

Yemen

The voice of local NGOs

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KUNO is an initiative of ten NGOs and five knowledge institutes from the Dutch humanitarian sector. KUNO's goal is to strengthen the humanitarian sector in the Netherlands. KUNO is a platform for joint learning, reflection and debate. We organize expert meetings, working sessions for professionals, webinars, training and public debates. All of our events are cross-sectoral and organized in cooperation with our partners.

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Introduction

Three years of conflict and lawlessness in Yemen brought the Yemeni hunger, diphtheria and cholera. Nearly three out of every four Yemenis rely on humanitarian aid to survive. The dire situation is deteriorating every day.

In March 2018, the UN Security Council made a strong plea for humanitarian access: Humanitarian support and peace must take the place of destruction. In the first week of April the UN and its international partners launched an international appeal for almost 3 billion US\$ for lifesaving assistance. At a pledging conference in Geneva, 2 billion US\$ was raised.

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Speakers:

- **Nabil Al-Kumain**, Yemen Family Care Association.
- **Tameem Abdulraqeep**, Wedyan Association for Society Development.
- **Layla Al-faqeeh**, Generations Without Qat.
- **Safa Murad Rafiq**, TOBE Foundation for Rights and Freedoms.

“There are no humanitarian solutions for these humanitarian problems. The solution is political.”

Nabil Al-Kumain

Nabil Al-Kumain is Associate Executive Director Partnerships and Communications of the Yemen Family Care Association. He is based in Sana’a.

Nabil Al-Kumain: ‘The pledging conference was a great achievement, but there is a big ‘but’. We made clear at the conference that it is not all about money. We say clearly that there are no humanitarian solutions for these humanitarian problems. The solution is political; we need political interventions and peace talks between all fragments of Yemeni people.’

‘During the pledging conference we emphasized the importance to start thinking about or to focus more upon the Humanitarian Development Nexus (HDN). What we do not want at the end of the day, is that three billion US\$ will be dumped into the country as shortterm ‘hit and run’ relief: distributing food baskets. We are asking for resilience. We don’t see that as sustainability, but as stability. At the moment stability, in programming is most necessary for the country.’

‘The humanitarian actors at the pledging conference challenged our suggestions. They said this is not the time for Yemen for development. We told them that it is indeed not about development, but it is about the humanitarian development nexus. So try to do both things: emergency relief and resilience-based programming.’

‘People in Yemen have adapted to minimum requirements of life. Take, for example, cooking on gas. A canister of 20 litres cost close to 10,000 Yemeni Real (almost 20 dollars) on the black market. Gas canisters are no longer available at the public market. A family can cook for one week with 20 litres of gas. But the average salary of Yemeni people is approximately 100 dollars. So cooking gas sufficient for only one week costs about one-fifth of your salary. By the way, there are no salaries, especially in the north. For almost two years now, civil servants

have gone without salary. And there has been no public electricity in the country since April 2015.'

"We do not want 'hit and run relief'. Stability is most necessary."

Tameem Abduraqeeb

Tameem Abduraqeeb is Director of the Wedyan Association for Society Development. He is based in Aden.

Tameem Abduraqeeb: 'Aden is now the new transitional capital of Yemen. Three years ago the situation was very bad. Our work as NGOs was hard. Many NGOs had to close: buildings were destroyed, some workers were arrested, others were killed.'

'Now Aden is safer than it was three years ago. There is a conflict between the Transitional Council and the Yemeni government. We have also some security issues about ISIS and Al Qaida, but as humanitarian organizations we can access many areas.'

'Many worries we are facing are related to funding. Most of the international NGOs are based in Sana`a, not in Aden. Some have offices in Aden, but the staff has no authority. But we are in Aden, still fighting for people.'

"Many NGOs had to close: buildings were destroyed, workers were arrested, others were killed."

Layla Al-faqeeh

Layla Al-faqeeh is Director of Generations Without Qat. She is based in Taiz.

Layla Al-faqeeh: 'Originally, Generations Without Qat did advocacy work. Since 2015 we have also worked on emergency relief: for instance on cholera and food security. One component we added to our work was the social engagement or youth engagement in our programming. We engage them to become community mobilisers. And because projects for cash for working are not sustainable, we are looking for more projects on livelihoods. We really need new programs for health and education, programs that create livelihoods for people and that focus on economic empowerment.'

'The position of Taiz is special, located in the centre of the country and controlled by different authorities in Yemen. The internationally recognized government controls the centre of the city. The area outside the city centre is, however, controlled by the de facto government. In the meantime, we are suffering from the non-existence of safe corridors from the city. We need safe corridors for Taiz.'

