



Women waiting to receive a cash grant from Oxfam in Al Hodeidah Governorate, Al-Jarrah, Yemen (March 2012). © Wolfgang Gressman/Oxfam

STILL WAITING FOR CHANGE

Making the political transition work for women in Yemen

Women played a key role in Yemen's 2011 popular uprising, but almost a year on they are still waiting for change. Four out of five women consulted by Oxfam in a series of focus group discussions say that their lives have worsened over the last 12 months. Although a transition towards democracy is under way, women's hopes for a better life are wearing thin. A quarter of women between the ages of 15 and 49 are acutely malnourished. Deepening humanitarian crisis and conflict are limiting women's role in shaping Yemen's future. Women have told Oxfam that they need better access to food, jobs, and physical safety. The Government of Yemen and the international community should adequately support the humanitarian response and help ensure women can play their part in building a peaceful and just society.

1 UNFULFILLED PROMISES

Women in Yemen surprised the world by the pivotal role they played on the front-lines of the country's 2011 popular uprising. Women took to the streets, along with men, to voice their demands for political change, justice and equality for all Yemenis. In November 2011, former President Saleh's resignation and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) mediated agreement signalled a promising transition to democracy and raised expectations that it would help to deliver a better life for Yemen's women, men and youth.¹

But nearly a year on, women told Oxfam that, despite the handover of power, there has been a deterioration in their lives and they are still waiting for change. Four out of five women consulted by Oxfam in a series of 10 focus group discussions held across Yemen said their lives had got worse in the last 12 months.² Women, across all economic backgrounds, said access to food, jobs and improved security were their top three priorities. At the same time women's participation in the transition process was identified as a top priority for educated women in focus groups held in the cities of Sana'a and Taiz.

Yemen is currently in the midst of a severe humanitarian crisis, with 10 million Yemenis – almost half of the population – without enough food to eat. Women and children are particularly being hit hard by the crisis. Among the worst affected groups are women who are heads of households.³

Women need to play a full and meaningful role in both response to the humanitarian crisis and in shaping the future of their country if the political transition is to deliver positive changes to the lives of people in Yemen. However, many women told Oxfam that the food crisis has meant that they are focused on immediate survival, they do not know when their next meal is coming, how they can meet their basic needs or earn incomes, and this made it hard for them to focus on or participate in the transition. The international community should step up to the mark by ensuring funding is dispersed immediately to support the immediate needs of women and girls and the Government of Yemen should allocate specific budgets in its Transitional Plan for Stabilisation and Development to address their priorities.

Conflict and insecurity is exposing women to violence and risking their safety requiring the Government to prioritise the protection of women. The international community should implement its obligations under UN Security Council Resolution 2014 to protect women against violence, to meet their specific needs, and to support women to play a full part in peace building, as detailed in UN Security Council Resolution 1325.⁴

Social and cultural norms, and a lack of access to decision making and formal political institutions, have led to the economic and political marginalisation of women in Yemen. This should be addressed by increasing women's access to jobs, economic resources and increasing women's representation in all political transitional mechanisms and committees, elected bodies and government institutions.

'Women and young people went out on to the streets to demand change. We wanted, jobs, security, an end to corruption and an improvement in services. Instead, we can't afford food, there's no electricity and there are guns everywhere.'

Protestor, City of Al Hodeidah

The concerns raised in the focus groups should be a wake-up call for the international community, which has committed to an inclusive transition in Yemen. The Friends of Yemen meeting in New York on 27 September 2012 is an important political moment, bringing together key members of the international community and the Government of Yemen and is an opportunity to deliver on promises of support to the women and men of Yemen.

2 EMPTY PLEDGES AND COSTLY DELAYS

The humanitarian crisis, caused by political instability, conflict, and rising food and fuel prices in Yemen risks undermining the country's transition, development and future.

A food crisis has increased malnutrition rates among women in Yemen, who suffer from one of the highest adult malnutrition rates in the world. Consequently, one-quarter of Yemeni women between the ages of 15 and 49 are acutely malnourished, and are therefore at increased risk of giving birth to malnourished babies.⁵

Women are resorting to desperate and destructive coping mechanisms. They are reducing their own food intake and eating less nutritious food, so there is more for their families. In extreme situations, women have been forced into prostitution so that they can buy food.⁶ A displaced mother in Haradh told Oxfam about her regret of having to pull all four of her children out of school to send them begging.

Women and men have sold off their remaining assets including jewellery, land and livestock despite long-term impacts on their incomes, and a third of all Yemenis have taken out loans to buy food.⁷ In some areas, women told Oxfam that men and boys are risking their lives to smuggle qat, a narcotic green leaf, out of Yemen in a desperate attempt to provide for their families.

