



Marriam travels from Sabir Mount to the city centre to sell bread as most of the city's bakeries have closed. She is the sole provider for her grandchildren. Photo credit: Abdalnasser Al-Sedek/ Oxfam

# PICKING UP THE PIECES

What Yemenis need to rebuild their lives in a country torn apart by conflict

**EMBARGOED UNTIL 00.01 HRS GMT 21 SEPTEMBER 2016**

Over three million Yemenis have fled their homes because of ongoing conflict. Many are unable to return. Facing unemployment, mounting debt and high food prices, they are running out of ways to survive. Men are joining armed groups; girls are increasingly forced into marriage, while crime and social unrest are on the rise. As hope for successful peace talks fades, life for millions of Yemenis is deteriorating fast – undermining the chances of securing peace.

# SUMMARY

*'Nobody can know what it feels like to be a displaced person, except those who were forced to leave their homes in search of safety.'*

– Jamal, a father of two young children who resides with his family in a small tent in a camp in Al-Quba village, Taiz governorate.

When Oxfam spoke to more than 1000 people living in the midst of Yemen's conflict, almost everyone wanted the very basics every human being desires – to live in peace, at home, with an income that meets the needs of their family.

But 18 months of war has created a country in crisis. The economy has been shattered, with one in four companies now closed and 70 percent of the workforce laid off.<sup>1</sup> Violent clashes and deadly air strikes have killed and injured thousands of men, women and children and forced over three million people from their homes. Half the population does not have enough food to eat. In some areas, the delivery of food has been deliberately obstructed. All sides in the conflict have committed violations of international humanitarian law (IHL) – including parties being armed by influential Western governments.

Close to one in five people Oxfam spoke to said their homes had been destroyed, and two-thirds had been displaced for ten months or longer. Almost two-thirds of the people Oxfam spoke with said that close family members had died or had been injured as a result of the conflict, and nearly half the families were looking after unaccompanied children.<sup>2</sup>

For those who try to return home, many find unexploded ordinance and destroyed schools, factories and health centres. Many told Oxfam they had no prospect of going home. Individual interviews and focus group discussions revealed a sense that the country was heading for collapse. The majority of respondents said criminality had increased, and violence against and exploitation of women were on the rise.

People are living in overcrowded accommodation, forced into debt and poorly paid work in order to survive. Some try to make a living by selling fuel on black markets, gathering plastic waste to sell, or selling firewood or *qat* (a mild herbal stimulant popular in Yemen).

As hope for successful and inclusive peace talks fades, the situation on the ground is getting worse. The loss of income sources and rampant inflation is eroding what little money host communities and those displaced have maintained to survive. Children and young men have been coerced into joining armed groups; tensions between communities and within families are growing and girls are forced into early marriage. A journalist from Amran told Oxfam that when the family does not have enough food, fathers will often force their daughters into marriage.

However, there are some reasons for hope. Driven by the severe pressures of conflict, women are increasingly seeking out opportunities to earn a living, with some men supportive of their ambition. In many places, markets are still functioning for families with cash.

While Oxfam has reached almost 900,000 people with aid since the start of the crisis, much more needs to be done to meet basic daily needs, and ensure people's safety and protection in an accountable way.

Communities that are hosting displaced people need aid as much as those that have fled and all must be consulted and participate in the delivery of assistance to ensure it reaches families in need (including socially marginalized groups). Beyond that, people urgently need support to get back to work, earn an income and build their self-reliance. Even when the conflict truly ends, it will take years for the country to pick up the pieces. By starting now, we can improve lives in the short and medium term and reduce the impact of a perpetual crisis foisted on Yemen and its people.

The following recommendations outline how Yemeni, regional, international and humanitarian actors can support these efforts.

## **Yemen's government and appointed Supreme Political Council at all levels should:**

- Implement and abide by an immediate and comprehensive nationwide ceasefire, which includes support for airstrikes and ground fighting;
- Issue public directives to security personnel, functionaries and associated armed groups that forbid interference and coercion of aid recipients and deliverers;
- Protect women, men, boys and girls from all forms of abuse and gender-based violence by developing and committing to standards that can be monitored by inclusive, locally-led protection committees in coordination with the established De-escalation and Coordination Committee;<sup>3</sup>
- Consult with displaced people, returnees and host communities and respond to their requests in order to support them in maintaining safety and building livelihoods.

## **The Saudi-led coalition and Western governments should:**

- Implement and abide by an immediate and comprehensive nationwide ceasefire;
- Stop fuelling the conflict and violations of IHL by suspending the supply of weapons to all parties and abide by their legal obligations under the Arms Trade Treaty;
- Enable expansion of cash transfer schemes to ensure people can meet their basic needs and establish sustainable livelihoods;
- Provide increased resources for immediate livelihood assistance for displaced people and returnees, including resources for local women's groups and support for women's employment through skills and training;
- Fund clearance of unexploded ordinance and mined areas, support public awareness schemes about the dangers from these weapons and provide compensation to victims;

- Donors should press Yemeni state and non-state actors to protect displaced people and aid workers throughout the country, and make funding conditional on providing protection.

