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Social capital in Yemen

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Question

What are the different forms of social capital existing in Yemen and the extent to which such social capital helps or hinders the ability of individuals, households and communities to cope with the current humanitarian crisis in Yemen?

Contents

1. Overview

Social capital in Yemen is informed primarily by tribal affiliation, particularly in rural areas and in the north. Other important sources including faith based institutions, local community solidarity initiatives, civil society organisations and support from the diaspora. While social capital has been eroded due to political, social and economic changes in recent years, the strong traditions of community self-help and dispute mediation continue to be important for some communities during the current crisis. However, given the local diversity of impact, resilience and coping strategies, local level analyses are key to understanding social capital in individual communities.

This rapid review has not found much literature that specifically applies the concept 'social capital'[1] in research or analysis on Yemen. Therefore the review has taken a wide approach to search for relevant literature on Yemen's societal institutions and relations.

There appears to be relatively limited recent in-depth research on social structures in Yemen (compared with the richer ethnographic literature on tribes in the North twenty or thirty years ago, for example[2]). However, this rapid review has found a small literature from the last decade on social institutions as well as patterns of exclusion and vulnerability in the country prior to the outbreak of the current crisis in 2015. This ranges from academic historical analyses of Yemeni tribes and society (e.g. Lackner, 2016; Gledhill, 2017); a focus on alternative dispute resolution (e.g. Gaston and al-Dawsari, 2014) and civil society intermediary organisations (Bonnefoy and Poirier, 2009); to social analyses by donors (e.g. the World Bank's 2006 country social).

Due to the current humanitarian crisis, there is limited up-to-date research and data on the impact of the conflict. Some of it is anecdotal (and included in this review to show the type of evidence and findings that are in circulation). Humanitarian mappings of communities' needs help identify where social capital is under strain, while some international organisations are reporting on household and community coping strategies.

The literature and experts caution against generalising about Yemen and social capital because of the wide variety of local dynamics. This rapid review has tried hard to identify available local analyses, while also reflecting literature that provides an over-arching narrative on Yemen's societal institutions and their changing characteristics over time. This rapid review has identified a couple of relevant primary in-depth qualitative studies that ask community focus groups about their communities' coping strategies, resilience and cohesion: notably by Al-Dawsari for Oxfam in 2014 in western Yemen; by UNDP in 2015 (UNDP, 2015; 2016a,b,c); and Oxfam in 2016 (Gressman, 2016; Moodley, 2016). More research is required in local areas to establish the ongoing impact of the conflict on social capital at the household and community level.

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[1] There is no single definition of social capital. A useful definition is provided by Aldrich & Smith (2015): the connections and ties that bond individuals to others on a daily basis. Aldrich and Smith further categorise this into three different forms: Bonding social capital (between quite similar people such as family members, neighbours, or extended kin); bridging social capital (between individuals different in critical ways who share an institution or interest); and linking social capital (the vertical ties between citizens and decision makers).

[2] It was beyond the scope of this rapid review to investigate this older body of literature. Stabilisation Unit (2012, p.3) identifies the following academic experts as being at the forefront of this research - Paul Dresch, Steve Caton, Shelagh Weir and Najwa Adra.

Key findings include:

- A **wide variety of local dynamics affects social capital** in Yemen: generalisations should be avoided. Given the local diversity, local level analyses are key to understanding social capital in individual communities.

- **Social capital in Yemen is informed primarily by tribal affiliation, but it is also important to appreciate that tribes are neither homogenous nor ubiquitous**. Faith based institutions, local community solidarity initiatives, other civil society organisations and support from the diaspora are other important sources of social capital. There is considerable interplay between the institutions informing social capital, in particular given the centrality of tribes to Yemeni society.

- **Social capital is affected by geography, gender and other vulnerabilities**:
  - Tribal structures are strongest in rural northern highlands and weakest in south Yemen. However, regions are not homogenous: for example tribal dispute resolution is still important in some southern areas (Gaston and al-Daswari, 2014, p.3).
  - Large segments of the population do not belong to tribes and other forms of social organisation (e.g. belonging to a specific village or urban centre) are prevalent in a number of regions (Bonnefoy and Poirier, 2009, p.6).
  - Women have less access to social capital than men. The traditionally marginalised – in particular the ethnic outcast Muhamasheen – have little or no social capital.

- **Benefits of Yemen's community institutions** include "strong traditions of deliberative decision making, dispute resolution mechanisms, principles for balancing private and collective interests for beneficial resource use, and protecting the interests of the socially vulnerable" (World Bank, 2015, p.82).

- **Challenges include recent political, social and economic change** that has eroded social capital, changing patterns of exclusion and driving conflict and political instability (Adra, 2006, p. 4, World Bank, 2016, p.2).

- **Impact of the conflict since 2015 on social capital**: communities face varied conflict experiences and multi-dimensional impacts. This review has found limited recent data.
  - The assessments identified by this rapid review report that social support and conflict resolution remain important for some communities, while others are struggling to respond to the impacts of the crisis (UNDP 2015; 2016a,b,c; Moodley, 2016).
  - The conflict has affected social dynamics within communities, tending to increase social polarisation and unequal access to social safety nets (OCHA, 2016, p.40). There is a fear that even if the war stops, local violent disputes will continue. Armed groups are becoming entrenched as powerful (but unaccountable) authorities (Moodley, 2016, p.8-9).
  - The most vulnerable are people affected by displacement, women, children, minorities, and refugees and migrants (OCHA, 2016).
  - There are reports of positive responses by women, the private sector and other local organisations. Humanitarian agency policy recommendations include providing support to women-led grassroots organisations; to local organisations' in the humanitarian response, including the private sector; and establishing genuine community participation in local delivery of humanitarian assistance with special attention to women and marginalised groups. (El Taraboulsi-McCarthy et al, 2017; Gressman, 2016; Moodley, 2016; OCHA, 2016).