Despite the grave needs, the humanitarian crisis is not adequately funded. In July 2012, the UN revised its Humanitarian Response Plan for Yemen to \$585m. This still only covers six million people in need of assistance leaving a significant gap.⁸ The total requirements are set to increase by a further \$91m when the Abyan Response Plan covering over 320,000 people is integrated. As of 27 August 2012 only \$272m has been made available for the Humanitarian Response Plan leaving the humanitarian response less than half funded.⁹

In a welcome move, the Government of Yemen has acknowledged the seriousness of the crisis by aligning the Humanitarian Response Plan with its own Transitional Plan for Stabilisation and Development. At the last Friends of Yemen conference held in Riyadh in May 2012, \$4bn was pledged, with Saudi Arabia alone pledging a staggering \$3.25bn. However, most of the money announced in May has not yet been

'The doctor told me to eat better food like eggs, milk, apples and red meat. But we don't have money to buy it.'

Pregnant mother, City of Bayt al-Faqih.

delivered resulting in costly delays and increased suffering for people in need of assistance. Although donors such as the United Arab Emirates, Germany, the UK, European Commission and Japan have significantly scaled up their humanitarian assistance, overall donor response to the crisis in Yemen has been slow and not matched to the enormous scale of humanitarian need.

Donors again promised to meet the level of need in Yemen by pledging billions of dollars more in aid at a conference held in Riyadh on 4 September 2012. However, it is not clear how much of this is new money and what is a restatement of existing pledges.¹⁰ Donors took a positive step by endorsing a Mutual Accountability Framework with the Government of Yemen to support effective implementation of the pledges of financial assistance. Now, donors need to ensure that the funds promised quickly become real aid that can help the millions of people that urgently need it.¹¹

3 INSECURITY AND INJUSTICE

WOMEN AND MEN UNDER THREAT

The majority of women consulted in areas where focus groups were held said that they felt less safe than one year ago. The ongoing conflict, political uncertainties and limitations of government have led to a deterioration in the safety of women, men and children.

There has been a 10 per cent rise in security incidents in Yemen over the last year.¹² Five hundred thousand people are displaced as a result of conflict in the northern and southern governorates with no immediate prospects of returning home.

In the conflict affected areas, increased risks are being posed by the spread of landmines, explosive devices, and grave human rights violations including the recruitment of children into armed forces, child labour, and the killing of women and children as a result of aerial bombardments and indiscriminate attacks in residential areas.¹³ All women expressed their concern about the spread of small arms.¹⁴ In the capital Sana'a, women mentioned that there were frequent gun battles in the street. There is also the risk of sexual assault. Both make it unsafe for them to leave their houses, thus making it difficult for them to fully participate in public life.

Conflict and insecurity has increased gender based violence. Displaced women in Haradh said that the added pressure of the current crisis was leading to increased levels of domestic violence in the camps. Conflict has also triggered a rise in forced and early marriages.¹⁵

Most women consulted by Oxfam pointed to an 'absence of government', weak rule of law, and lack of protection provided to women by the security forces, police and justice institutions.

'I don't have trust or faith in the police, army or justice system to protect women and make us feel safe.'

Married woman, Al Hodeidah

A key demand from women consulted is for the government to take steps to restore women's trust in the security and justice sectors. The Government of Yemen and the international community should address these demands by ensuring that they implement obligations under UN Security Council Resolution 1325 to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, through the constitution, legislation and reforms and training of the police and judiciary.

RISKS IN RETURNING HOME

All displaced women interviewed by Oxfam in Aden and Haradh in the south and north of the country expressed their desire to return home. However, most do not feel safe to return. Some women in Aden said that they lacked adequate information about the situation in Abyan to make an informed decision to return home. With the recapturing of key districts in Abyan by government forces there is a new focus on the potential for returns. However, the security situation remains fragile.

Displaced women sheltering in schools in Aden expressed their fear they would be forcibly evicted and sent back to Abyan as the government wants to reopen the schools. For those women and men who have returned they have found that their safety is still at risk. A recent multi-agency assessment in Abyan found no visible police presence.

The role of local security has been assumed by 'popular committees', tribal militias not easily identifiable by civilians and not under the control of the government.¹⁶ Reports suggest insecurity in Jaar City in Abyan is preventing many pregnant women who have returned to Abyan from accessing prenatal care.¹⁷

With three quarters of internally displaced people indicating that they may return to Abyan in the next six months and a long-term situation of displacement in the North, the Government of Yemen should develop a comprehensive national policy on internal displacement. If carried out well, it will help the government to better protect and meet the needs of internally displaced communities across the country through strengthening institutional capacity and overseeing improved coordination at a national and governorate level.