## **UN and humanitarian agencies should:**

- Rapidly scale up the response with the adequate human and financial resources to deliver immediate livelihood assistance where possible and deploy staff to deliver increased protection services and strengthened accountability to local people;
- Ensure that the needs of both displaced people and host communities are considered in shaping future projects in order to promote long-term stability and prevent new outbreaks of conflict;
- Establish clear mechanisms for the genuine participation of communities in the delivery of humanitarian assistance at district and village levels. Strategies should be designed with community engagement at the centre. Special attention should be given to ensuring meaningful participation of women and marginalized groups.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

Yemen is reeling from more than 18 months of brutal conflict. The war has pitted a Saudi-led coalition and Yemeni government against the Ansar-Allah movement (also known as the Houthis), which has joined with armed forces loyal to former President Ali Abdullah Saleh. The impact of the conflict has been devastating. More than 6,500 men, women and children have been killed and thousands more have been wounded by airstrikes, shelling, ground fighting and sniper fire. Countless homes and vital parts of civilian infrastructure have been destroyed.<sup>4</sup> All sides have committed serious violations of international humanitarian law (IHL).

More than 13 million Yemenis are in need of immediate, life-saving humanitarian assistance, with seven million people experiencing shortages of food at an emergency level. Over three million people have fled their homes, with many facing growing debt and destitution. Peace talks hosted in Kuwait and a partially observed cessation of hostilities are at an end, with airstrikes and ground fighting on the rise yet again. For millions of Yemeni women, men and children, life remains a daily struggle and violence a constant threat.

For too many, fighting has destroyed the means by which they provide for their families. Fighting has destroyed the physical infrastructure of markets, crippling local economies and preventing people from being able to work safely. The private sector in Yemen has been flattened as a result of the conflict, with one in four companies closing and 70 percent of the workforce laid off.<sup>5</sup> People across northern and southern governorates told Oxfam they cannot find jobs due to continued insecurity and fighting.<sup>6</sup>

Farmers across the country have been hit by high fuel costs and can no longer afford to employ people, leaving the poorest households without an income. The millions who fled their homes are often no longer able to access their land and assets.

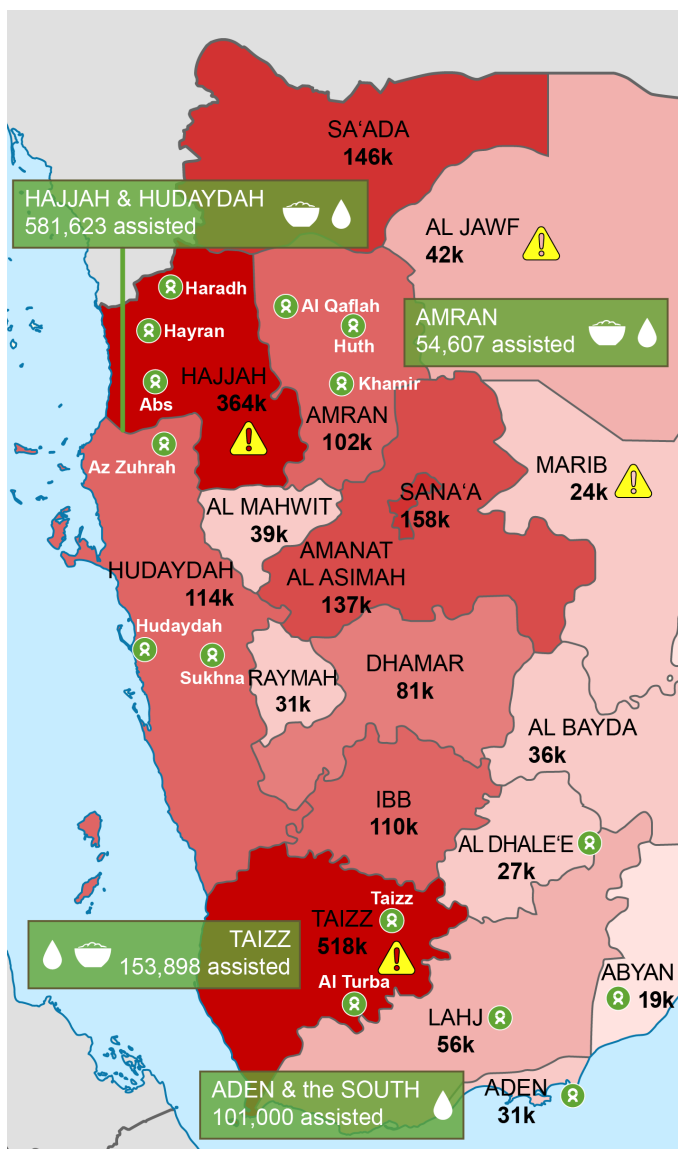
The state is in collapse, with government services, salaries and benefits for millions disappearing. Families have already been hit hard by rampant inflation and restrictions on the movement of vital goods and commodities imposed by a myriad of different groups. Any further price rises or reduced availability of food will have a devastating impact on an already impoverished, hungry and exhausted population.