2. Social capital prior to the current humanitarian crisis

Different forms of social capital in Yemen

1) Tribal affiliation

Often described as 'a tribal society', the majority of Yemen's rural population (more than 70 per cent) identify as tribal members, according to a World Bank report on societal dynamics and fragility (Marc et al, 2013, p.111). Tribes have played an important role as an intermediary between state and society in Yemen in the context of a majority rural population and weak or absent state structures (Bonnefoy and Poirier, 2009, p.6). They have been at the centre of political, economic, judicial and military power in rural areas in Yemen for centuries (Marc et al, 2013, p. 98; Gledhill, 2017, p.174; Bonnefoy and Poirer, 2009: p.6; Adra, 2016, p.303).

Yemen has never had a strong central state (Al-Iranyi et al, 2015, p. 329; Gledhill, 2017, p.164). Following Yemen's 1990 unification, civil war in 1994 debilitated state structures. Political patronage held Yemen together under President Ali Abdullah Saleh (President for 33 years) but did not establish state authority throughout the country (Gledhill, 2017, p.173-174). With the collapse of Saleh's regime in 2011 resource competition intensified, further weakening state structures (p.174). Formal justice has been mostly absent outside the main towns, and particularly weak in areas with a strong tribal history (Gaston and Al-Dawsari, 2014, p.6). (Since 2015 the humanitarian crisis has incapacitated state services; see Section 5 for more details.)

A 2014 qualitative primary research study on social capital in eight villages in two governates (Hajjah and Al Hodeida) in west Yemen found that the tribal structure, while relatively weak compared with the central region, was 1) still active in facilitating access to limited public services and 2), as in other places, played a key role in dispute resolution (Al-Dawsari, 2014).

An important point is that tribes have not been homogenous or ubiquitous in Yemen. There are significant geographical variations[3], including between North and South, and rural and urban areas. There are other important non-tribal groups (Stabilisation Unit, 2012, p.1). Moreover tribal influence has depended on whether the tribal leader has been co-opted by the state, and what interests he represented (p.1). See World Bank (2006) for a more detailed account of the geographic characteristics of tribal institutions and historical development.

2) Faith based institutions

Most citizens are Muslim, belonging to Shafi-Sunni communities (65 per cent) and Zaydi-Shia (estimated 35 per cent of the population) (United States Department of State, 2015, p.1-2). With Islam the official religion and Sharia constitutionally the source of all legislation, Yemen has had a long history of religious moderation, with amicable relations between the two predominant Islamic sects and the rights of non-Muslim religious minorities[4] generally respected in practice (United States Department of State, 2012, p.1; Freedom House, 2016).

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[3] Tribes in Yemen are distinct from those in other Middle Eastern countries in that they are sedentary and territorial, and consanguinity is not necessarily a defining factor of membership. (Stabilisation Unit, 2012, p.1)

4 Minorities include approximately 15,000 Ismaili Muslims are concentrated in the Haraz district near Sana'a; an indeterminate number of Twelver Shia (residing mainly in the north) and Sufis; as well as Jews, Bahais, Hindus,

World Bank (2006, p. 51) found that Yemeni "religious and cultural values are important in reinforcing traditional mechanisms of solidarity and resolution mechanisms by recalling principles of generosity, support to the weak, fairness, reconciliation and integrity". Islamic practice and mutual self-help norms include the tradition of alms giving to the poor (p.51).

Bonnefoy and Poirier (2009, p.8) find that through systems of religious taxation ('zakat') and endowments, and a dense network of mosques in Yemen as well as connections with transnational networks, the Islamic realm has provided welfare, education and justice. They found it largely decentralised and independent, with small local actors managing mosques, schools and Islamic courts (p.8). Religious based social networks like the female Quranic study groups mobilised for the Islah Charitable society or the Islah Islamist party (p.9). At the same time however, the central state also became a major religious actor, collecting the zakat, appointing imams and establishing its own network of religious educational institutions (p.8).

3) Local community solidarity

Experts consider Yemen to have had a "rich history of both community participation and grassroots-level community-based institutions", with tribes the most prominent informal institution (Baas and Ali, 2005, p.8).

From the 1970s a local vibrant cooperative movement, which started in North Yemen in the central region of Taez[5] and spread out, undertaking education, health and infrastructure activities through mutual aid (Bonnefoy and Poirer, 2009, p.17). This lost some effectiveness during the 1980s after being subsumed into the state's administration (p.17). In 2006 the World Bank reported that there continued to be active community solidarity initiatives, from collectively managing water crises to collaborative labour for building and maintaining local infrastructure and other community assets (p.51-52). Carapico (1998) highlighted that the early activities were overwhelmingly financed from non-central sources, in particular by remittances.

The national Social Fund for Development in Yemen has been widely cited as a positive example donor supported community driven development in a fragile environment (Gisselquist, 2015, p.288). It was established in 1997 to combat national poverty and reinforce the limited existing social safety net (Al-Iranyi et al, 2015, p.321). By 2012 the programme reached almost a quarter of Yemen's villages (Gisselquist, 2015, p.288). Al-Iranyi et al (2015, p.329) find that SFD successfully adapted to Yemen's social and political context by giving an important role to the community in setting its priorities and implementing its programmes.

