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Extended Meeting of "Active Communities" Components - F
Active Communities at Implementing YOD with Su...om



From the Ground Up

The Impact of Track III Initiatives on Peacebuilding

Cases Studies of Youth-led Initiatives in Taiz, Yemen

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I. Introduction

The catastrophic effects of protracted conflicts like Yemen's have been felt massively at the social, economic, and governance levels, among others. In addition to heavy physical damage to infrastructure and state institutions, and loss of countless lives, wealth, and opportunities, such conflicts result in a massive breakdown of societal mutual trust and relationships. Coherent, sustainable peace-empowering structures typically do not exist or are non-functional or crippled. Such challenges also make it more difficult and costly to bring peace and effectively sustain it once a solution is reached. The fragmentation of the Yemeni state has resulted in a shift to more localized struggles over access to resources and power that involve both internal and external actors.¹ Amidst the erosion of political authority, the escalation of violent conflicts, widespread forced displacement, and a rapid decline in government capacity, the delivery of public services by governmental bodies has virtually ceased, leading to over 80% of the population necessitating humanitarian aid for sustenance.²

Given the multifaceted conflict and complex dynamics in Yemen, peace-creation, cannot rely only on externally-led or controlled efforts.³ Nonetheless, the bottom-up peacebuilding, which recognizes the importance of engaging community members, civil society organizations, and local leaders, persists itself as an effective approach in efforts to foster reconciliation, rebuild social cohesion, and promote sustainable peace. Track III and grassroots initiatives in Yemen play a crucial role in bottom-up peacebuilding efforts, particularly in fostering sustainable peace at the local level. Track III initiatives, with their focus on unofficial dialogue and people-to-people interactions, complement grassroots efforts by engaging diverse stakeholders in conflict resolution processes, social cohesion, and community resilience. On the other hand, grassroots initiatives empower communities to take ownership of peacebuilding activities, promoting inclusivity, and fostering a sense of collective responsibility for building a peaceful society. Together, these initiatives create a synergistic approach that addresses the root causes of conflict and paves the way for lasting peace in Yemen.

This research is an attempt to uncover the transformative role of youth-led Track III initiatives in the intricate web of bottom-up peacebuilding efforts across Yemen, with particular focus on Taiz city. By presenting four real case studies, navigating the experiences, challenges, and successes of these initiatives, illuminates a path towards sustainable peace rooted in grassroots engagement and community empowerment. Through a lens that magnifies the agency and creativity of community-based and youth-led initiatives, we aim to explore the transformative power of Track III initiatives in bridging divides, fostering inclusivity, and nurturing a culture of peace within communities scarred by conflict.

1 Clausen, M. L. (2018). Competing for Control over the State: The Case of Yemen. *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 578–560 ,(3)29. <https://doi.org/09592318,2018,1455792/10,1080>

2 In "Community-Based Initiatives and Public Services Delivery in a Fragile Context: The Case of Yemen." https://www.researchgate.net/publication/367075942_Community-Based_Initiatives_and_Public_Services_Delivery_in_a_Fragile_Context_The_Case_of_Yemen

3 Septyanto Galan Prakoso, Ferdian Ahya Al Putra, Edo Artima Kasla (2023). Political Landscape Dynamics in Post-Decade Yemeni Revolution: A Literature Review. CMES (Center of Middle Eastern Studies).



This case study series adopts a qualitative approach and includes different research methods including in-person and virtual data collection. The research extends on the existing literature and convenes 3 focus group discussions (FGDs) with 18 youth members of 9 youth- and woman-led initiatives (55 females) and 21 in-depth interviews with multiple stakeholders (members of youth-led initiatives, CSOs, INGOs, local authority and community activists) (18 females) to explore the challenges of community-based initiatives, often led by young men and women, in peacebuilding and to identify the opportunities that these initiatives have and the advantages they present. The Case Studies not only examine the context, challenges, and contributions of these initiatives, but also aim to encourage all stakeholders to consider integrating and supporting these initiatives in peacebuilding programs and processes.



II. Background

2.1 Bottom-up Peacebuilding in Yemen

Efforts to achieve peace in Yemen require a comprehensive approach that addresses the political, security, and humanitarian dimensions of the conflict. It necessitates coordinated efforts from local, regional, and international stakeholders to support a sustainable peace process, inclusive dialogue, and the provision of essential humanitarian assistance to the affected population. While the peacebuilding landscape in Yemen remains complex, there is a recognition of the importance of bottom-up approaches that involve local communities, youth, and civil society. Building on these efforts and ensuring meaningful inclusion of all stakeholders will be crucial in shaping a more peaceful and stable future for Yemen.

It is crucial to recognize the importance of initiating local peacebuilding efforts without waiting for a national agreement to be reached. These local initiatives can actually serve as a catalyst for a broader national-level agreement.⁴ By addressing conflicts at the local level, it is possible to reduce the underlying causes of violence among parties involved in the national conflict and their supporters. This, in turn, creates opportunities for building trust and fostering collaboration among these actors on a local scale, which can inspire them to explore possibilities for cooperation at higher levels. Moreover, empowering local communities to provide nonviolent alternatives to address critical needs and resolve conflicts can lessen the reliance on and support for violent extremist groups that exploit the grievances of desperate communities.