Despite these challenges many have found ways to survive, such as selling fuel on black markets, gathering plastic waste to sell, undertaking paid volunteering with the few aid agencies operating or selling firewood and *qat*.<sup>7</sup> Some said they had previously received an income through work in the Social Fund for Development.<sup>8</sup> Very few people said they receive remittances from relatives working in the Gulf.<sup>9</sup>

Between January and May 2016, Oxfam completed protection<sup>10</sup> and gender<sup>11</sup> assessments in Yemen. Oxfam spoke to over 990 people and close to 80 groups across the north and south of the country as part of these two surveys of conflict-affected people. The protection assessment was an in-depth analysis on the needs and vulnerabilities of displaced people and host communities. The assessment engaged respondents in Aden, Amran, Hajjah and Taiz governorates.

The second study explored the impact of the crisis on gender relations, to help inform humanitarian and longer-term response. The study was conducted in partnership with CARE and GenCap<sup>12</sup> and covered Aden, Taiz, Hajjah and Abyan governorates.

**Figure 1: Despite the challenges, Oxfam is delivering on the ground**



Source: Oxfam

In 2015, when conflict escalated,

**2.2m people**

were newly displaced.

Most are unsure of when they can go

**home**

Now over

**13 m people**

are in need of life-saving assistance.



**KEY**

- Oxfam programme
- Conflict
- Colour reflects number of IDPs
- Water
- Food

## 2 IN SEARCH OF SAFETY

More than 10 percent of the population is on the move in order to find safety. Close to one in five people Oxfam spoke to said their homes had been destroyed.<sup>13</sup> Oxfam's surveys show that two-thirds of people have been living precarious lives away from home for 12 months or more, since the escalation of conflict in March 2015. People spoke of a pervasive fear that a deterioration of the security situation, continued airstrikes and ground fighting would again force them to flee.

Around half of those displaced reside in Aden, Taiz, Hajjah and Al Dhale'e governorates, with large groupings in Abyan, Al Bayda, Ibb, Sa'ada and Amran.<sup>14</sup> Most people Oxfam spoke to left their homes in Taiz, Hajjah, Sana'a, Sa'ada and Amanat Al Asimah. However, it is hard to see the full picture of displacement in Yemen due to the operational and logistical hurdles humanitarian agencies face in trying to access many parts of the country, particularly Sa'ada and Hudaydah.

People told Oxfam they were forced from their homes by insecurity, the threat of violence or death of a family member, or fear of abduction.<sup>15</sup> Around 76 percent of people surveyed by Oxfam were forced to flee their homes due to airstrikes. Despite the international legal obligations of many Western powers who are signatories and State Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty, many states continue to sell weapons where there is a clear, well-evidenced risk that these could be used in acts which breach IHL and human rights.

### Box 1: The only option was to run

Oxfam spoke with Halima, a mother of eight children, who fled her home following intense fighting and airstrikes, which killed her husband.<sup>16</sup> 'I could not see anything because of the dust. All I remember is that I was screaming the names of my kids', she said. With nowhere else to go, she fled to a camp in Amran. Before she received food vouchers from Oxfam, Halima was forced to live on whatever food or medicine people would give her. Previously the family survived on just one meal a day.



Halima and her eight children live with other displaced people in an Amran camp. Photo credit: Moayed Al-Shaibani/Oxfam

## SEPARATED IN THE CHAOS – UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN

The number of children who have been separated from their families in the conflict is hard to calculate. However, nearly half the families that took part in Oxfam's survey are hosting an unaccompanied or separated minor.<sup>17</sup> Displaced women in Hajjah said they were most concerned about the whereabouts of loved ones.<sup>18</sup> The continued violent clashes and the presence of armed groups prevent separated families returning home or being reunited.

Those that do not have the option to live with or near family or people whom they trust must seek shelter in overcrowded spaces, including rented rooms, public buildings or in tents or makeshift shelters on public or private land.<sup>19</sup> Displaced people have sought shelter in schools – just one more factor halting the education of thousands of Yemeni children.<sup>20</sup> Others have been forced to move so schools could reopen, but many are left with nowhere else to go.<sup>21</sup>

In the rush to leave their homes for safety, families are often unable to take all they need to maintain their health, dignity and access to services. People told us that in most instances, they were only able to grab their identity documents, clothes, blankets and a mobile phone. Many have survived with little else for over a year now. Some people told Oxfam they were forced to flee in such a rush that they were unable to take crucial identification documents, which can prevent them accessing aid and leaves them vulnerable to harassment and detention by armed groups.<sup>22</sup>