There have also been successful interventions promoting social inclusion of marginalised populations in Sana'a City and Taiz including through collaboration among a wide number stakeholders: national and local government, private sector, civil society and the shanty dwellers themselves (World Bank, 2006, p.50).

The literature highlights that it can be difficult to isolate a community-based organisation (CBO) from the tribe as a social institution; moreover CBOs have been highly vulnerable to tribal conflicts, depending on the local setting (Baas and Ali, 2005, p.9; Carapico, 1998).

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and Christians, many of whom are refugees or temporary foreign residents, comprising less than 1 percent of the population (U.S. Department of State, 2015, p.1,2)

[5] Place names are included in this report as spelt in the source material and are not standardised.

4) Civil society organisations

Unification in 1990 brought greater democratic freedom and civil society – including political parties, free press and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) – flourished before curtailment by the 1994 civil war (Bonnefoy and Poirer, 2009). In 2009 analysts found that Yemen was still characterised by "a vigorous and dynamic civil society" with about 5,000 registered NGOs. Half of these undertook charitable activities; the others social and cooperative work (especially in the agricultural sector), development issues, the promotion of democracy and human rights and women's empowerment (p.10-11).

5) Diaspora

The Yemeni diaspora has played an important role in supporting families back home, with remittances a key source of income in many rural communities (World Bank, 2015, p.88). 6 to 7 million Yemenis have settled in over 40 countries across Asia, Europe, Africa, and North America[6]. In particular Yemeni nationals migrated to the Gulf States – especially Saudi Arabia – for economic and security reasons (Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat, 2017). Officially estimated at around USD 3.3 billion a year, remittances accounted for 8.9 per cent of GDP in 2015[7] (World Bank, 2017, p.27). It is likely that additional significant remittances are transferred through informal networks due to the poor penetration of financial services in the country[8].

Factors determining type and strength of social capital

1) Wide variety of local dynamics

Generalisations about social capital in Yemen are difficult to make because of the wide variety of narrowly defined identity groups that fragment Yemeni society (Marc et al, 2013, p.52). The government patronage system has exacerbated these divisions by co-opting clans, religious groups and regional leaders, switching allegiance when necessary, creating competition between subgroups and a sense of incompatibility between identities (p.52). Academics studying Yemen tribalism recommend understanding Yemen society by looking at geography and the local community, rather than just the tribe (Stabilisation Unit, 2012, p.4).

The literature provides summaries of the **geographical prevalence and character of tribal structures[9]** (and therefore tribal social capital), and details **regions' distinct cultural and political histories**. It is noteworthy that the literature has also stressed Yemen's strong sense of national identity (World Bank, 2006, p.52). Key points include:

- Tribal structures have been strongest in rural northern highlands and in the desert along the borders with Saudi Arabia, where the population historically belongs to the two major tribal confederations, the Hashid and Bakil (Gaston and Al-Daswari, 2014, p.3; Hales,

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[6] http://www.ye.undp.org/content/yemen/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2015/12/21/yemen-our-home-innovative-online-platform-connects-yemeni-diaspora-with-local-communities-in-need.html

[7] http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.DT.GD.ZS?locations=YE&name_desc=true

[8] http://www.ye.undp.org/content/yemen/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2015/12/21/yemen-our-home-innovative-online-platform-connects-yemeni-diaspora-with-local-communities-in-need.html

[9] See Stabilisation Unit (2012, p.6) for a geographical mapping of Yemeni tribes.

2010, p.5) In North Yemen (former Yemen Arab Republic), in the early 1960s, tribes were formally incorporated in the state structure, and up to present day provide political support for the central regime for political and economic benefits (Marc et al, 2013, p.99).

- In lower uplands around Taiz and Ibb and along the Red Sea coast up through Hudeida, tribal traditions exist and have been dominant in some communities, but overall weaker than more northern areas. (Gaston and Al-Daswari, 2014, p.3)

- Tribal structures have been weakest in south Yemen, particularly in Aden (Gaston and Al-Daswari, 2014, p.3). In the South (former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen), the British colonisation minimised the role of tribes in urban areas (particularly the port town of Aden) and the controlling Socialist Party (1967-1989) undermined tribal structures to favour state mechanisms (Marc et al, 2013, p.99; Gaston and al-Dawsari 2014, p.3). After unification in 1990, the incorporation of tribal leaders into formal institutions was reinforced (p.99). However, in non-tribal southern governates, tribal dispute resolution is still important, in particular since the formal provision has weakened since 2011 (Gaston and al-Dawsari, 2014, p.6).

- Viewing Yemen as fragmented along North/South lines does not fit the complex reality (according to Ardemagni, 2016b in her London School of Economic blog post). The South is not a homogenous actor; regional and tribal identities feed local agendas. See Marc et al (2013, p.52-53) for further detail on regional and other identities and divisions.

The World Bank's 2006 country social analysis provides a **regional breakdown of livelihood strategies** (and how they are changing) across the country's main geographic zones (rural–Highland, Tihama, Eastern Plateau, Arabian Sea – and strategies). While not about social capital per se, the geographic analysis offers some insight into communities' different stresses and coping strategies.