In the context Yemen, community-based initiatives have the potential to play a crucial role in bottom-up peacebuilding efforts. As part of OSESGY's endeavors to increase involvement with Yemenis at both the national and community levels, there has been a focus on expanding outreach to include a broader array of participants. This has involved holding consultative gatherings with various stakeholders, including women, youth, private sector representatives, civil society organizations, experts, and local mediators. These efforts aim to engage a diverse range of actors and gather input from different perspectives to inform OSESGY's work in Yemen.⁵ This approach emphasizes the importance of involving society at large in shaping the peace process, not just those directly involved in the conflict or actively engaging in hostilities.⁶ In the midst of conflict and instability, Yemen's social services are in a dire state, livelihoods have been devastated, and building trust between local authorities and communities is crucial. Recognizing the essential role of local governance in fostering social unity, delivering public services, and promoting the well-being of society, it is imperative to adopt a grassroots approach to enhance the capacity of local communities to effectively handle local challenges and withstand unexpected events by cultivating resilience and self-sufficiency.⁷

⁴<https://www.partnersglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/12/2020/Building-Sustainable-Peace-in-Yemen12,8,202-0.pdf>

⁵ "Engaging peacebuilding civil society coalitions in Yemen."

<https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/engaging-peacebuilding-civil-society-coalitions-yemen>

⁶<https://www.eip.org/pathways-for-reconciliation-in-yemen-full-page-v2/>

⁷<https://www.undp.org/arab-states/stories/building-bridges-mediation-and-dialogue-bring-communities-together-yemen>



Thus, the inclusivity of the process, going beyond the voices of political elites and civil society, directly impacts the likelihood of reaching a legitimate and sustainable settlement.⁸ Engaging in inclusive processes is not only possible but also more likely to result in sustainable and inclusive outcomes. These outcomes, in turn, can serve as the basis for broader societal and political transformations towards peaceful societies that embrace inclusivity.

By focusing on amplifying and learning from community-focused initiatives, such as the ones observed in Taiz, where civil society members have actively participated in negotiations on access and movement of people, this approach aims to build upon existing efforts.⁹ It seeks to create more opportunities for local civil society and women's peacebuilding to influence national and regional levels, raise public awareness, generate momentum, and reenergize the peace process. Additionally, by combining these efforts with widespread local mobilization for peace, pressure can be exerted on conflicting parties to engage in negotiations.¹⁰

2.2 Grassroots Youth-led Initiatives Contributing to Peacebuilding

In conflict zones and fragile contexts, community-based initiatives (CBIs) play a crucial role in bridging the void created by the state's inability to deliver fundamental public services. Their mission goes beyond enhancing quality and financial effectiveness; it centers on building resilience and addressing the pressing absence of essential services in these complex environments. Contemporary scholarly works classify the notion of Community-Based Initiatives (CBIs) within the realm of civil society, acknowledging their notable contribution to service provision and community-led intervention.¹¹ In the context of this research, Community-Based Initiatives (CBIs) are delineated as self-initiated endeavors wherein individuals, predominantly young men and women, unite to allocate resources and execute targeted projects with the collective aim of delivering services to their community.¹²

8 <https://www.eip.org/pathways-for-reconciliation-in-yemen-full-page-v2/>

9 <https://www.yemenpolicy.org/a-rethink-is-needed-to-revitalize-the-peace-process-in-yemen/>

10 Ibid

11 Verkoren, W. M., & Van Leeuwen, M. (2014). Civil society in fragile contexts. In M. Kaldor & I. Rangelov (Eds.), *The handbook of global security policy* (pp. 481–463).

12 Igalla, M., Edelenbos, J., & van Meerkerk, I. (2020). What explains the performance of community-based initiatives? Testing the impact of leadership, social capital, organizational capacity, and government support. *Public Management Review*, 632–602 ,(4)22.



Young people in Yemen are collectively and actively contributing to various aspects of society, showcasing their ability to adapt and innovate in the face of difficult circumstances.¹³ They have undertaken initiatives to document human rights abuses, offer psychosocial support, establish social enterprises, and address urgent humanitarian needs. These endeavors include activities like refilling water tanks, organizing food packages, and providing first-aid kits to individuals with chronic illnesses. Additionally, they have been spreading messages of peace not just within their local communities but also on national and international platforms.

These initiatives empower young people to become active agents of peace, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility for building a harmonious society from the grassroots level.

One interviewee states “I firmly believe that community initiatives led by young men and women play a crucial role in peacebuilding efforts, given their ability to engage with local communities effectively. Being rooted in the community itself, they are more attuned to the social dynamics at play. The proximity of these initiatives to local communities grants their roles and endeavors significant weight, leading to greater success and effectiveness.”¹⁴ Through their innovative approaches, youth-led initiatives often introduce fresh perspectives, creative solutions, and inclusive strategies that resonate with diverse groups within society. By engaging in dialogue, promoting reconciliation, and addressing the root causes of conflict, these initiatives contribute to building social cohesion, fostering resilience, and nurturing a culture of peace within communities.¹⁵

Locally, in Taiz, civil society organizations and grassroots initiatives have been actively engaged in peacebuilding efforts, addressing the root causes of conflict, including socio-economic grievances, basic services, marginalization, and inequality. They play a crucial role in laying the groundwork for long-term peace and stability, which can be further strengthened when integrated with top-down efforts to create a more balanced and enduring peace framework.