"There is an urgent need for the economic empowerment of women."

Safa Murad Rafiq

Safa Murad Rafiq is project coordinator of the TOBE Foundation for Rights and Freedoms. She is based in Aden.

'Safa Murad Rafiq: 'Since this crisis started in 2015, we generated a couple of reports on the human rights status in the city, for instance on gender-based violence. We started other activities, less focused on research. One programme created friendly spaces for survivors of gender-based-violence. Eight hundred women benefited from this programme. Furthermore, we discovered that there is an urgent need for the economic empowerment for women, because some women lost their breadwinners.'

‘We left to move to Lahij, not far from Aden, to open up three different women-friendly spaces, in three different areas. Al Qaida and ISIS formerly controlled two of these three areas. We offered the most vulnerable women non-interest loans. And we offered knowledge of international laws and UN resolutions.’

Debate, questions and answers

Remarks of the speakers and other participants.

A complex, complex setting

Yemen is a very complex setting: a complex, complex setting. We see humanitarians running and running. Running in an overstressed humanitarian cycle. In the meantime, the situation for the people is deteriorating. People had two sheep. Then they had to sell one, perhaps to get a doctor for a sick child. Then they had one sheep left. After the next emergency, there were no sheep left. After that, they have to borrow money or sell part of their land whenever they are in need.

We need to rethink about what a humanitarian situation looks like in some countries. It is not just about food or cash.

The situation in Yemen is very complex and hard to work in. The country director of Oxfam in Yemen, for example, spends most of his time on security issues.

Allocating new donor money – more money for resilience?

We see a strong focus on humanitarian assistance. We prefer infrastructure.

It is important to realize how resilient the population of Yemen currently is. There is a cultural system in Yemen whereby the population shares its resources amongst themselves. But this system has been shocked repeatedly over the last three years. It is important that the call for resilience is shared by different actors.

‘Yemenis share, until they all die together.’ The mortality rate is not yet as high as it could be, but if this cultural system gets stretched further, we could see a significant jump in mortality rates.

Lack of schooling & child marriages

Two million children dropped out of school during the last three years of war. That might lead to more child marriages, but there is more to it. Child marriage is not a new phenomenon in Yemen, and the key driver for that is the economic situation. If you – as a father and a mother – do not have sufficient means to support your family, an early marriage might seem a safe solution for your child.

“Now NGOs are doing what the state was doing before.”

Role of the Yemeni state

Governmental institutions try to facilitate, but they have no budget. They cannot pay their own staff. There is no money for the military, nor for public services such as visa services. The oil reserves have not been used for quite some time, so there is no income from oil. For impact on the ground there is a large reliance on international organizations.

Furthermore: there are some discussions between the Northern and Southern governments, but only on a technical level. Political issues are not discussed.

The Yemeni health system

The entire health system has been affected by the war and nothing is working as before. There is a large lack of medical supplies and a lot has to be imported. Now NGOs are doing what the state was doing before. Oxfam has a programme with GIZ (the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit*) to support health centres. It is important that health centres are part of this response.

The situation is relatively safe in Aden and Lahij. The programme in Lahij is focused on gender, by creating safe areas for women who are ‘socially affected’. There is also awareness training and training for trainers. Lastly, there is an exchange of experiences and a call from women in society with elevated standing to the men to put down their weapons. This is a success story in how women can play a significant role in building peace.

“The population overwhelmingly indicated that they need peace.”

Education

Schoolteachers are being encouraged to continue to teach, but transport is difficult. They often cannot afford transport with their salaries. Furthermore, schoolteachers also have to stand in line for food and water, since they often have their own families to feed. Private schools are popping up in the country to provide education for the richer sections of the population. Unfortunately, they are also hiring the schoolteachers, exacerbating the problem for normal schools.

Education could play an important role in combating the contagious diseases, e.g. by including information about cholera and diphtheria in their curriculum. The government could change that relatively easily.

Gaps & a need for peace

Some areas have not received assistance due to the war. There are geographic gaps in the response. Scaling-up is ongoing, but it takes some time. Additionally, most INGOs that have traditionally worked in the north of the country are now expanding to the south.

While the pledging conference was a success, the population has overwhelmingly indicated that they need peace. Otherwise, the needs will remain high and next year we will need a new pledging conference. Communities are very resilient and innovative, but the scope is limited. The situation at the local level is heart-breaking, but also very complex.

“The situation is heartbreaking, but also very complex.”