Urban areas: many urban Yemenis have identified with their tribal heritage and in the past may use tribal customs to resolve their conflicts (particularly in Sana'a, located in a predominantly tribal area (Gaston and Al-Dawsari, 2014, p.3) However, overall tribal dispute resolution has been less prevalent in urban areas because they tended to have some functioning formal justice mechanisms and other nontribal dispute resolution (such as commercial arbitration) (p.3). World Bank (2006, p.30) found that in urban centres patron-client ties with wealthy individuals who have links to the states were important, while networks of solidarity were weak, due to the stresses of urban life and heterogeneity of people in the towns/cities (p.31). Nevertheless in some areas (e.g. Yarim and Attaq) tribal solidarity networks remained strong (p.31).

Non-tribal communities: Bonnefoy and Poirier (2009, p.6) highlight that large segments of the population have not belonged to tribes. Other forms of social organisation (e.g. belonging to a specific village or urban centre) were prevalent in a number of regions, al-Hujariyya for instance (p.6).

2) Gender

"Gender relations in Yemen are shaped by diverse religious, cultural, social and political traditions. They are complex, and vary across the north and south of the country, between urban and rural areas, and between different tribes and generations." (Gressman, 2016, p.3).

A key point is that "historically, women in Yemen have had much less power in society than men" (p.3).Yemen is a patriarchal society and tribal ideology and leadership is male dominated (Adra,

2016, p.316). Women's safety nets have depended on their male relatives, and their resources have been limited without family support (Heinze, 2016, p.1). Al-Dawsri's 2014 focus groups in western Yemen reported that women face higher barriers to accessing tribal actors (p.3). This situation was attenuated by rural women's economic (agricultural) contributions as well as tribal egalitarian norms (Adra, 2016, p.316).

There have been geographical differences. In the north conservative interpretations of Islam has limited the role of women to family affairs, and in urban areas, the seclusion of women has been the social ideal. In the south, socialist ideology led to two generations of highly educated and empowered women leaders in urban areas (particularly in the former capital Aden) (Heinze, 2016, p.2). In 2006 the World Bank identified strong political will for addressing challenges to gender equity and promotion of women's economic inclusion and political voice, with a vibrant (if fragmented) women's movement (p.50).

3) Traditionally marginalised

The minority group Akdham (which translates as a perjorative term for 'the servants') – or as they prefer to be called, the Muhamasheen or 'marginalised ones' – have a distinct cultural and ethnic heritage from the majority Yemeni population[10] (Marc et al, 2013, p.120). They have been traditionally marginalised in Yemen, socially discriminated against for centuries as inferior "untouchable" outcasts (p.120; All Youth Network for Community Development and International Dalit Solidarity Network World, 2012, p.4). Falling outside the tribal and societal structure, they have little access to redress or mediation (El Rajii, 2016, p.12).

People born in Yemen of Somali ancestry also face discrimination, as do the thousands of refugees from the Horn of Africa who are routinely subject to theft, abuse and even murder (p.120; Freedom House, 2015).

Benefits of social capital

In 2015 the World Bank surmised that:

> "The performance of community institutions varies and is vulnerable to intervention and the capture of benefits by influential people, but the country has **strong traditions of deliberative decision making, dispute resolution mechanisms, principles for balancing private and collective interests for beneficial resource use, and protecting the interests of the socially vulnerable**." (p.82)

Benefits of tribal (and other) institutions[11] found in the literature reviewed include:

- Tribal culture (although often intertwined with government) is considered to have played **a critical role in the balance of power** in contemporary Yemen; preventing the development of an autocratic state, promoting political dialogue and consensus-building at the national level; and checking the escalation of violence in parts of Yemen following

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[10] According to some, the Muhamasheen account for up to 10 per cent of the population (El Rajji, 2016, p.12).

[11] Recent analysis highlights that tribalism in Yemen has often been misunderstood, considered ahistorically despite changes that have taken place over decades, and subject to multiple prejudices (Lackner, 2016, p.1).

the dissolution of state capacity in 2011 (Bonnefoy and Poirer, 2009, p.7; Al-Dawsari, 2012, p.1; Gledhill, 2017). Local religious leaders have also played a role in encouraging peaceful conflict resolution and reconciliation (Gaston and Al-Dawsari, 2014, p.4).

- The tribal system has provided **structures and consistent customary laws** ('urf'), enforced using various social sanctions, mediation and "reciprocal obligations of cooperation among their members (Marc et al, 2013, p.99; Gledhill, 2017, p.174; Bonnefoy and Poirer, 2009, p.6; Adra, 2016, p.310-11).

- Communities have also traditionally played "a **significant role in the management of local resources such as land and water**, providing not only a basic framework of property rights that control access, but also rules regulating use, including rainwater harvesting, grazing, and irrigation" (World Bank, 2015, p. 82).

- **Tribal dispute resolution** is considered to have effectively handled a range of conflicts, from civil, commercial, and personal status issues to criminal justice, intertribal disputes, and conflict mediation (Gaston and Al-Dawsari, 2014, p.4). These involve conflicts between tribes, between tribes and extractive companies, and between tribes and the government (Al-Dawsari (2012, p.1). Tribal mediation has worked to maintain community cohesion through mediation and consensus rather than coercion (Adra, 2015, p.302; Gledhill, 2017, p.174). Local religious leaders have also been involved in peaceful conflict resolution, acting as mediators in tribal areas and more traditionally nontribal urban areas (e.g. Aden and Taiz) (Gaston and Al-Dawsari, 2014, p.4).

- **Tribal tradition of dialogue**: daily sessions of qat chewing have provided an important informal forum for socialising, conducting business, discussing current events, dispute mediation and religious instruction (Marc et al, 2013, p.48, 71; Bonnefoy and Poirier, 2009, p.6).