## BREAKDOWN OF LAW AND PROTECTION

With the collapse of law and order, people do not feel protected by police or the legal system. The majority of those that Oxfam spoke with said criminality had increased and crimes went unpunished.<sup>23</sup> People said they increasingly feared theft and looting of their properties and businesses.<sup>24</sup> In Al-Misrakh District in rural Taiz, for example, medical supplies and equipment were stolen from a hospital, leaving the local population without a health service since late April with no sign of immediate remedy.<sup>25</sup>

Higher crime levels exacerbate tensions and mutual distrust between displaced people and host communities, who often blame their new neighbours for breaches of the law. Amidst the ongoing instability, armed groups are further entrenched as more powerful (yet unaccountable) authorities. When local people perceive that armed groups have ensured a more protective environment, newfound community support often bolsters the group's power – a direct challenge to state institutions.<sup>26</sup> For instance, in northern governorates, communities report an increase in



law and order with less kidnapping due to the presence of armed actors, although in the south in Aden and neighbouring governorates the opposite is true, with ongoing violent instability despite their presence.

In areas taken over by extremist armed groups, ordinary Yemenis have reportedly found the new authorities more capable of delivering basic services, such as electricity, water and waste disposal.<sup>27</sup> This presents enormous challenges to rebuilding confidence in state institutions and contributes to continued instability and collapse.

Around 83 percent of people surveyed told Oxfam they felt safer when humanitarian agencies were working in the area. However, there are not enough agencies working in hard-to-reach areas to respond to the scale of need, let alone monitor distributions and the safety of civilians.<sup>28</sup> For example, women from the host community in Al-Ma'Afer district in Taiz said that, despite the numbers of displaced people and the high level of need, they saw little aid distribution.

## WOMEN'S FREEDOM TO MOVE OR WORK

Despite the fact that some armed extremist factions have been able to win the trust of local populations by capably delivering services, women and girls still face violence, abuse and exploitation (including sexual abuse and exploitation) by armed groups as the conflict continues.<sup>29</sup>

Women from the Muhamasheen community, an ethnic minority historically treated as an underclass, told Oxfam they were victims of violence, including sexual violence and frequent harassment by armed groups, particularly at checkpoints. Men highlighted the risk of arbitrary arrest or detention at checkpoints and how this negatively impacted on their freedom of movement and ability to search for work.<sup>30</sup> Both men and women are particularly vulnerable to violence and harassment in Taiz governorate, given the sheer number of checkpoints manned by different armed groups and active conflict.

The war has undoubtedly empowered extremist groups.<sup>31</sup> In territories such as Abyan and Lahj, which have at various points been under the control of extremist groups, the practice of *mahram* is now enforced more rigorously – meaning more women are now unable to travel in public places without being accompanied by a male family member.<sup>32</sup> In Abyan, where women previously made up a higher percentage of the overall workforce, generally in the provision of public services,<sup>33</sup> these restrictions on movement have had a harmful effect on women's ability to work. Women reported to Oxfam that they also face diminished self-esteem and fewer educational opportunities.

### 3 WAR WITHOUT END

In addition to the immediate impacts of the war, Yemen's conflict will have lasting consequences for individuals and communities. Prior to the escalation of the conflict in March 2015, 334,000 people were displaced from their homes due to a series of wars in the north. This number has now increased to over three million nationwide – more than an eight-fold increase in a country recently ranked the fourth most fragile state in the world.<sup>34</sup> Two out of three have been displaced for 10 months or longer. Almost 950,000 people have returned home to an uncertain future due to widespread infrastructure damage, destroyed homes, a lack of schools for children, a non-functional health system and widespread joblessness.<sup>35</sup>

Many of those Oxfam spoke with said they had no intention or prospect of going home.<sup>36</sup> For those unable to return, some have integrated into the local community, particularly if they have familial or tribal connections. For marginalized groups, such as the Muhamasheen, there is often little reason to return to the misery that characterized their previous living conditions. Many prefer to stay where they fled. But when people choose to settle within a community with real or perceived rival political affiliations, integration is close to impossible.

During an interview conducted with Ali Abdalmajeed, the head of a local council in Aden, he mentioned that employment opportunities were often given to those known within the community.<sup>37</sup> This puts displaced people at a distinct disadvantage when seeking paid work. It is likely that displaced people in Yemen will continue to endure dire circumstances and unemployment for years to come.

#### **Box 2: Jobs and lives left in ruins – Ammar's Story**

Until the war began, life was normal for Ammar, a 44-year-old bus driver from Taiz. He was able to work and provide for his seven boys and girls, including one infant. But then a rocket hit and destroyed his bus next to his home. 'Suddenly another loud explosion happened', Ammar said. 'My family and I ran back to our house, including the baby. Where our house used to be, a column of smoke was rising to the sky. It looked like a huge chimney. The second rocket had destroyed one room and the roof, and all doors and windows were gone. I found myself like a blind man in the street. I had no bus and no house any more. The only consolation was that the second rocket didn't kill us, either by chance or the grace of Allah.' After seeking shelter at his father's home, Ammar returned to investigate what remained of his former life. A rocket had hit his neighbour's home, killing his neighbour instantly. Ammar sold all of his remaining assets and sought safety and shelter with his family in a disused health centre in Batra Taiziyah. Their savings are now almost entirely depleted. However, he does not want to travel too far to look for work because he fears for the safety of his family.