4 RECOVERING FROM CRISIS

The majority of women consulted by Oxfam said simply increasing their access to food was not enough and called on the government to help them recover from the crisis by supporting women to earn incomes so that they can protect their families from the threat of future crises.

Women highlighted that traditional cultural attitudes in Yemen restrict women from working and earning a decent wage. They emphasised that due to restrictions on women they are confined to traditional and underpaid work such as sewing, basic agricultural work and handicrafts.

Although rural women represent 88 per cent of working women in Yemen, most are employed informally or do not earn an income from their labour. Women said that poor roads and transport in rural areas are preventing them from travelling and getting to markets. Women also have difficulties owning or controlling land and, cannot get credit or seeds and tools to help them grow enough food to feed their families.¹⁸ Strategies for ensuring Yemen has enough food to feed its population should address the specific needs of women who produce most of the food in Yemen.

Construction and improvement of poor rural roads and reducing the cost and distance of travel will help women get to markets. Supporting women to look after animals by providing animal health services will provide cash, incomes and savings for women who are in charge of looking after animals.¹⁹ Improving women's awareness of their land and property rights will increase women's potential for more control over these productive assets.²⁰ Micro-finance schemes which provide women with adequate levels of credit to run businesses can support women to generate incomes. Schemes such as the Social Fund for Development should ensure that work programmes maximise the participation of women through designing work which is physically and culturally suitable for women.

'It's been one year since the war started. We are experiencing pressure to leave but we are unable to go home as we do not have information on whether it is safe to go home.'

Teacher, City of Aden

'We don't just want food, we want to know the government is with us and wants to hear our views on how we can be supported to address our problems.'

Villager, Haradh District

5 WOMEN PART OF CHANGE

The humanitarian crisis is making a bad situation worse for women by exacerbating deep rooted gender inequalities. Yemeni women consistently rank bottom in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender gap in access to health, education, economic opportunities and decision making at all levels.²¹

Despite women being an active element of Yemen's 2011 popular uprising, existing barriers mean that their voices are rarely heard and they are unable to help shape solutions to the problems in their country. The majority of women consulted by Oxfam are starting to feel sidelined by the transition process and say they have been shut out of decision making by political parties and the government.

A minority of women we spoke to said they felt happy there are now three female ministers in the new government, and others pointed to positive steps taken by the government to provide six places (out of 25) to women on the preparatory committee of the upcoming National Dialogue.

Most women said the government was not doing enough to include women in the national transition. There was particular concern expressed about the lack of quotas for women's inclusion. A 30 per cent quota for women's representation in the transitional mechanisms and

committees, parliament and government, is a key demand from Oxfam's partner the Yemeni Women's Union, the National Women's Committee and women activists.²²

At the heart of all discussions was a call from women to the government to not just pay 'lip service' to women's rights but to ensure government policies, laws and institutions in Yemen enable women to realise their rights.

The government and the international community should live up to their obligations, under UN Security Council Resolution 1325, to ensure the equal participation of women in Yemen in the national transition process and mechanisms so that they participate fully in decision making on the future of Yemen.

6 CONCLUSION

Prominent among Yemeni women's hopes for their future are to feel safe and secure, to know that they can feed their families, and that they can earn an income. Women want to see the future state of Yemen delivering greater equality between men and women and for women to participate equally in public life.

The humanitarian situation and food crisis is not only threatening lives and livelihoods. Taking place in a fragile political context, it is a major threat to the prospects for positive change in Yemen. The worsening humanitarian situation is leading to greater levels of poverty and inequality, and many women and men are already finding it impossible to participate in the transition. If the different needs and aspirations of women and men are not addressed then the transition process will fail.

In the long-term this may lead to further disillusionment with the political transition and democracy, leading to continued or new instability in Yemen. By providing immediate support to address the humanitarian crisis, and also ensuring that all women and men can play a role and have a stake in the future direction of their country, the government and Friends of Yemen will not only save lives but will also help begin to build a more just and peaceful country.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Friends of Yemen should:

- Immediately allocate \$6.4bn already pledged, in order to, among other things, fully fund the \$585m UN Humanitarian Response Plan for Yemen, and the Government of Yemen's Transitional Plan for Stabilisation and Development Plan to help fill a budget gap of \$11bn. Priority should be given to meeting the needs of women and girls: meeting urgent food needs, ensuring protection from conflict and gender based violence, and supporting improved access to basic services including health and education.