“An exemplary project worth mentioning is the “Active Communities” project by YWBOD, where we can explore how youth-led initiatives within this project contributed to fostering community engagements and involving diverse segments of society. This showcases the impact achieved by creating opportunities for collaboration between initiatives and local authorities for the greater public good.”

Confidential interview with leader of youth-led initiative, male, July ,31 2024.

¹³<https://www.saferworld-global.org/resources/publications/-1241atthe-situation-needs-us-to-be-activea-youth-h-contributions-to-peacebuilding-in-yemen>

¹⁴ Confidential interview, Yemeni local CSO, male, August 2024 ,7.

¹⁵ Confidential interview with leader of youth-led initiative, male, August 2024 ,3



III. Presentation of the Case Studies

Grassroots youth-led initiatives in Yemen in general, Taiz in particular, continue to play a vital role in promoting peace and resilience at the local level, in spite of the host of challenges that test their resilience and determination in sustaining their activities. This section presents four remarkable case studies that showcase the transformative power of grassroots youth-led initiatives in driving bottom-up peacebuilding efforts within the local context of Taiz. These initiatives, spearheaded by passionate and dedicated young male and female leaders, have emerged as beacons of hope and resilience in the face of conflict and adversity. Each case study offers a unique lens into the impactful contributions of young changemakers, highlighting their unwavering commitment to building bridges, promoting understanding, and paving the way for a more peaceful and inclusive future for their communities.

Case Study One - Building Trust with Local Authorities and Beneficiary Communities: Paving the Path to Peace

In Taiz, a transformative narrative of trust, collaboration, and empowerment is unfolding, driven by the tireless efforts of youth-led initiatives in the realm of bottom-up peacebuilding. The collaborative efforts of local stakeholders, including local authorities and beneficiary communities, serve as the cornerstone for prioritizing and facilitating the impactful work of community-based initiatives. Within the intricate landscape of community dynamics in Taiz, the perceptions and attitudes of local authorities towards youth-led initiatives play a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of collaborative efforts towards positive change. This Case delves into the arduous path faced by these initiatives in building trust with both local authorities and beneficiary communities, their journey to overcome initial resistance, and the pivotal role they played in fostering collaborative partnerships through effective community service delivery.

A Challenging Start

According to the youth participants in the FGD sessions, the relationship between youth-led initiatives on one side and local authorities and beneficiary communities on the other was characterized by skepticism, reluctance, and a lack of cooperation. Local authorities and communities were hesitant and indifferent to engage with youth-led initiatives.

Youth-led initiatives complained about the pervasive skepticism among local authorities which hinders the alignment between decision-makers in the local level and youth-led initiatives.

“Local authorities show less interest in youth-led initiatives compared to organizations because organizations are established entities with official registrations and licenses. Also, as a result to the small funds we have for activities, we receive inadequate attention, which truly impacts coordination.”
FGD, members of youth-led initiatives, female, July 2024 ,29



The uncharted terrain of youth-led approaches, coupled with the nature of activities that often are characterized as small and lack big funding, often evoke skepticism regarding the feasibility and efficacy of youth-led initiatives in driving meaningful impact and sustainable change within the community. This skepticism, rooted in a desire for proven results and established practices, creates a barrier to embracing the potential of youth leadership in peacebuilding and community development efforts.

The lack of adequate resources hinders youth-led initiatives' ability to reach a wider audience, organize events, and engage in capacity-building activities crucial for fostering peace within their communities.¹⁶ This, as justified by a leader of a youth-led initiative, is why governmental entities often do not engage with youth-led initiatives in the same manner as they do with formal organizations, in addition to the lack of official registration and institutional status, which result in limited recognition and support.¹⁷ Such palpable sense of reluctance permeates the interactions between local authorities and youth-led initiatives, leading to an inadequate engagement.¹⁸

On the other hand, local beneficiary communities lack of trust and skepticism towards youth-led efforts, and limited awareness of youth-led initiatives' potential impact posed challenges in fostering meaningful cooperation and building productive relationships. The ongoing smear campaigns by influential local people targeting organizations, whether local or international, have sown seeds of doubt and mistrust within local communities regarding the interventions and motives of youth-led initiatives.¹⁹ This tarnished reputation undermines the credibility of young participants and the initiatives themselves, making it challenging to gain community trust and support for their peacebuilding activities.²⁰ Additionally, youth-led initiatives encounter challenges related to societal norms that discriminate against marginalized groups, particularly women and young people, as they engage in peacebuilding activities.²¹

The disconnect between youth-led initiatives and beneficiary communities stemmed from a combination of factors, including preconceived notions about youth capabilities, traditional power dynamics, and a conflict between individual interest and collective interest.²² Youth-led initiatives ran through a challenging context during implementation of community activities, including the interference of influential figures in certain areas, who often sought to steer the direction of initiatives for their individual gain.²³ This manipulation divert resources and attention away from the core mission of promoting peace, undermining the integrity and autonomy of youth-led initiatives. Such perceived disconnect in priorities, communication breakdowns, and divergent agendas created barriers to effective collaboration and partnership-building, hindering the realization of synergies and collective impact, impeding the progress towards shared goals of community development and peacebuilding.

