen, the government has responded to massive and largely peaceful protests in favour of secession with unprovoked deadly gunfire on numerous occasions. Though these incidents are well-documented, there has been no effort by the UN, the GCC, the Arab League or major Western donors to press for adherence to international humanitarian law and to urge protection of Yemeni civilians and refugees. United States (US) silence is particularly notable. In a March 2010 visit to Yemen, US Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs said that Washington “consider[s] what is happening in the southern provinces to be an internal affair, for Yemen alone, and we do not believe that any outside party should intervene,” (Wicke & Bouckaert 2010).

Humanitarian needs

Yemen is characterised by widespread poverty, food insecurity, malnutrition, unemployment, low levels of education, high gender disparities, rapid population growth and insufficient access to safe water and to land. Multiple and simultaneous shocks have exacerbated the vulnerability of families and left millions trapped in absolute hunger and poverty. Health services have virtually collapsed as even basic medications are no longer available. Up to two thirds of Yemenis eligible to attend school are not doing so. Almost half of Yemen’s population lives on less than US\$2 a day (King 2010). Yemen continues to rank last in the list of countries assessing the closure of the gender gap (World Economic Forum 2009).

Hunger and malnutrition are widespread. In July 2010, the World Food Programme (WFP) reported that one in three Yemenis is acutely hungry, making Yemen the 11th most food insecure country in the world. Life-threatening levels of hunger and malnutrition are not confined to conflict-affected areas but are often even worse in regions where there is relative stability. Food insecurity and child malnutrition in rural areas are much worse than in cities. WFP has identified 1.7 million people in immediate need of food assistance but lacks the resources to assist them (IRIN 2010d). It has warned that funding shortages mean that over two million residents of Yemen – Somali refugees, IDPs and those in severely food-insecure regions – who need food assistance are being left unaided. Some unassisted IDPs may be able to obtain food by working for farmers in areas of displacement, but widows and persons with disabilities are being left to fend for themselves (IRIN 2010e). As of June 2010, only 14 percent of beneficiaries planned for under the Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan (YHRP) received food rations (OCHA 2010b).

Funding response

In September 2009, a Flash Appeal for US\$23.75 million was launched and was nearly 88 percent funded. However, the response to the subsequent 2010 Yemen Consolidated Appeal – which has become known as the YHRP – has been disappointing. As of early September 2010, only 43 percent of the revised YHRP total of US\$187.5 million had been obtained. The best response has been to food needs (58 percent). Early recovery is only 12 percent funded and education five percent. Providing US\$30.4 million, the US has been the largest responder (30 percent), followed by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (almost 14 percent). Eight percent has come from the Central Emergency Response Fund and approximately six percent from Germany. The United Kingdom (UK), the former colonial power in southern Yemen, joins the US as a major provider of development assistance, but has only provided US\$2.7 million (about three percent) for the YHRP.

The US has increased considerably its involvement in Yemen. While the US provided less than US\$400 million for the 2002–2009 period, the Obama Administration allocated over US\$250 million for 2010 – some two thirds of it in security assistance – and seems likely to demarcate over US\$300 million for 2011 (King 2010).

Between 2007 and 2010, the European Commission (EC) provided roughly 165 million in financial assistance to Yemen, an amount set to increase by 40 percent annually (Boucek, de Kerchove & Hill 2010). However, its recent response to immediate humanitarian needs has been negligible – as of early September 2010, the EC had provided only US\$1.45 million, approximately one percent of total pledges.

Organisations interviewed reported to the HRI team that the poor response to the YHRP and reduction in international funding is partly because donor representatives in Sana’a argue that the GCC states should be helping Yemen in its time of dire need. There is also recrimination among donors after less than ten percent of the US\$4.7 billion pledged for 2007–2010 at a major donor meeting in London in 2006 is thought to have actually been provided (IRIN 2010f). Donors differ about prioritisation activities within the consolidated Appeals Process (CAP), with some disputing the assessment process jointly undertaken by the UN and the government, feeling they have been presented with a random shopping list which blurs emergency and recovery needs. Interviewees also confirmed widespread reports that donors feel the Yemeni government has limited absorptive capacity and little commitment to transparency.

The major non-traditional donors contributing to Yemen are GCC members. As with assistance they provide in other regional humanitarian crises, it is impossible to quantify the level of support they provide. It is thought – but there is no evidence – that Saudi Arabia is the largest non-traditional donor. One analyst suggests total Saudi annual disbursements in Yemen reach US\$2 billion (Boucek, de Korchove & Hill 2010). Much Saudi assistance goes not to the government, but to tribal leaders and religious institutions. Bahrain undertakes technical assistance in Yemen through the Social Development Fund – the state body which is the main conduit for development assistance – and is emerging as an important investor in Yemen’s under-developed financial sector.