- In consultation with Yemeni women, prioritise Yemen in their National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security. Clear indicators, lines of responsibility, and adequate resources must be committed to ensure objectives identified in the national action plans can be achieved.
- Support women to recover and enable them to withstand future crises by supporting programmes that increase women's access to and control of credit, agricultural services, land, markets, as well as the Social Welfare and Social Development Funds.

The Government of Yemen should:

- Set benchmarks and allocate specific budgets for meeting the immediate, medium and long-term priorities of women and girls in its Transitional Plan for Stabilisation and Development.
- Build on the steps taken in the appointment of the Preparatory Committee for the National Dialogue and work to increase representation of women in all transitional mechanisms and committees, elected bodies and government institutions, at all levels to at least 30 per cent.
- Develop a National Action Plan on implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325 to support the inclusion of women in all stages of peace, security and transition processes. The objectives of the National Action Plan should be developed with the support of UN Women, and in consultation with Yemeni women and civil society organisations and international non-governmental organisations.
- Include guarantees of women's rights in Yemen's future constitution and ensure that those rights are translated into all relevant laws.

The Yemeni Executive Unit for Internally Displaced People should:

- Develop a comprehensive national policy on internal displacement to ensure better protection, assistance and durable solutions that meet the different needs of women and men in all parts of Yemen. This should be in consultation with national and local authorities, displaced women and men and host communities, civil society, and international humanitarian and development actors, including donors.

The Yemeni Ministries of Interior, Justice and Human Rights should:

- Strengthen efforts to ensure women's safety through recruiting more women police officers, and training police officers, public officials and members of the judiciary on approaches to addressing violence against women and other violations of women's rights.
- Improve women's access to justice by ensuring all laws, policies and procedures conform with international human rights law and standards and ensure these laws are implemented to protect women.

NOTES

- ¹ Agreement On The Implementation Mechanism For The Transition Process in Yemen In Accordance with the Initiative Of The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) UN translation, 23 November 2011. By sponsoring the GCC agreement the international community promised to, "fulfil the aspirations of Yemeni people for change and reform," and to ensure the inclusion of women and youth in decision making about the future of Yemen. It also instructed the Government of Yemen to develop programmes to address the humanitarian, development and economic priorities of the population.
- ² 10 focus group discussions were conducted with a total of 136 women in Sana'a, Al Hodeidah, Aden, Haradh, Taiz , The consultations took place between 22 July – 4 August 2012. Although 8 of the focus groups were held in the main cities, diversity was a feature of the sampled women's groups, including housewives, civil society and political activists; women affected by displacement and conflict, women in professions including teachers, lawyers and journalists and rural women. The women's ages ranged from 16-65. Women were selected based on Oxfam's links to communities through Oxfam partners and through outreach to communities in Oxfam programme areas.
- ³ WFP (2012), 'The State of Food Security and Nutrition in Yemen,' p.26, refers to female headed households as being amongst the most food insecure groups. UNICEF and ODI (2009), 'Impact of the economic crisis and food and fuel price volatility on children and women', states women children and young people suffer disproportionately and points to worsening nutrition status of women and children, looks at health impacts and educational impacts on women and children in Yemen.
- ⁴ UN Security Council Resolution 2014 highlights the international community's commitment to supporting the role of Yemeni women in conflict resolution, peacebuilding and meeting their needs. UN Security Council 2014, 21 October 2012: <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2011/sc10418.doc.htm> . Also see UN Security Council 1325, 31 October 2000: http://www.un.org/events/res_1325e.pdf. UN Security Council Resolution 2051, 12 June 2012: <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2012/sc10671.doc.htm>
- ⁵ Daniel, et. Al. (2010) Conditions in Rural Yemen: Findings from the RALP Baseline Survey, November 22, 2010.
- ⁶ UNHCR (2011) , p.8, 'IDP Profiling and Protection Monitoring'.
- ⁷ UN OCHA (2012),p.14, ' Yemen 2012 Humanitarian Response Plan Mid-Year Review', 20 July 2012.
- ⁸ 12.7 million is the latest figure for people in need of humanitarian assistance taken from UN OCHA's Yemen Humanitarian Dashboard CAP Mid-year Review June 2012. This covers 10.4 million people in need of food and a further 2.3 million people without access to water as identified by the WASH Cluster. Based on the 12.7 million figure the humanitarian response plan only covers 47 per cent of people in need. According to the mid-year review as of June 2012 only 2.2 million of the targeted people have received humanitarian assistance. <http://yemen.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/Yemen%20MYR%202012%20Dashboard.pdf>
- ⁹ This is a \$312m gap in funding and can be sourced to UN Financial Tracking Service as of 27 August 2012: <http://yemen.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/YHRP%20Funding%20Update%2027082012.pdf>.
- ¹⁰ Some reports suggest that donors have pledged an extra \$2.4bn, which when added to existing pledges equals \$6.4bn. <http://www.voanews.com/content/donors-again-pledge-billions-in-yemen-aid/1501448.html>. Oxfam has consulted a number of donors but has not been able to verify new pledges from restatements of existing pledges.
- ¹¹ The Mutual Accountability Framework includes key policy reforms and implementation commitments by the Government, and commitments from donors to respect Government ownership; deliver timely support; and strengthen the Government's ability to manage external support effectively. It also sets out a framework for monitoring and coordination of donor assistance, which Government and donors commit to follow to achieve tangible results, which benefit the Yemeni people.
- ¹² UN OCHA Humanitarian Bulletin, Issue 6, 16 August 2012.
- ¹³ UNHCR (2011) , p.7, 'IDP Profiling and Protection'.
- ¹⁴ Yemen Times 26 July 2012, "Yemen Second in Arms Possession". Yemen is ranked the second highest country in the world for weapons possession, with 61 weapons per 100 civilians, according to a 2007 survey by Small Arms Survey.
- ¹⁵ UN OCHA (2012) , p.57, 'Yemen 2012 Humanitarian Response Plan Mid-Year Review', 20 July 2012, refers to a rise in domestic violence, and early and forced marriage in Haradh in January 2012.
- ¹⁶ Notes from Multi-Agency Rapid Assessment, Initial debriefing, 10 July, 2012.
- ¹⁷ IRIN, (24 August 2012), 'Women die as violence impedes antenatal care'.
- ¹⁸ Japan International Cooperation Agency (2009) , 'Yemen Country Gender Profile'.
- ¹⁹ Animals constitute poor people's main savings instrument and insurance against risks. Women make, cheese butter and yoghurt all products from animals which they can sell.
- ²⁰ Although no legal obstacles prevent women from owning land most women do not know about their property and inheritance rights or how they can gain access to them. widespread illiteracy, and women's lack of knowledge about their economic rights have produced a situation in which a majority of women hand over the administration of their possessions and property to their husbands or brothers.
- ²¹ The Global Gender Gap Report (2011), World Economic Forum. Yemen ranks bottom, 135 out of 135 countries.
- ²² Joint Log frame, Yemeni Women's Union and National Women's Committee, National Agenda and Women's Demands in The Transitional Period.