16 Confidential interview, Yemeni CSO, vice President, male, August 2024 ,8.

17 Confidential interview, youth-led initiative's leader, male, August 2024 ,3.

18 Confidential interview, Yemeni CSO chairperson and community activist, female, August 2024 ,4.

19 Confidential interview, youth-led initiative's leader, female, July 2024 ,31.

20 Ibid.

21 Confidential interview, youth-led initiative's coordinator, male, August 2024 ,14.

22 Confidential interview, Yemeni CSO vice-president, male, August 2024 ,8.

23 Confidential interview, youth-led initiative's leader, female, August 2024 ,7.



Looking Ahead

As the narrative unfolds, it becomes evident that addressing the barriers of skepticism, reluctance, and lack of cooperation in the perceptions of local authorities and local communities towards youth-led initiatives is essential for fostering a culture of inclusive engagement and collaborative action. “Stakeholders, such as local authorities and beneficiary communities, possess a deep understanding of the needs and challenges facing the society, which enable youth-led initiatives and any entity providing community services to identify priorities that directly address these needs and ensure ownership and sustainability.”²⁴

Moving forward, youth-led initiatives followed proactive steps to cultivate cooperative relationships and involve local authorities and beneficiary communities in the decision-making processes essential for building sustainable peacebuilding efforts rooted in shared ownership and collective action.

As per FGD sessions and interviews with multiple stakeholders and members of youth-led initiatives, there are a number of effective approaches followed by the youth-led initiatives that cultivated in mutual understanding and meaningful partnerships. They engaged local stakeholders in dialogue through constant meetings in the planning and implementation phases to seek input and perspectives. Based on a true example, Youth Leadership Initiative, to implement their “Safe Roads” project in Al Qahirah District in Taiz with the support of YWBOD under “Active Communities” project, held a stakeholder’s meeting and signed a MOU with the Police Foot Patrols Management in the governorate to facilitate the work of fixing six surveillance cameras near the shops in the main street. “We committed to transparent communication through regular meetings to provide regular updates, share progress, and solicit feedback which ensured accountability within the partnership.”²⁵

“By actively engaging with community-based initiatives, local authorities provide essential support in terms of regulatory frameworks, resource allocation, and strategic guidance.”

Confidential interview, local authority, Security Management, Male, August 2024 ,16

24 Confidential interview, youth-led initiative’s leader, male, August 2024 ,3.

25 Confidential interview, Youth Leadership initiative’s coordinator, male, August 2024 ,14.



The Journey of Transformation

The outcome of Youth Leadership Initiative's intervention was that security, traffic and economic situation in the targeted context was maintained, as surveillance cameras have contributed to monitoring, preventing and combating crimes, attacks, vandalism, traffic violations, accidents, congestion, noise and other problems that affect the safety, stability and rights of the citizens and children in the targeted area. The outcome extends to influence local communities' perceptions about local authorities, strengthening mutual trust, comfort and satisfaction with the security services provided.

"The approach of coordinating with and engaging the Foot Police Management in planning the project, assessing needs, and the importance of working with the local community and the capabilities that community engagement provides in supporting and enhancing the efforts was essential to promote security and ensure the sustainability of the intervention."

Confidential interview, Director of Foot Police Department, Male, August 12, 2024

This impactful intervention not only improved the quality of life for residents but also showcased the dedication and capabilities of youth-led initiatives in driving positive change. The tangible impact coupled with the commitment to inclusivity and stakeholder engagement, gradually earned the trust and respect of local residents. What has made Youth Leadership Initiative's intervention a real success was that, from a one-thousand US dollars budget to implement their intervention, Youth Leadership Initiative could achieve a fruitful gain through the engagement and participation of multiple stakeholders (Security Management, private sector, local committees and communities) who supported with 38 thousand US dollars to extend the efforts by covering other districts with surveillance systems. The collaborative efforts to address shared challenges and work towards common goals fostered a sense of unity and partnership between youth-led initiatives and local stakeholders, laying the foundation for sustainable peacebuilding initiatives rooted in mutual trust and collaboration.

Case Study Two - Youth-Led Initiatives Promoting Local Security and Community Safety

Integrating community-based and top-down peacebuilding approaches in Yemen has the potential to create a more comprehensive and effective peacebuilding process. While top-down approaches focus on political negotiations and high-level agreements, community-based initiatives, almost led by young men and women, emphasize grassroots participation and local ownership.

In Taiz, the youth-led initiatives understand that the seeds of lasting peace are sown at the grassroots level, emphasizing the importance of resolving local conflicts to establish trust and unity.