- **Flexible and inclusive tribal organisation**, has enabled "groups of varying size to mobilise quickly and effectively to accomplish given tasks", enhancing communities' ability to adapt to changing circumstances (Adra, 2016, p.310-311)

There is also some discussion in the literature of the benefits of community solidarity activities and mutual aid culture in Yemen. For example:

- Carapico (1998, p.132) found the **cumulative economic, political, and social effect of local community cooperative projects** from the 1970s was immense, contributing to the rapid modernisation and commercialisation of small towns and farm districts as well as state's capacity to extend out. Everyday life was profoundly changed by the introduction of roads, schools, running water, electricity, and primary health care.

- Pournik and Abu-Ismail (2011) found that **rural areas had lower inequality** than urban areas due to the importance in rural areas of traditional forms of community managed social solidarity arrangements.

Challenges of social capital

The literature highlights how in recent years – prior to the current humanitarian crisis – **political, social and economic change were eroding social capital, changing patterns of exclusion, and driving conflict and political instability** (Adra, 2006, p. 4, World Bank, 2016, p.2). In its 2016 country engagement note, the World Bank (2016, p.2) found that deep-rooted structural drivers include:

- "Weak state legitimacy, authority, and capacity".
- "Decades of elite capture based on (co-opted) tribal structures".
- "Dwindling natural resources (water, oil, and cultivable and livable land) and additional economic pressures".
- "Society fragmentation (tribal, geographical, and sectarian) complicating national identity and prospects for a unifying vision for the state".
- "Political, economic, and social exclusion which has a strong spatial dimension contributing to the country's fragility".

Analyses of **changes in the social structure** have identified the development of a new class system based on wealth and a devaluation of traditional safety nets for the poor (Adra, 2006, p.4; World Bank, 2006). The co-optation of customary leaders – tribal sheiks – into the formal state system has led to problems of loss of accountability and increased opportunity for corruption (Marc et al, 2013, p.5, 99-100 Adra, 2006, p.4; Lackner, 2016, p.13). With selected tribal leaders enjoying a new level of power and impunity, many poor people have been excluded from justice, security and political participation (Adra, 2006, p.4; World Bank, 2006, p.39).

Economic changes have also had an impact on social capital. Yemen has had to contend with a doubling of the population, profound water shortages, alongside the impacts of the economic crisis. One outcome has been a rise in unemployment and an increasingly frustrated and disaffected youth, who have felt excluded by elites from political decision-making and economic opportunities (Lackner, 2016, p.13). Research on the social impact of the economic crisis found "although many people reported borrowing from each other to get by, on the whole, there was a sense that informal social support had started to decline" (Hossain et al, 2010, p. 39).

Back in 2006, Adra's social exclusion analysis found that with **rapid growth of towns and cities**, many new urban residents lacked support networks and safety nets, contributing to their exclusion from justice, income security and services (p.4). The landless poor were particularly vulnerable. They were largely concentrated in squatter settlements in Yemen's towns and cities, especially in the southern governorates (p.4). Meanwhile the strain of growing urban populations on service delivery systems led to further declining capacity to deliver services to rural areas – and the progressive marginalisation and exclusion of rural communities with concomitant conflict and security implications (p.5).

Since the 2011 Arab spring protests, Yemen has "suffered deep insecurity" from **national, regional and local power struggles and conflicts** (Gledhill, 2017, p.175-6). With weakening state institutions, this has led in some areas to "a retribalisation", while in others new, armed actors dominate (Gaston and Al-Dawsari, 2014, p.1, 11). The **rise of radicalisation** and the growth of the radical Al-Qaeda in Arab Peninsula (AQAP) and Islamic State in Iraq and Levant groups has further destabilised the country (World Bank, 2016, p. 2).

Political uncertainty, deteriorating rule of law and increased criminality has weakened formal and informal actors' ability to resolve disputes and prevent conflict (Gaston and Al-Dawsari, 2014, p.1). Hales (2010, p.4) finds a number of (anecdotal) reports of the gradual erosion of customary norms controlling the use of guns, an increasingly common recourse to arms to resolve conflicts, as well as a strong association between the proliferation of weapons and the rapid escalation of disputes (p.4) (see also World Bank, 2006, p.51).

3. Social capital during the current crisis (since 2015)

Varied conflict experiences

There is literature highlighting how the latest conflict is being played out in different areas of the country, which will impact on local social capital[12]. For example, this is illustrated by a paper on local governance by Adam Smith International choosing three areas undergoing different local challenges: Sanaa, under the control of the Houthis and their allies; Wessab, in central Yemen, controlled by local councils in coordination with the central government in the capital; and Aden in South Yemen, under the nominal control of the internationally recognised government. There are also reports that armed confrontations have devastated individual places, in some areas creating enclaves where the civilian population has limited movement and humanitarian access almost non-existent (e.g. in one of the main cities, Taiz) (El Rajji, 2016, p. 6).

Multi-dimensional impact of the conflict

There are humanitarian reports that assess the impact of the conflict since 2015. The accounts of the high negative impact of the conflict on all areas of life in Yemen since 2015 involve an impact on social resilience and cohesion, and therefore on social capital. The OCHA 2016 assessment found that the escalating crisis since March 2015 has "created a vast protection crisis in which millions face risks to their safety and basic rights, and are struggling to survive" (OCHA, 2016, p.3, p.5). "An estimated 18.8 million people in Yemen need some kind of humanitarian or protection assistance, including 10.3 million who are in acute need" (p.3). The report provides an assessment by district of the severity of needs, which can help show where and to what degree social capital is likely to be under strain.