The UAE has consistently pledged large sums of development assistance but has admitted significant problems in disbursing. The UAE is continuing a policy which was criticised in southern Lebanon following the 2006 Israeli invasion of ‘adopting’ particular communities and lavishly bestowing disproportional assistance which it highly publicises. In Mazraq II camp in Hajja province – which is supported by the UAE – it is reported that IDPs receive three substantial meals a day, have constant electricity, fans in tents and a resident-to-medical staff ratio of less than 400:1, thus creating an extraordinary disincentive to return (IRIN 2010g and IRIN 2010h).

A number of UN agencies have a significant presence in Yemen, including WFP, UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), UN Development Programme (UNDP) and UNHCR. However, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) has no representation. All UN agencies and INGOs follow strict security protocols which generally restrict movement outside Sana’a and sometimes even within the capital.

Dilemmas of working with the Yemeni government

Donors seem generally aware of the lack of capacity and accountability within state institutions. The US Agency for International Development (USAID), for example, does not follow general practice elsewhere and declines to work directly with the Yemeni government – apart from funding an anti-corruption agency – instead working with implementing partners such as Save the Children, the National Democratic Institute and UNDP.

The West is understandably concerned both by the increased evidence of al-Qa’ida presence in Yemen and the fact that 40 percent of those detained in Guantanamo are Yemenis. There are also fears that elements of the Yemeni government have, in effect, given a green light to those who have promoted extremist Salafist ideas. Analysts warn these concerns should not prevail over wider foreign policy considerations. One argues “an exclusively military counter-terrorism focus using airstrikes may alienate local allies, as in Afghanistan. One lesson in counter-terrorism from Afghanistan and Pakistan is that armed militant groups thrive when the government does not enjoy the support of its people... Mounting civilian casualties in the fight against al-Qa’ida, along with excessive use of force in the south and indiscriminate attacks against armed rebels in the north, are grist for al-Qa’ida’s publicity mill,” (Wilcke & Bouckaert 2010).

Yemen is ranked by Transparency International (2009) as highly corrupt, exceeded in the region only by Iraq and Sudan. In general, Yemenis are highly skeptical of protestations by the government that development or humanitarian aid reaches those in need. Many analysts note that, in practice, there are no mechanisms to ensure international aid reaches its intended recipients rather than corrupt officials. As part of patronage networks by which the Saleh regime retains support considerable amounts of international aid are funneled to senior tribal leaders.

Lack of coordination

Humanitarian organisations reported that there is poor coordination among development and humanitarian actors. A Donor Coordinating Committee – which is co-chaired by UNDP and the World Bank – brings together UN and Yemeni government actors for regular meetings to discuss development issues but there is no such body when it comes to coordinating humanitarian response. The coordination mechanism convened by the UN Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) – which is chaired by the UN’s Resident Coordinator/ Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/ HC) – has limited membership and is said to lack capacity for early warning, preparedness, contingency planning and early recovery. The system has suffered from lack of fiscal and human resources, including the failure to appoint an OCHA Head of Office to give leadership and guidance to the humanitarian community. The cluster approach, launched in late 2009, is still in its infancy in Yemen.

Humanitarians generally note that the Yemeni authorities lack capacity for both disaster preparedness and response. The government has established a high-level Inter-Ministerial Committee for Relief Operations and a Technical Relief Committee but lacks a reliable database, data collection and assessment system.

The Friends of Yemen, a group established by UAE, other Gulf countries, Italy and now joined by a number of other Western donors, met in Abu Dhabi in April 2010. An analyst has suggested that its 20 members have some potential to assist the country’s stability and development as a counterbalance to the US, which over-emphasises the security agenda. However, this requires striking a balance between addressing security and developmental concerns. The Friends of Yemen must deliver action and not just talk, and needs to do more to align the expectations of the Yemeni government with those of the international community (Hill 2010).

Good Humanitarian Donorship Principles bypassed

The HRI team found that most donor representatives in Sana'a have little or no understanding of either *Principles of Good Humanitarian Donorship* (GHD) or humanitarian issues. Many seem unclear of their roles and working relationship with humanitarian agencies. Most embassy personnel entrusted with humanitarian assistance have a development background. While many are well-intentioned, they are unprepared and lack technical skills and humanitarian response experience. The mission found INGOs are insufficiently aware of how to apply *GHD Principles*. Lack of application of *GHD Principles* has meant that donors and implementing agencies do not reflect on their performance and conformity to international standards. Evaluation and monitoring are often perfunctory and respondents informed the HRI team that only UNICEF has conducted real time evaluations.