Driven by the passion and energy of young individuals, a diverse array of grassroots initiatives in Taiz are actively shaping a path towards positive transformation and peace-building within their communities. By directly addressing the urgent needs of their communities, these youth-driven endeavors not only uplift the well-being of their communities but also fortify the resilience and cohesiveness of the entire community, paving the way for a brighter and harmonious future.



To showcase the narrative, Al-Daym, a village located in Sabir Al Mawadim District, Taiz governorate, was grappling with deteriorating infrastructure, specifically concerning road maintenance, which posed a significant threat to community cohesion and local security. Take My Hand Initiative, a local youth-led initiative in Taiz, recognized the urgent need to address this issue to enhance safety and mobility in the area.

Pre-Intervention Context

The residents of Al-Daym village suffered from recurring conflicts, enduring fatigue and hardship, especially women and children, all for the sake of obtaining a -20liter bottle of water from the elevated communal reservoir at the top of the village. These conflicts significantly impacted the social fabric, creating rifts and disintegration within families. Located far from the city center and district headquarters, the village faced marginalization and deprivation of essential service and developmental projects. “The area had never received any attention or visits from local authorities, nor interventions from local and international civil society organizations.”²⁶ There were no natural water sources like springs or wells, forcing residents to rely on rainwater collected in private cisterns or in a communal reservoir established years before the war by the Social Development Fund to be used as a secondary water source during drought seasons. However, neither the Fund nor any other entity assisted the villagers in connecting and installing a water network from the communal reservoir to ease the burden on the residents, especially women and children, who struggled to climb to the reservoir, gather at its gate, jostle, and argue over water access.

Taking the Lead

Take My Hand Initiative conducted a project study and implemented “The Rainwater Harvesting Communal Reservoir Water Network Installation” project in Al-Daym village, with the support of Youth without Borders Organization for Development (YWBOD). This has so far helped install a water network from the communal reservoir to harvest rainwater and distribute it to residential areas based on a system that allocates a share of water to each individual through a main meter and sub-distribution rooms.

Transformation and Impact

After the installation of the communal reservoir water network by Take My Hand, along with active community participation and contributions, the residents of Al-Daym village are now able to access water easily and conveniently. Through their activity, Take My Hand Initiative not only repaired critical infrastructure but also catalyzed a broader transformation within the community. By fostering a sense of ownership and pride among residents, the initiative instilled a culture of civic responsibility and solidarity. The improved water access conditions not only enhanced local security by reducing violent accidents and crimes but also bolstered social cohesion in the area.

26 Confidential interview, Take My Hand initiative’s leader, male, August 2024 ,3.



As per the initiative's leader, "The impact of the initiative was profound, as it not only addressed a pressing safety concern but also inspired a sense of hope and empowerment among community members."²⁷ The success of this initiative drew the community's attention to other needs of the village, which were subsequently addressed through the voluntary collective efforts. This resulted in raising 3 million Yemeni riyals to launch an intervention to pave the village's internal roads, the rehabilitation of the village school with windows and doors funded by a woman from the village with 2 million riyals, and the extension of another stone aqueduct alongside the existing one to transport water from the mountain to the communal reservoir. Take My Hand Initiative's proactive approach and community engagement to promoting local security and community safety exemplifies the transformative potential of youth-led initiatives in addressing critical issues and fostering positive change at the grassroots level. Through their dedication, innovation, and collaborative spirit, the local-based initiative not only repaired roads but also paved the way for a safer, more resilient, and united community.

27 Confidential interview, Take My Hand initiative's leader, male, August 2024 ,3.



Case Study Three - Addressing Gender Disparities: Strengthening Women's Access to Security Services in Taiz

Diverse efforts have been pursued at the community-level, including myriad women-led initiatives. There is evidence to suggest that the track three level tends to be a more productive space for peacebuilding in Yemen, including in relation to women's meaningful engagement and contribution.²⁸ In Taiz, for example, women-led initiatives have played a key role in addressing gender issues and promoting gender equality, securing access to basic services for their communities, enhancing community resilience and security, and advocacy through media outlets.

Bottom-up peacebuilding in Yemen acknowledges the importance of inclusivity and the active participation of women and marginalized groups. Women have been disproportionately affected by the conflict, facing various forms of violence, displacement, and limited access to resources and opportunities. "Engaging women and marginalized groups in peacebuilding processes can bring diverse perspectives, ensure their specific needs are addressed, and contribute to inclusive and sustainable peace."²⁹ One prominent example is the case of Interactive Women Forum (IWF), a local women initiative in Taiz, which focused on improving security services with a particular emphasis on enhancing the treatment of female detainees.

Setting the Stage: Understanding Gender Security Disparities

In light of the current circumstances and the security deterioration that Taiz city is experiencing due to the ongoing war in the country, the suffering of women has increased. This is due to the rise in crime rates and violent incidents, which have imposed significant challenges on providing basic security services in the city. As a result, women have lost their sense of safety and security. The inadequacy in accessing security services for women has highlighted the social issue of establishing a communication bridge between security authorities and women as a right of women to access security services. This is especially crucial for women in prisons who are facing a scarcity of security services.

"Recognizing the importance of grassroots involvement, empowering women, and addressing the grievances of marginalized groups, bottom-up peacebuilding approaches have the potential to contribute to lasting peace, reconciliation, and social cohesion in Yemen."