© Oxfam International September 2012

This paper was written by Sultana Begum. Oxfam acknowledges the assistance of Rebecca Wynn, Rosa Garwood, Suha Bashren, Martin Walsh, Fionna Smyth, Shaheen Chughati, Ed Cairns and Abigail Baldoumous in its production. It is part of a series of papers written to inform public debate on development and humanitarian policy issues.

For further information on the issues raised in this paper please e-mail advocacy@oxfaminternational.org

This publication is copyright but the text may be used free of charge for the purposes of advocacy, campaigning, education, and research, provided that the source is acknowledged in full. The copyright holder requests that all such use be registered with them for impact assessment purposes. For copying in any other circumstances, or for re-use in other publications, or for translation or adaptation, permission must be secured and a fee may be charged. E-mail policyandpractice@oxfam.org.uk.

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

Published by Oxfam GB for Oxfam International under ISBN 978-1-78077-178-6 in September 2012. Oxfam GB, Oxfam House, John Smith Drive, Cowley, Oxford, OX4 2JY, UK.

OXFAM

Oxfam is an international confederation of 17 organizations networked together in 92 countries, as part of a global movement for change, to build a future free from the injustice of poverty:

Oxfam America (www.oxfamamerica.org)

Oxfam Australia (www.oxfam.org.au)

Oxfam-in-Belgium (www.oxfamsol.be)

Oxfam Canada (www.oxfam.ca)

Oxfam France (www.oxfamfrance.org)

Oxfam Germany (www.oxfam.de)

Oxfam GB (www.oxfam.org.uk)

Oxfam Hong Kong (www.oxfam.org.hk)

Oxfam India (www.oxfamindia.org)

Intermón Oxfam (www.intermonoxfam.org)

Oxfam Ireland (www.oxfamireland.org)

Oxfam Italy (www.oxfamitalia.org)

Oxfam Japan (www.oxfam.jp)

Oxfam Mexico (www.oxfamexico.org)

Oxfam New Zealand (www.oxfam.org.nz)

Oxfam Novib (www.oxfamnovib.nl)

Oxfam Quebec (www.oxfam.qc.ca)

Please write to any of the agencies for further information, or visit www.oxfam.org. Email: advocacy@oxfaminternational.org

www.oxfam.org



OXFAM