Humanitarians' evaluation of donors

In general terms, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development / Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC) donors applied *GHD Principles* slightly better than non-OECD/DAC donors. Non-traditional donors performed well in responding to needs, promoting protection and international law and in working with humanitarian partners. They were weaker with regard to prevention, risk reduction, recovery, learning and accountability.

The HRI team gathered general impressions concerning particular donors. In terms of flexibility of funding, several donors were praised including Germany, Japan, Ireland and Spain. However, the European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) and the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) were criticised for procedural inflexibility and conditionality. Sweden and Germany were commended for their focus on refugees, while AusAID was praised for its stance on protection. Italy, however, was criticised for its lack of attention to this area. Several donors were criticised for supporting and engaging with partners: Italy, Japan, Spain, and Australia.

“The international community and the UN are seemingly unable to stop the shrinking of humanitarian space.”



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The HRI team noted a wide range of views regarding timeliness of funding. This indicates a need for agreed time-bound funding, implementation and monitoring of programmes. One donor was commended for quickly responding to the Flash Appeal despite having no in-country presence but another was criticised for deciding to ignore the joint needs assessment and recommendations included in the YHRP.

Most of those interviewed objected to donors attempting to link the level of humanitarian assistance to progress in promoting good governance, accountability and other matters on the political reform agenda. A number of NGOs complained about donors denying funding simply because there are no expatriates to implement interventions.

Lessons learnt and recommendations for the future

Analysts predict a continuation of the Houthi conflict, further displacement and the likelihood that Saleh's regime may struggle to muster sufficient resources to continue combat (Salmoni, Loidolt & Wells 2010). If donors continue to respond so poorly to the nutrition needs of the displaced, and rations remain below Sphere Standards, it is likely that demonstrations and volatility will escalate. Future instability in Yemen could expand a lawless zone stretching from northern Kenya, through Somalia and the Gulf of Aden to Saudi Arabia (Hill 2010). Yemen is confronting a “perfect storm” of problems (King 2010) and the response of donors has proven grossly inadequate.

Based on its findings, the HRI team believes the Yemeni government, the international community, the UN and Yemen's oil-rich neighbours can do much more to address the root causes and the consequences of Yemen's myriad crises.

- 1 Promoting coordination and more cohesive international engagement:** OCHA needs to appoint a permanent Head of Office to provide decisive leadership for the humanitarian community. The UN should appoint a Secretary-General's Special Envoy to support peace talks, promote peace-building, protection and human rights and ensure that linkages between the crises in Yemen and the Horn of Africa are better understood. Without a serious international effort at mediation, further intense fighting between the Houthis and the government and ongoing displacement appears inevitable. ECHO could play a larger role advising those embassy staff in Sana'a whose knowledge of development and humanitarian issues in Yemen is limited.
- 2 Access:** Donors and the UN must engage in more high-level and consistent advocacy to ensure access of humanitarian actors – and donor representatives – to areas of greatest vulnerability and to end the climate of impunity for those who abuse human rights.
- 3 Appropriate balance of humanitarian and development responses:** The many aid actors who continue to see Yemen primarily through a development lens must acknowledge the massive scale of immediate life-threatening needs.

- 4 Flexibility:** Donors should approve more substantial amounts of un-earmarked funding, including of operations run by capable national actors in areas where expatriate staff are absent. Donors need to consistently advocate for greater decentralisation of decision-making and budgetary control to district level and consider channelling more development funding through international and national civil society organisations, alongside its direct support to government and parastatal agencies.
- 5 Good Humanitarian Donorship:** It is important to ensure that *GHD Principles* are better known, and consistently adhered to, by the leading traditional and non-traditional donors.
- 6 Transparency and participation:** Given the high level of cynicism among the Yemeni public about misappropriation of international support, it is essential: a) that donors stand up to the government and insist on working more closely with Yemeni civil society, especially community-based organisations and women and b) that the Donor Coordinating Committee should establish a system for reporting, recording and accounting for all humanitarian funding including in-kind-contributions.

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Information based on field interviews with key humanitarian agencies in Yemen from 4 to 11 June 2010, and 52 questionnaires on donor performance (including 35 OECD/DAC donors).

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