# THE THREAT OF LANDMINES AND UNEXPLODED ORDINANCE

An alarming presence of landmines and other unexploded ordinance (UXO) is reducing farming production and stopping people from returning home. The UN reports widespread areas affected by landmines along with other significant explosive contamination.<sup>38</sup> Death and injury relating to landmines have been documented in the southern and eastern governorates of Abyan, Aden, Marib, Lahj and Taiz.<sup>39</sup> In a recent report by human rights group Amnesty International, at least 16 civilians (including nine children) were killed or injured by cluster munitions between July 2015 and April 2016, in some instances long after they were deployed.<sup>40</sup> Many more deaths remain undocumented.

Respondents told Oxfam that UXO is a major barrier to using previously productive land and a threat to the life and safety of those attempting to reengage in agricultural work. Often people feel they have no other choice but to take the risk and work on potentially contaminated and deadly land.

## Box 3: Ghaseb's long road home

Ghaseb Al-Faqeeh used to live in Dahian district in Sa'ada but he was forced to flee with his children when his village and the neighbouring farms were bombed. He was able to make it to the relative safety of Amran, where his family now shares one single room. In Sa'ada, Ghaseb used to work around 20 days a month but he can't find work in Amran. 'Most of the farms have been bombed and some others were exposed to drought due to the scarcity of fuel that is used to run water pumps', Ghaseb said. 'The situation is very bad now. My family and I only eat one meal a day, or two at most, because I couldn't find work.' Although Oxfam is able to support Ghaseb and his family, the need for humanitarian aid outstrips supply.



Ghaseb Al-Faqeeh, his eight-year-old daughter Aya and three-year-old son Sultan in the single room that houses the whole family. Photo credit: Moayed Al-Shaibani/Oxfam

## SOME HAVE NO OPTION BUT TO RETURN

Given their desperation, some displaced people have tested the waters and returned home to assess the situation, what remains of their possessions and the potential for earning some sort of income. Many have returned to their own homes but others have had to rent or stay with family members. Of the 3.1 million people displaced from their homes, 949,470 people have returned home and require urgent support to work, particularly in Aden, Amanat Al Asimah and Taiz.<sup>41</sup> It is expected that large numbers of people will return to the heavily bombed governorate of Sa'ada, although the current number of returnees is unclear. Oxfam staff noted slow movements of people back to Sa'ada from Amran governorate in July.

For those that do make the return journey, indications are that many swiftly leave again for places of relative safety. Given the continued instability, people who have returned home must still be considered vulnerable and trapped within the cycle of displacement.

It is difficult for displaced people to assess the situation back home from afar, given the lack of credible news sources and highly partisan and misleading national media outlets.<sup>42</sup> It is impossible for most of the hundreds of thousands of people displaced to contemplate returning home given the continued violence and widespread destruction to infrastructure.<sup>43</sup> Around half of those Oxfam interviewed did not intend to return home until there was improved security.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES

### **Social cohesion: the strain on families, displaced people and host communities**

As displaced people move in search of safety and shelter, there are increased tensions within their families and with the broader host community.<sup>44</sup> Tensions may, for example, relate to shared livestock pastures or woods being depleted for cooking fuel by displaced people.<sup>45</sup> As Amani Zuhair, the Alamal National Association Chairperson in Hajjah explained, continued conflict between communities has meant some displaced people have moved on to other areas. Despite this, people across all regions said that relations between displaced people and host communities are generally sound.<sup>46</sup> People from host communities told Oxfam that displaced people were in a difficult situation and despite their own hardship they had to express solidarity with them and make them feel as though they were in their own homes.<sup>47</sup>

Some report that displaced people have been denied aid because community leaders or sheikhs see them as supporters of rival political

parties. In other instances, as is the case of the Muhamasheen, they remain victims of historical social exclusion.<sup>48</sup> While humanitarian agencies undertake needs assessments and create lists of pre-identified beneficiaries, Oxfam's assessments in Aden and Hajjah highlight that the Muhamasheen and other marginalized groups were excluded from aid delivered by international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) or Gulf-funded charities. Many people felt they did not have the power to ask to be registered or could not afford the informal 'taxes' or 'registration fees' sometimes charged by local elites.<sup>49</sup> In a focus group discussion in Abs district in Hajjah, people spoke of an instance in which elites of the area asked for a tax of 1000YER (\$3–\$4) after announcing a distribution of food baskets was to take place. The distribution never occurred.

## **A dangerous rise in early marriage**

Within shelters for displaced people, women told Oxfam that the threat of sexual exploitation and abuse of women and girls is real and ever present. For example, there are numerous reports of forced child marriage as a result of families seeking to protect their young daughters from harassment and destitution or to provide income for the family. A journalist from Bani Sureem District in Amran said that when the family does not have enough food, fathers will often marry off their daughters, even if this only slightly eases the financial pressure on the girl's family.<sup>50</sup> Some people spoke of young women who were forced into becoming 'brides' to members of extremist armed groups in order to help their families.