Impact on community self-help

Anecdotal evidence from a Yemeni strategist reported in *The Independent* highlights that whereas Yemenis traditionally help each other through lending money and other assistance through friends and neighbours, the impact of the conflict means that people cannot afford to do this any more. Salaries have not been paid and there is no capital to lend. "It's a cultural shift which is ripping at the very fabric of Yemeni society and changing how people treat each other."[13] However, an analyst from the International Crisis Group reporting from Sanaa relays her impression that while "Yemen's social fabric has been stretched and frayed" it is "not torn completely. Communities are working together at the local level to feed those in need"[14].

In 2015, six months after the start of the conflict, a UNDP "Voices of Yemen" consultation in six governates[15] found that, with incapacitated local authorities, community based social support – within and outside of families – was considered more important (UNDP, 2015). Better off

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[12] See Baron (2016) for a detailed overview of the conflict characteristics at play in different areas of the country.

[13] http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/yemen-saudi-arabia-civil-war-geneva-aid-summit-arms-sales-a7702021.html

[14] https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/yemen/counter-productive-isolation-proud-and-hungry-sanaa

[15] Sharjab Community, Taiz Governorate; Ma'een, Sho'ub and Alsab'een districts, Sana'a Governorate; Al Mukalla City, Hadhramout Governorate; Hajjah city, Abs and Haradh districts; Alsayani Area, Ibb Governorate; and Sahar, Saada Governorate.

Yemenis or immigrants were helping poor relatives while communities were using their own methods of conflict resolution including to deal with tensions over influxes of internally displaced people. The consultation reports illustrate the different needs, tensions and coping responses in individual communities. See the Annex for further findings for the individual communities.

UNDP also carried out several resilience monitor assessments between August and September 2015covering 1,152 families across six governorates[16]. Findings include:

- **Financial access**: After six months of conflict informal credit remained the main source of financial capital for families, but it reduced from 47 per cent to 39 per cent. 13 per cent of households still had access to international remittances, as compared with 23 per cent before. (UNDP, 2016a)
- **Coping strategies**: The most frequently cited coping strategy used in the last 30 days was to borrow food/money to buy essential items, or rely on help from friends or relatives. Nearly 6 per cent of families participated in community-based relief initiatives. (UNDP, 2016b)

A protection assessment by Oxfam, involving 96 individual respondents in Aden, Amran, Hajjah and Taiz [17,] reports that "Very few people said they receive remittances from relatives working in the Gulf" (Moodley, 2016, p.5).

Social cohesion

The conflict has affected social dynamics within communities, increasing social polarisation and unequal access to social safety nets (OCHA, 2016, p.40). The UNDP Resilience Monitor found that a majority of people interviewed in six governorates did not perceive strong solidarity within their community or within neighbouring communities. In Aden Governorate and Sana'a city, more than 30 per cent of people interviewed said they have problems among community members on at least one of three issues: access to livelihoods, natural resources or living spaces (UNDP, 2016c). In its consultation exercise "Voices of Yemen", UNDP found that most local conflicts stem from disputes over land and water resources (UNDP, 2015)

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[16] For the resilience monitors, UNDP collected data at the household level from the following governorates: Abyan; Aden; Hajjah; Sa'ada; Sana'a; and Taiz (UNDP, 2016a,b,c).

[17] "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 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." The briefing paper mentions that the report will be forthcoming in 2016 but this rapid review was not able to find a published version. (*cited as Oxfam. (Forthcoming 2016). Understanding Affected Communities in Yemen. Protection Assessment. Sana'a, Yemen: Oxfam. Conducted January to May 2016.*)

Oxfam's protection assessment found that the majority of people said criminality had increased and crimes went unpunished (Moodley, 2016, p.8). The assessment found that "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" (p.8). Despite this, Oxfam's protection assessment found that across all regions included in the research "relations between displaced people and host communities are generally sound" (Moodley, 2016, p.12).

There is a fear that even if the war stops, because of the wide variety of local dynamics and grievances, revenge killings and violent disputes will continue (Al-Dawsari, 2016, p.28; UNDP, 2015). Regional divides have been exacerbated, with most southerners claiming they want secession from the north, and tensions between and within local communities and tribes heightened (Al-Dawsari, 2016, p.3). Increasing violent sectarianism (between Sunni and Zaidi Shi'a Muslims, and the Sunni militant groups and Shi'a Houthis in particular), as well as the rise of extremist groups such as AQAP and the IS, risk impacting on post-conflict societal relations (Freedom House, 2016; Baron, 2016, p.7; El Rajji, 2016, p.3, 8; Al-Muslimi, 2015).

The Oxfam protection assessment found that "Amidst the ongoing instability, armed groups are further entrenched as more powerful (yet unaccountable) authorities. … 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." (Moodley, 2016, p.8-9)

Impact on population groups

The crisis is impacting population groups differently: the most vulnerable are people affected by displacement, women, children, minorities, and refugees and migrants (OCHA, 2016, p.15).

Internally displaced people (IDPs): As of February 2017, the crisis had caused approximately 2 million IDPs and 1 million IDP returnees, with the highest number residing in Hajjah, Taiz, Amanat, Al Asimah and Sana'a governorates (FAO, 2017). IDPs and returnees are putting strain on host communities already struggling to cope, increasing tensions as resources become scarcer (FAO, 2017; UNDP, 2015).