Confidential interview, INGO, Governance Program Officer, male, August 2024, 10.

28 Alexander Bramble (2022). "Pathways Towards an Inclusive Peace Process in Yemen." Inclusive Peace. <https://www.inclusivepeace.org/wp-content/uploads/12/2022/Policy-Brief-Pathways-Yemen-Nov-2022-updated-Dec19.pdf>

29 Confidential interview, woman-led initiative, initiative leader, female, August 2024, 7.



Moreover, the lack of awareness and understanding of gender issues within the security services meant that female detainees' specific needs were not adequately addressed. The absence of gender-sensitive protocols and procedures further exacerbated the challenges faced by women in custody, as their experiences and vulnerabilities were not taken into consideration during the legal process. One FGD participant demonstrated, "the existing infrastructure did not cater to the privacy and dignity of female detainees, leading to potential violations of their rights."³⁰ She added, "women police officers lacked the necessary training and skills to effectively handle cases involving female detainees, further exacerbating the challenges faced by women in the justice system."³¹

To address this urgent need, Interactive Women's Forum, and with the support of YWBOD, embarked on a community accountability intervention "Community Accountability for Women's Access to Security Services" to facilitate communication between local security authorities and female citizens, to understand and assess women's specific needs and how best to respond to them. "This aimed to promote human security, human development, and local state-building models, and enhance mutual relationships and trust for the sake of women's security and safety."³² The IWF advocated for reforms to ensure the protection, rights, and dignity of female citizens, and transform the existing practices and policies within the security services to create a more gender-sensitive and inclusive environment for women in custody.

30 FGD with members of youth-led initiatives, Interactive Women Forum, female, July 2024 ,29.

31 Ibid

32 Confidential interview, women-led initiative, initiative leader, female, July 2024 ,31.



Catalyzing Change: Fostering Women's Participation in Security Decision-Making

The Interactive Women Forum's intervention in Taiz was marked by strategic and comprehensive approaches that aimed to empower women, enhance community engagement, and improve access to security services:

1. IWF recognized the importance of collaborating with local security authorities to effect lasting change. By establishing strategic partnerships and signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), IWF solidified its relationship with security institutions, fostering mutual cooperation and commitment towards addressing gender-specific security concerns.
2. IWF actively engaged various stakeholders, including women-led initiatives, activists, media personalities, and civil society organizations working in peace and security. "This multi-stakeholder engagement approach enriched our intervention, bringing diverse perspectives to the table and amplifying the voices advocating for women's rights and safety."³³
3. Throughout the intervention, IWF prioritized gender inclusion and conflict sensitivity at every stage of the activities. By integrating these considerations, IWF ensured a nuanced and responsive approach that not only addressed immediate security needs but also contributed to long-term peacebuilding efforts in the community.
4. IWF organized a hearing session on security services for women, inviting women to share their opinions, stories, and recommendations. "The high participation rate of 90% underscored the success of the session in capturing the diverse perspectives and needs of women, leading to the development of a comprehensive needs assessment report."³⁴
5. As part of community accountability, IWF implemented a Community Evaluation Card tool to assess the quality of security services for women. This tool facilitated feedback from female citizens, identified areas for improvement, and promoted community participation in monitoring and evaluating security services.
6. Another follow-up hearing session was conducted with security authorities and stakeholders to discuss solutions for enhancing security services for women. The session culminated in the identification of key interventions, including the establishment of a dedicated detention room for female detainees and the design of informative panels to guide women accessing security services. IWF, in collaboration with the Women Council, another local women-led initiative, and the Security Department, spearheaded the construction of a room for female detainees in the Family Protection Department of the Taiz Police Security Department. This activity aimed to provide a safe and dignified space for women and girls in detention, reflecting a commitment to respect their rights and well-being.
7. IWF conducted capacity-building sessions of 13 female police officers from various security departments, focusing on peacebuilding, conflict resolution, leadership skills, human rights, and international legislation. These sessions equipped officers with the knowledge and skills to address gender-specific security challenges effectively.

³³ Confidential interview, woman-led initiative, initiative leader, female, July 2024 ,31.

³⁴ Ibid



Building Bridges: Sustainable Impact of Women-Driven Security Solutions

Upon the implementation of the Interactive Women Forum's intervention in Taiz, a profound transformation and significant impact were witnessed. By forging strong partnerships with local security authorities and stakeholders, the IWF successfully advocated for and implemented concrete measures to improve access to security services for women. The establishment of a dedicated detention room for female detainees within the Family Protection Department of the Taiz Police Security Department symbolized a pivotal shift towards creating a safe and dignified space for women and girls in vulnerable situations. "This transformation not only elevated the standards of security provision but also underscored a deep-seated commitment to upholding the rights and well-being of women in the community."³⁵

Community engagement emerged as a cornerstone of the intervention, empowering women to actively participate in shaping security services tailored to their needs and experiences. Through innovative approaches such as hearing sessions and community evaluation tools, women were given a platform to voice their concerns, share insights, and contribute to the development of inclusive security solutions. "The high level of engagement and participation observed during such activities signaled a transformative shift in the dynamics of community involvement, instilling a sense of agency and empowerment among women in Taiz."³⁶

The intervention's holistic approach extended beyond immediate interventions to encompass capacity-building and awareness activities aimed at enhancing the skills and competencies of female police officers. Through tailored sessions focusing on peacebuilding, conflict resolution, leadership, and human rights, female officers were equipped with the tools to address gender-specific security challenges effectively. This investment in capacity-building not only bolstered the capabilities of female officers but also paved the way for a more gender-responsive and inclusive security sector in Taiz. In addition, the collaborative spirit that underpinned the intervention was instrumental in driving sustainable change and fostering institutional partnerships.