An estimated 32 percent of girls are married before the age of 18.<sup>51</sup> Before the war, Yemen was starting to make small steps towards tackling child marriage but as the conflict continues, these gains are being reversed.

Oxfam's assessments also showed an increase in the number of men entering polygamous marriages as a direct consequence of the prolonged conflict.<sup>52</sup> As one woman said: 'The war offers chances for men to get married easier than ever before. Dowry payments are less now, as parents are more determined to marry their girls.' In a focus group discussion with Muhamasheen women, they reported that many men used polygamy as a way to increase their income by using multiple wives to beg in public.

## **Increased risk of exploitation by armed groups**

People told Oxfam about many instances in which young men and, in some cases children, were forced to join armed groups.<sup>53</sup> The UN has reported that the number of children recruited in the conflict in 2015 was five times higher than the previous year.<sup>54</sup> While voluntary enlistment is the norm, increasingly children are coerced or misled into joining through false promises. This phenomenon is pervasive in both the north and south of Yemen and across the spectrum of armed groups currently operating. The motivation in many cases is economic. In Aden and southern governorates, numerous people told Oxfam that joining armed

groups for ‘guarding’ or ‘protection’ purposes was a ready source of daily wages for young men.<sup>55</sup>

When Oxfam spoke with men and women in many governorates, they expressed their reluctance to allow their young to fight for extremist armed groups. One female respondent said young people were returning as ‘different people – indoctrinated and in many instances traumatized’.<sup>56</sup>

Many may also be driven to join armed groups through a sense of duty and obligation to see an end to the current conflict. However, joining the fight is likely to have the reverse effect, contributing to a downward spiral of violence and bloodshed. Ongoing recruitment of children and youth, especially into extremist armed groups, has severe implications for the future stability of Yemen and for the region more broadly.

#### **Box 6: Zakarya’s choice**

Oxfam spoke with Zakarya Ali, a 23-year-old who recently graduated with a diploma in computer maintenance from a technical institute. Due to violent instability in Taiz, Zakarya was unable to find a job. ‘The war in Yemen has shut down all doors. The youth don’t find any available employment opportunities. Frustration and the lack of work opportunities made several of my friends join the warring parties in return for a scant amount of money’, said Zakarya.<sup>57</sup>



Zakarya is a recent graduate; however, within the debilitated Yemeni economy there are few opportunities to earn a living other than to join the fighting. Photo credit: Moayed Al-Shaibani/Oxfam

## 4 GETTING BACK TO WORK

Yemen urgently needs a genuine end to the conflict and for the international and regional community to support the efforts of Yemenis to pick up the pieces and build a more productive and peaceful future. The situation may seem hopeless, given the dire circumstances outlined above and the fact that aid is not a panacea. However, if urgent resources are mobilized to address the humanitarian crisis and support emergency livelihoods this can help people cope and stay safe amidst the chaos, reducing the chances of conflict spreading.

As of mid-August 2016, donors had funded \$509.5m of the humanitarian response, which represents only 28 percent of the \$1.8bn requested in the Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan (YHRP).<sup>58</sup> To address the challenges of a collapsing economy and devastated markets and livelihoods, the international community must ensure there is well-resourced and timely support for host communities and returning families to assist in rebuilding their homes, livelihoods and local economies. This can help lay the foundations for Yemen's longer-term recovery and reconstruction while ensuring its diverse communities have a stake in the success of any future peace agreement.

Creating long-term employment is a daunting task. Where markets are able to operate, Oxfam increasingly provides direct cash assistance to people in need. This can help to break the cycle of poverty and indebtedness and help families restart livelihood activities.

Where cash programming is possible, it gives people the flexibility to choose how to restart their livelihoods and helps people maintain the dignity to choose how they spend the money. Such support also benefits local traders and small businesses, which have been particularly impacted by the current conflict. In numerous interviews and focus group discussions, people mentioned that cash combined with technical skills training could greatly help young people, including those displaced, to develop market opportunities.<sup>59</sup>

In areas that continue to be acutely affected by conflict, people must first be provided with the resources and safety to provide food for their families. Oxfam is piloting a programme that provides funds to support the development of livelihoods on top of the amount needed to meet basic food needs. It is hoped this approach will allow households to service their debt and help them get back on their feet. Oxfam believes Yemeni households are best placed to manage their income over the short, medium and long term. Without sufficient and regular funding, however, aid agencies cannot help people build self-reliance.

People who fled without identification should be supported to make sure they receive the aid they need. For example, in Hajjah, Oxfam works with community committees to select those who are most in need of cash support, including people without identification. In Taiz, working through Al-Kuraimi Bank, people are able to access cash through a voucher system issued through Oxfam field staff.