Women and children: From a qualitative study by Oxfam, CARE and GenCap,[18] Gressman (2016, p.3) finds overall gender relations are deteriorating, with women marginalised from participation in decision-making forums. Recent proliferation of externally funded Wahhabism, Salafi and other forms of politicised Islam threaten women's empowerment with their conservative message (Adra, 2016, p.326). Women have limited mobility, and lack access to resources, livelihood opportunities, and protection (Alwazir et al, 2016). Women and girls face

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[18] "The assessment built on CARE's and OXFAM's gender assessment tools and used a combined methodology including a secondary data review, 544 household interviews, 40 Focus Group Discussions, and 32 in-depth interviews with significant individuals and officials. The assessment was supplemented by case studies/stories collected from from participants and civil society to validate and exemplify the research findings. The geographical scope of the assessment included the areas in Yemen with the most severe needs - Aden, Taiz, Hajjah, and Abyan governorates." (Gressman, 2016, p.3)

various forms of gender based violence while children continue to be killed and maimed, separated from families and subject to exploitation (OCHA, 2016, p.35).

Minorities: The war has had a devastating impact on the Muhamasheen, in particular because the cities most affected by conflict (Aden, Taiz, and Hodeida) had large concentrations of Muhamasheen (El Rajji, 2016, p.13). They lack proper documentation, equal access to available resources, and are often made more vulnerable by being displaced to the edges of cities or frontlines (p.6). "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" (Moodley, 2016, p.13).

Refugees and migrants: "Despite the onset of the conflict, thousands of migrants continued to head towards Yemeni shores. From January to October 2015, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported 71,780 documented new arrivals into Yemen. Meanwhile, thousands have been evacuated while many remain stranded in the country." (El Rajji, 2016, p.14). They do not have official documents and do not benefit from tribal or other local support mechanisms, leaving them vulnerable to violence and exploitation (p.14).

Positive adaptations

1) Women and women-led local organisations

Oxfam and Saferworld report frequently seeing Yemeni women taking on leadership roles and their associated risks during the ongoing conflict, reporting that there are hundreds of women-led initiatives to address the effects of the conflict (Al Naami and Moodley, 2017). They identify an urgent need to bridge the gap between women leading peace efforts at the national and international levels, and those at a local level. They recommend longer-term financial, technical and political support for women-led grassroots organisations, as well as opportunities for women from a diverse range of backgrounds, and from beyond Sana'a.

A gender and conflict analysis by Oxfam, CARE and GenCap finds that during the recent conflict there have been examples of "women's coping mechanisms, resilience and ability to carve out spaces of agency", in contradiction to "the predominant portrayal of Yemeni women as passive victims" (Gressman, 2016, p3). The report recommends nurturing "women's increasing roles in distributing community-level humanitarian assistance, hygiene promotion, leading on [gender based violence] protection projects and facilitating women's access to services" (p.3)

2) Other community initiatives

There are some reports of local communities providing a positive response during the current war (for example, setting up a local relief committee to respond to tensions between IDPs and host community in Al Mukalla City in Hadhramout – see Annex (UNDP, 2015).

A multi-donor programme – "Enhanced Rural Resilience in Yemen" (ERRY) (2016-2019) – aims to enhance the resilience and self-reliance of crisis-affected rural communities in Abyan, Hajjah, Hudaydah, and Lahj Governorates[19]. Activities include equipping communities to raise

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[19] http://ye.one.un.org/content/unct/yemen/en/home/what-we-do/ERRY.html

awareness of local sources of conflict and empowering them to establish sustainable conflict management systems. There is a focus on the most vulnerable (women, the unemployed, youth, the Muhamasheen, IDPs and stressed host communities). The year one progress report finds that from March-December 2016 completed activities included establishing or reactivating 185 village cooperative councils, 30 water use associations and 181 community self-help initiatives (El Moulat, 2017, p.3-4). The security situation continues to be the main challenge to the programme, and its coverage does not match the extremely high number of vulnerable households that need resilience and livelihoods support (p.4).

Several international organisations have issued policy recommendations to invest in local organisations and consult with affected people. OCHA's 2016 assessment recommends providing capacity building and support so that local organisations can increase their role in the humanitarian response, "considerably expanding reach into difficult to access areas and strengthening community engagement" (p.40). Oxfam recommends (among other points) that UN and humanitarian agencies should establish clear mechanisms for genuine community participation in the delivery of humanitarian assistance at district and village level, with special attention given to women and marginalised groups (Moodley, 2016, p.3-4).

3) Private sector

An ODI report finds that since 2015 the Yemeni private sector has used its social capital and networks to facilitate humanitarian access, leveraging its resources and distributing assistance (El Taraboulsi-McCarthy et al, 2017, p. 1, 11). Local and diaspora businessmen see their humanitarian response as a duty informed by the Yemeni sociocultural context, which emphasises family and community ties, as well as Islamic precepts of charitable giving (p.10). El Taraboulsi-McCarthy et al (2017) advise that, despite concerns over the political bias of private sector actors, humanitarian actors cannot ignore their operational advantages and local know-how (p.11). Policy recommendations for the international community and humanitarian actors include (among others) designing a roadmap for private sector humanitarian engagement (p.13).