"As a Women Police Officer in Taiz, I have witnessed firsthand the transformative impact of the Interactive Women Forum's intervention. Their dedication to enhancing security services for women has not only empowered us to better serve our community but has also instilled a sense of solidarity and support among female officers. I am grateful for their collaboration and commitment to promoting women issues pertaining to their safety and security in our community."

Confidential interview, Taiz Police Department, Women Police Officer female, July 2024 ,30.

35 FGD with members of women-led initiatives, Women Union Initiative, female, July 2024 ,29.

36 Confidential interview, Yemeni CSO chairperson and community activist, female, August 2024 ,4.



. By working closely with the Women Council and Taiz Police Security Department, the IWF facilitated the construction of the detainee room and spearheaded policy advocacy efforts to improve security services for women. “This collaborative approach transcended organizational boundaries and underscored a shared commitment towards promoting woman issues, enhancing security provision, and upholding the rights of women in Taiz.”³⁷

In conclusion, the implementation of the Interactive Women Forum’s intervention yielded a transformative impact that rippled through the fabric of the community, leaving a lasting imprint of empowerment, inclusivity, and progress. If this has to indicate something, the Interactive Women Forum’s intervention in Taiz exemplified a holistic and collaborative approach that leveraged strategic partnerships, community engagement, and capacity-building initiatives to promote gender equality, enhance security services for women, leading to more gender-responsive peacebuilding outcomes.

Case Study Four - Empowering Youth-led Initiatives for Peacebuilding: The Journey of Peace Ambassadors Initiative

In a conflict-affected setting, a group of passionate and determined young men and women came together to form Peace Ambassadors, a local youth-led initiative dedicated to fostering peace and harmony in their community. Driven by a shared vision of a more peaceful and inclusive society, these young leaders embarked on their journey in peacebuilding efforts with unbridled enthusiasm and unwavering commitment. However, as they delved deeper into their mission, Peace Ambassadors encountered a myriad of challenges stemming from significant capacity gaps (i.e., institutional, knowledge, skills) that threatened to impede their progress and hinder their impact on the ground. These capacity gaps posed formidable obstacles that tested the resolve and resilience of the young peacebuilders as they sought to navigate the complexities of peacebuilding work in their community in Taiz. Yet, Peace Ambassadors embarked on a transformative journey towards enhancing their capacity to contribute to peacebuilding efforts. This Case demonstrates that local youth-led initiatives, with empowered leadership and enhanced capacities, have the potential to serve as dynamic agents of change in bottom-up peacebuilding efforts, amplifying community voices and fostering community resilience and sustainable reconciliation.

37 FGD with members of women-led initiatives, Interactive Women Forum and Women Council, female, July ,29 2024.



Navigating Capacity Gaps in Peacebuilding Endeavors

Peace Ambassadors' mechanism for writing project proposals fell short of the mark, failing to set forth community needs, and to meet the stringent requirements of donor agencies. This deficiency not only resulted in missed opportunities for securing crucial funding but also hindered their ability to translate their innovative ideas into impactful projects on the ground. Further, demonstrated by Peace Ambassadors' leader, "we lacked access to field studies or recent research that could substantiate our needs, support our proposals, and highlight the importance of our projects, leading to our previous proposals relying more on assumptions, making them less convincing."³⁸

"In my opinion, almost all the initiatives in the beginning of our work, we lacked several necessary skills. The limited capacities of the teams, especially concerning the analysis of local contexts, mobilization, and community support, have hindered the efforts of the initiatives to implement effective interventions that contribute to peacebuilding within local communities."

Reiterated by all FGDs members from youth-led initiatives, Taiz, July 2024 ,29.

Additionally, a noticeable knowledge gap within the Initiative limited their capacity to enrich their proposals with the depth and nuance necessary to address the complex needs of their community. Lacking a comprehensive understanding of conflict sensitivity and gender mainstreaming, Peace Ambassadors found themselves ill-equipped to design interventions that could effectively mitigate the root causes of conflict and promote gender-inclusive peacebuilding strategies.

Skills gaps further compounded their challenges, as deficiencies in communication, outreach, and advocacy skills hindered their ability to engage with a diverse range of stakeholders and amplify the impact of their initiatives. Some youth-led initiatives members consulted in FGD sessions pointed out that due to gaps in communication, coordination, and networking skills, they encountered some clashes with local authorities and the local communities they aimed to serve.³⁹ They added that the lack of a strong network of relationships with local government entities and communities, led to initial resistance and misunderstandings at the start of their journey, and hindered the achievement of their interventions goals as they had hoped for.