# YEMENI WOMEN ARE RESILIENT AND CREATIVE

Yemen is ranked as one of the worst places in the world to be a woman, where gendered household roles are firmly entrenched.<sup>60</sup> However, driven by the severe pressures of conflict, women are increasingly seeking opportunities to earn a living. In fact, a male participant in an Oxfam focus group discussion said: 'It is no longer shameful for a woman to go for work.'

Hamida from Sana'a governorate told Oxfam her husband lost his job due to continued violent instability. She then became the exclusive breadwinner for the family as a volunteer with the Social Fund for Development (SFD).<sup>61</sup> Due to the conflict, the implementation of the SFD has been severely curtailed.<sup>62</sup> Despite this, the World Bank recently announced a positive measure of \$50m to support the SFD and the Public Works Project (PWP).<sup>63</sup>

In Hajjah, women are selling food and produce in markets, which was traditionally the preserve of men. The *delalah* practice, whereby women sell small goods door to door, is also making a comeback.<sup>64</sup> Suad, a woman who was displaced with her family, took a loan from a neighbour and started producing incense and perfumes, which she now sells to earn her family an income. She said: 'It was like the first step in a thousand-mile journey. I started to make enough profit for me and my family to live on.'<sup>65</sup> This newfound role of women in the family also comes with challenges as many men say they feel resentful and ashamed that they are now unable to provide.<sup>66</sup>

The experience and skills of Yemeni women must be harnessed in humanitarian and reconstruction efforts and is essential to their protection. Women's employment should be supported through financial management and business skills training and requires adequate technical support, market linkages and sustained resourcing. Opportunities exist to support meaningful work options for women that develop self-reliance and move beyond traditional gender-stereotyped activities, such as sewing or home-based activities.



### Box 7: Women powering up the home

Given damaged and irregular electrical supplies across the country and high fuel prices, the use of solar panels in Yemen is increasing. This presents a significant and unique livelihood opportunity for women. For example, some women in Taiz have trained themselves as technicians for household solar energy systems that require frequent servicing due to their poor quality.<sup>67</sup> Given prevailing social norms, it is much more acceptable for women to enter the home and perform this function than men. The continued high prices of fuel and irregular electricity supplies mean that the solar energy industry in Yemen is booming.

There are also opportunities to support and work with women's groups and community-led initiatives.<sup>68</sup> For example, indigenous practices, such as *hakba* (women's savings groups), continue to be utilized and can be the foundation for future interventions. Before the crisis, in the instance of a family emergency, such groups were very effective in supporting vulnerable members of the community. Yemen's women are culturally regarded as more 'wise' with money, with the ability to stretch limited household resources to meet the needs of the family. As one woman in Taiz said: 'Our husbands used to bring goods to the house. But we don't know if they can bring more tomorrow. So they leave it in the hands of us women to spend this money more wisely and for the benefit of the family.'<sup>69</sup>

## LIVELIHOODS AMIDST PROTRACTED DISPLACEMENT AND RETURN

Improving livelihoods can address drivers of conflict at the local level. Yemenis spoke of tensions within families and between displaced people and host communities owing to perceptions of unfair distribution of aid by relief agencies.

Effective livelihood programmes help people meet their basic needs and provide more space to engage with efforts to manage conflicts, both within the home and broader society. In shaping such interventions there is a need to look at what community resources exist, including indigenous practices and how the whole displaced and host community can be engaged, including men and women. In some areas, women control the distribution of aid, due to conflict and political tensions between men in communities. In other communities they have collectively decided to stop talking about politics and have agreed to start cooperating on community-based initiatives around livelihoods.

During Oxfam's surveys, communities spoke strongly about the need for assistance to be based on the real needs of both displaced people and host communities in order to enhance, rather than harm, social cohesion. Increasing the field presence of humanitarian agencies will assist greatly in targeting, registration and the quality of assistance provided. Essential

to this process is the need to engage community representatives and local land owners to ensure better reception of displaced people, accuracy of target areas, clear communication of selection criteria and the specific needs that need to be addressed. Such programming requires a meaningful field presence in order to be implemented. Where possible, both vulnerable members of host communities and displaced people should be involved in the design of interventions that provide livelihood opportunities for all.

Oxfam programming has sought to positively serve the needs of both displaced people and vulnerable host communities. Mass displacement puts exceptional pressure on water and sanitation systems, for instance, which has led to tensions between host communities and displaced people. Oxfam has been able to alleviate the situation in many areas by rehabilitating water schemes across the north and south of Yemen, which serve hundreds of thousands, including displaced people and vulnerable host communities. This rehabilitation has also generated cash-for-work opportunities, ensuring income for people in dire need. In this way, Oxfam is meeting current needs while also providing tangible solutions to longer-term recovery and reconstruction through interventions that are sustainable beyond the crisis.

## 5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Amidst the uncertainty, the reality for ordinary Yemenis is even worse than it was before the crisis, when half the population already lived in poverty. As an immediate step, the warring parties must deliver a genuine ceasefire and allow people and goods to move freely throughout Yemen.