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Annex

Social capital in communities in the UNDP "Voices of Yemen" consultations

Excerpts in this table are copied from the individual community reports, accessed from:

UNDP (2015). *Living in Yemen – voices of resilience.* Press Release, Accessed online 22 June 2017.
http://www.ye.undp.org/content/yemen/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2015/10/12/living-in-yemen-voices-of-resilience-.html

Communities consulted	Governate	Description of community	Positive adaptations of social capital	Issues
Alsayani Area	Ibb	"A small community of 380 households where youth compose the biggest part of population. Alsayani area is at the center of the Alsayani district, south of Ibb governorate. The community is experiencing a critical influx of IDPs who, like all Yemenis, seek a permanent respite from the ongoing challenges and conflicts."	"Community-based social support has strengthened as people cooperate more among each other in cooking, helping others to access water, wood, fuel, and food" "Community Support and Income Sources: Community social support is extended through active charitable initiatives which have developed and direct support from betteroff individuals to their extended family. Workers' remittances are also one of the income sources for the local population" "People prefer to turn to informal justice mechanisms rather than seek assistance from formal judicial and security institutions due to perceived corruption of the system. - There is no presence of NGOs in the area. People rely on community support to cope with shocks. - The residents of Alsayani are socially divided as per their political orientations. The political parties are active in the area and the community is divided between two main parties. However, the social division has not reached violent levels of polarization. Residents believe that the airstrike campaign has fostered long-lasting localized conflicts."	"Localized conflicts: If current crisis continues for much longer, residents fear that they will not be able to cope. They believe that social cohesion has already been negatively affected."

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Communities consulted	Governate	Description of community	Positive adaptations of social capital	Issues
Hajjah City, Abs and Haradh Districts	Hajjah		"coping mechanisms - Community-based social support has developed"	"Community leaders have a limited role on social cohesion: It was reported that the roles of social, political and religious leaders are perceived as weak to strengthen social solidarity amongst people."
Al Mukalla City	Hadhramout	"Al Mukalla is considered the most important sea port in Hadhramout governorate. Like other localities in Yemen, the area has been affected by the ongoing violence affecting all aspects of life. Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) seized the security vacuum and took over the city."	"Local Relief Committee: Al Mukalla residents have established a Local Relief Committee in response to the observed tensions between IDPs and locals. Many local NGOs and local development institutions like Al-Own Foundation have joined this committee. Humanitarian aid is channeled through the committee in charge for them to distribute amongst IDPs" "Private sector and citizen engagement: Businessmen from Hadhramout have contributed through NGOs to respond to the pressing needs of IDPs and the community. NGOs, institutions and charitable associations have been able to collect cash and in-kind contributions from citizens to support IDPs" "No localized conflicts: The area has not yet encountered or had any localized conflicts. Despite tensions encountered, it has not transformed into larger conflict as the LRC has been acting as mediator." "Proactive community: "The positive thing is that the community mobilizes its available resources to support the poor families and IDPs, the community is proactive and did not wait for humanitarian assistance to arrive. This is a good thing, indeed!" said one of local men interviewed."	"Pressure on CSOs: Non-profit institutions and charity associations have declared that they can no longer support the communities in need. They are unable to serve increasing numbers of IDPs due to insufficient funding. They have not received any humanitarian aid for them to meet the pressing needs."

Communities consulted	Governate	Description of community	Positive adaptations of social capital	Issues
			"Community-based social support: Al Mukalla enjoys a great deal of social solidarity which goes beyond close family relations. It extends to citizens, CSOs and members of the business community who are uniting to provide assistance to those most in need"	
Ma'een, Sho'ub and Alsab'een districts	Sana'a		"Savings, jewelry and community social assistance represent the main safety net options for vulnerable residents. Examples of community-based social support included exchanging goods and services (bartering), notably in old neighbourhoods such as those of Sho'ub and the Old City" "80% of support received is through family networks." "70% of residents are not members of any organizations or social groups, and 20% receive assistance from other groups depending on their affiliations." "The main income sources for residents of Ma'een, Sho'ub and Alsab'een prior to the conflict were as following: • 60% public and private-sector jobs, • 23% self-employment, • 3% remittances, • 14% community-based social support. - 89% of residents did not receive any public or private humanitarian aid."	"Vulnerability factors: Poverty, human and food security, collapse of service delivery and rising violence are negative factors contributing to increased community vulnerability. Ma'een, Sho'ub and Alsab'een have not witnessed any localized conflicts; however, residents are expecting conflicts to arise due to political divisions that can affect social cohesion. Residents wonder how long the conflict can last for and question their ability to cope."

Communities consulted	Governate	Description of community	Positive adaptations of social capital	Issues
Sharjab Community	Taiz	"Sharjab is a small community of 397 families (1,042 men, 1,168 women) where youth represent the highest share, the marginalized groups (Muhamasheen) amounts to 6%."	"Residents in the village always cooperate to find solutions to their community challenges. Faced with difficulties, community members provide in-kind and cash support to the poorest families as well as deliver training to secure an income through improved skills. The main source of funding for this communitybased social support is from members' donations."	
Sahar district	Saada	"Sahar district has been one of the most affected areas of the conflict in Saada governorate. The district … is particularly well known for hosting the largest market in the governorate, the Al Talh market. Sahar has been called the food basket of Yemen."	"Community-based social support during these difficult times has been clearly observed. Residents are sharing shelter, giving charity and providing financial and psychological support." opportunities: "Community acceptance of women participation: Women are actively involved in agricultural activities and, though limited in number, there are some women working in both the private and public sector." "Active community-based associations: For example, the Alsunbolah Cooperative Agricultural Association exports 90 percent of the agricultural products and employs hundreds of youth"	

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About this report

This report is based on seven days of desk-based research. The K4D research helpdesk provides rapid syntheses of a selection of recent relevant literature and international expert thinking in response to specific questions relating to international development. For any enquiries, contact helpdesk@k4d.info.

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