Moreover, the sustainability of local youth-led initiatives, especially emerging ones, when it comes to both institutionally and in terms of human resources, faced significant hurdles due to internal policy gaps, organizational structure limitations, and a lack of commitment and growth among its members.

39 FGDs with youth-led initiatives in Taiz, July 2024 ,29.



. Illustrated by an interviewee, “the institutional weaknesses and the lack of commitment and growth among members of local youth-led initiatives not only threatened the long-term viability of Youth-led Initiatives but also impeded their ability to establish a strong foundation for impactful peacebuilding interventions.”⁴⁰

The impact of capacity gaps on youth-led initiatives in general, Peace Ambassadors in particular, cast a shadow over their peacebuilding interventions, manifesting in missed opportunities, strained relationships, and limited community impact. Without a solid institutional foundation and a dedicated and empowered team, local youth-led initiatives struggled to navigate the complexities of peacebuilding work and establish themselves as credible and impactful players in the field. In essence, the capacity gaps faced by Peace Ambassadors Initiative before receiving targeted capacity-building programs posed substantial barriers to their effectiveness, limiting their potential impact and hindering their progress in contributing meaningfully to peacebuilding efforts.

Empowering Peacebuilding Capacities: The Resilient Evolution of Peace Ambassadors

Peace Ambassadors Initiative embarked on a transformative journey of capacity-building programs that served as a turning point in their quest to enhance their peacebuilding efforts. Peace Ambassadors expressing their experience when they were targeted by YWBOD to involve in “Active Communities” project, “the programs we underwent within Active Communities project were carefully designed to address our critical capacity gaps and empower us with the skills, knowledge, and tools needed to navigate complex peacebuilding challenges effectively.”⁴¹ The capacity-building programs focused on several key areas essential for Peace Ambassadors Initiative’s growth and impact. Demonstrated by Peace Ambassadors’ leader, “the proficiency in proposal writing helped us continue in Active Communities project throughout its -3year stages and we could get funding opportunities to three projects.”⁴²

“Through our participation in Active Communities project, we benefited greatly from a variety of capacity-building programs that encompassed project proposal writing, budgeting, financial reporting mechanisms, governance, social accountability, context and conflict analysis, conflict sensitivity, gender mainstreaming, and local mediation. Indeed, Active Communities project proved to be a transformative milestone in enhancing our capacities, equipping us with the ability to craft proposals that meet the requirements of donor agencies through clear structuring, and present measurable objectives aligned with specific criteria.”

Reiterated by all FGDs members from youth-led initiatives, Taiz, July 2024 ,29.

40 Confidential interview, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) & Founder of a local CSO, male, August 2024 ,11.

42 FGD, members of Peace Ambassadors Initiative, Taiz, July 2024 ,29.

43 Confidential interview, youth-led initiative, initiative leader, female, August 2024 ,7.



Moreover, the programs honed Peace Ambassadors Initiative's conflict sensitivity and gender mainstreaming capabilities, providing them with a deeper understanding of the dynamics of conflict and the importance of gender-inclusive approaches in peacebuilding activities. Peace Ambassadors' members underwent training to enhance their ability to engage with diverse stakeholders, build strategic partnerships, and advocate for sustainable peacebuilding solutions effectively. The institutional strengthening in terms of internal policies, organizational structures, and a culture of commitment and growth bolstered the Initiative's resilience and capacity to weather challenges, ensuring continuity in their peacebuilding efforts and fostering a culture of innovation and collaboration.

Through targeted interventions that addressed their capacity gaps, Peace Ambassadors Initiative emerged as a well-established and capable local entity, driving positive change, capable of driving sustainable peacebuilding initiatives and inspiring a new generation of peacebuilders in their community. Their journey from struggle to strength exemplified the transformative power of capacity-building interventions in empowering local entities (i.e., Track III local youth-led initiatives) to lead the charge towards a more peaceful and inclusive future in Yemen.



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YWBOB, Active Communities, and Author

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YWBOB

Established in April 2013, YWBOB is a non-governmental, non-profit, civil society organization working on youth empowerment, peacebuilding and development in Yemen. YWBOB has the strategic vision to be the pioneer platform for young men and women engaging in peacebuilding programs in Yemen. Since its establishment, YWBOB seeks to empower young changemakers in a peaceful, coherent and inclusive context in Yemen, supporting the effective roles of young people in local and national policies to contribute to development and peace. This has resulted in strong partnerships and collective work towards impactful and sustainable results for the empowerment of young men and women and their engagement in community security, community resilience and conflict resolution, recovery and reconstruction, humanitarian relief and livelihoods.

Active Communities Project

Active Communities: Peacebuilding from the Ground Up in Yemen is a three-year project implemented by YWBOB in partnership with Saferworld Organization and with the support of the Irish Aid. Its overall objective is to ensure that communities across Yemen are more stable and resilient to shocks, and support an inclusive peace process capable of producing a sustainable long-term political settlement. The project commenced in September 2021 and continued through 2022 in three governorates: Taiz, Aden and Abyan.

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