Life amidst the chaos is a daily struggle to survive. Building opportunities to work and develop self-reliance is a lifeline to those trapped within protracted displacement and families returning home to see what remains of their former lives. However, powerful international and regional interests and rivalries shape Yemeni domestic politics. Support is provided by international and regional powers to proxy elites and factions, while Yemeni civilians' rights to humanitarian protection and assistance, as well as economic development, are neglected.<sup>70</sup> How the regional and international community chooses to respond to the needs and aspirations of Yemen's people in the immediate, intermediate and long term will determine the path its future takes.

New resources, particularly from the Gulf states and their Western allies, can be used to support innovative livelihood opportunities that can help men and women survive and potentially rebuild. This will address the needs of those displaced from their homes and vulnerable host communities, not merely those of societal elites.

Oxfam urges key stakeholders to take immediate action to address the safety and economic concerns of Yemenis at the local level, thereby enabling a meaningful and sustainable peace. Unless people are able to earn a living through support from aid agencies and economic regeneration at the local level, the seeds for continued violent instability will be sown.

The following recommendations outline how this can be achieved.

## **Yemen's government and appointed Supreme Political Council at all levels should:**

- Implement and abide by an immediate and comprehensive nationwide ceasefire, which includes support for airstrikes and ground fighting;
- Issue public directives to security personnel, functionaries and associated armed groups that forbid interference and coercion of aid recipients and deliverers;
- Protect women, men, boys and girls from all forms of abuse and gender-based violence by developing and committing to standards that can be monitored by inclusive, locally-led protection committees in coordination with the established De-escalation and Coordination Committee;
- Consult with displaced people, returnees and host communities and respond to their requests in order to support them in maintaining safety and building livelihoods.

## **The Saudi-led coalition and Western governments should:**

- Implement and abide by an immediate and comprehensive nationwide ceasefire;
- Stop fuelling the conflict and violations of IHL by suspending the supply of weapons to all parties and abide by their legal obligations under the Arms Trade Treaty;
- Enable expansion of cash transfer schemes to ensure people can meet their basic needs and establish sustainable livelihoods;
- Provide increased resources for immediate livelihood assistance for displaced people and returnees, including resources for local women's groups and support for women's employment through skills and training;
- Fund clearance of unexploded ordinance and mined areas, support public awareness schemes about the dangers from these weapons and provide compensation to victims;
- Donors should press Yemeni state and non-state actors to protect displaced people and aid workers throughout the country, and make funding conditional on providing protection.

## **UN and humanitarian agencies should:**

- Rapidly scale up the response with the adequate human and financial resources to deliver immediate livelihood assistance where possible and deploy staff to deliver increased protection services and strengthened accountability to local people;
- Ensure that the needs of both displaced people and host communities are considered in shaping future projects in order to promote long-term stability and prevent new outbreaks of conflict;
- Establish clear mechanisms for the genuine participation of communities in the delivery of humanitarian assistance at district and village levels. Strategies should be designed with community engagement at the centre. Special attention should be given to ensuring meaningful participation of women and marginalized groups.

# NOTES

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- 9 Oxfam. (2016). Food Security Assessment – Hajjah. May 2016.
- 10 Oxfam. (Forthcoming 2016). *Understanding Affected Communities in Yemen*. Protection Assessment. Sana'a, Yemen: Oxfam. Conducted January to May 2016. The Protection Assessment is an in-depth analysis of the impact of the conflict on protection needs and vulnerabilities. In particular this focused on the level of social cohesion, the effect on formal and informal protection structures, the perception of the humanitarian response and the preferred communication channels to the affected population. The assessment aimed at reaching a 95 percent confidence interval with a  $\pm 5$  percent margin of error by covering a sample size of 384 household interviews with purposive and randomized sampling. The sample size aimed to be as representative as possible, with 96 individual respondents in Aden, Amran, Hajjah and Taiz. These governorates were chosen due to the high presence of IDPs and conflict-affected populations combined with severe WASH, food security, livelihood and protection needs. In line with Oxfam's minimum standards, this assessment ensured a gendered analysis of protection issues that focused more on the impact of the conflict on men and young boys. This choice was made since the gender analysis of the impact of the conflict was undertaken by Oxfam's Gender Department along with CARE and the GenCap Advisor in three of the four governorates covered through the Protection Assessment.
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This paper was written by Soman Moodley. Oxfam acknowledges the assistance of Zorica Skakun, Fausto Aarya De Santis, Steve Purbrick, Richard Stanforth, Shaheen Chughtai, Sajjad Mohammad Sajid, Sylvia Ghaly and Anna Ridout in its production. It is part of a series of papers written to inform public debate on development and humanitarian policy issues.

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The information in this publication is correct at the time of going to press.

Published by Oxfam GB for Oxfam International under ISBN 978-0-85598-772-5 in September 2016.

Oxfam GB, Oxfam House, John Smith Drive, Cowley, Oxford, OX4 2JY, UK.

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