



I. Background

Partners-Yemen believes that any effective effort to address conflicts should be based on in-depth analysis of the current context, the actors involved, and the underlying factors that reinforce conflict and lack of development. The analysis should include an assessment of the challenges and the opportunities available in order to support a realistic approach to conflict and change management.

As part of the process of opening the Center in Yemen, Partners conducted a country assessment early 2009. The purpose of the assessment was to identify gaps and opportunities in order to guide Partners' future programming in Yemen. The assessment showed a great need in the field of conflict management and development, particularly in tribal areas in Yemen. Most INGOs avoid working in tribal areas because of security concerns. Thus, Partners Yemen decided to focus its work on tribal governorates and on programs that contribute to identifying and addressing challenges to security and development in those areas. Currently Partners focuses its programs on 4 tribal governorates (Mareb, Al-Jawf, Shabwa, Al-Baidha), which have been identified by the Yemeni government as areas of serious tribal conflicts. Based on the assessment, Partners also included one governorate (Ibb), which is undergoing rapid urban changes, resulting in the serious potential for violent conflicts.

II. Analyzing Tribal Conflicts in Yemen

1. Conflict Profile

The areas in which Partners-Yemen works are remote and characterized by poor infrastructure, high poverty and illiteracy rates, tribal conflicts, weak presence of state and law enforcement institutions, and deteriorating traditional tribal conflict mitigation structures. In these areas, most conflicts between communities/tribes occur over resources (like water and grazing land) and services (like development projects), as well as over land and borders.

The traditional tribal conflict prevention and resolution system has been the main and most effective mechanism for conflict management. The tribal system has a set of comprehensive rules and traditions that prevent conflict by regulating the use and sharing of resources, prescribe methods for resolving conflicts, and impose enforcement

mechanisms. The tradition of collective responsibility governing tribal culture has helped keep customary laws strong and effective¹.

It is believed that many tribal conflicts are prevented and mitigated by the traditional system before they become violent. However, when a conflict becomes violent, it sometimes involves revenge killing. Dealing with the conflict at this level is very complicated even through traditional structures, as tribes consider it a “black shame” to remove the threat of a blood feud from the family or tribe of the individual who committed murder. Usually, such conflicts are mitigated through long term truces that are renewed on annual basis. However, respect for truce agreements is deteriorating as traditional culture and values are breaking down under the pressure of modernization.

When conflicts are violent and involve revenge killing, it becomes too complicated and sensitive for external actors to approach it directly.

2. Causes of Conflict

Partners identified the following main drivers of conflict based on the Yemen country assessment, the experience of its local staff, lessons learned from previous conflict programs in the country, and cross-sectoral consultations with international organizations, government, tribal leaders and local NGOs:

- **Economic causes:** high poverty and unemployment coupled with a poor education system
- **Lack of development:** competition over resources and development services and projects, poor access to development assistance.
- **Poorly-planned development process:** Lack of transparency and community participation as well as lack of sensitivity to tribal conflicts while planning and implementing development services and projects.
- **Weak role of state institutions:** especially law enforcement institutions, and deterioration/ breaking down of traditional laws.
- **Deteriorating traditional systems:** traditional conflict prevention and resolution systems are deteriorating and are increasingly unresponsive to transitional problems.
- **Youth vulnerability:** and their lack of respect for tribal conflict prevention rules resulting in their engagement in violent conflicts.

III. Partners-Yemen’s Approach to Tribal Conflicts

The difficulties of working on conflict in Yemen are significant if organizations fail to understand the political, security, tribal and cultural context of the conflict areas.

¹ All male members of the tribe who are 18 years and older share the responsibility of fines and penalties levied on individual members.

Organizations that are not prepared with experience and skills to provide support that is sensitive to these issues might end up doing harm to themselves, and more importantly, to the cause they are trying to serve. The complexities around conflict issues such as: the politics of tribalism, the overlap and distinction between security issues and tribal culture, understanding tribal conflicts and how they affect access and power, sensitivity towards working on conflict issues, appropriate presentation and outreach methods, and using the right wording and language, for example, can all hinder development and conflict mitigation projects if not well-understood and approached carefully. Partners-Yemen deals with this issue by having local staff with long experience working on tribal conflicts and in tribal areas.

Due to the political nature of violent tribal conflicts, and the associated risk of being perceived as partisan and getting caught up in the conflict, Partners-Yemen's programs address the root causes of conflict rather than engaging directly with the political issues. To promote sustainable solutions, Partners-Yemen empowers local and national actors to mitigate their own conflicts rather than intervening or mediating (as Partners) in conflicts. At the same time, Partners links its efforts at the local level with efforts at the policy level coordinating with and bringing in relevant national and local governmental institutions as well as the traditional institutions already in place.

Partners programs focus on achieving the following objectives:

1. Build in-country capacity to analyze and manage conflicts over natural resources, educational services, health facilities, and conflicts between corporations and local communities.
2. Foster cooperation among local authorities-councils, tribal leaders, community and religious leaders as well as local NGOs, CBOs and corporations to manage these conflicts.
3. Enhance the ability of local NGOs and local authorities to make the process of development sensitive to tribal conflicts through community-based inclusive and participatory planning processes.
4. Promote women and youth participation in development and conflict management processes.

Partners-Yemen considers its role that of a facilitator bringing different parties together and helping them think differently and consider alternative options for addressing conflicts.

IV. Partners Tools

1. ***Strengthen existing and potential structures for peace:***
 - **National government:** Engage the national government in activities and dialogues in order to help them understand local stakeholders' perspective about conflict and how current national government interventions affect conflict (positively and negatively). The aim is for the national government to adopt conflict-sensitive policies and interventions.

- **Sub-national/Local authorities:** build the capacity of local authorities and elected local representatives to analyze conflicts and, as the country is undergoing local governance reform, design conflict-sensitive development policies and programs.
 - **Tribal/ informal conflict mitigation systems:** help revive and strengthen traditions that mitigate conflict and that deal with structural factors contributing to conflict (e.g. protecting public places and services as safe havens, traditional water distribution methods, social safety nets).
 - **Local NGOs:** build the capacity of local NGOs based in the tribal governorates to enhance citizen participation in the development process and to reduce the gap between communities and policy/decision makers. Through intensive training and mentoring, Partners programs help build cadres of skilled facilitators/ community mobilizers who then engage in activities that enhance community dialogue on development priorities, conflict issues and ways to promote peace and development in their areas. Currently, Partners programs serve over 40 local NGOs and CBOs in tribal areas.
- 2. *Engage existing and potential actors for peace:***
- Tribal leaders
 - Religious leaders
 - Women
 - Youth
 - Local communities
 - Corporations: help mitigating and reducing risk between communities and oil, gas and mining corporations through empowering communities to understand social responsibilities of corporations, information-sharing and negotiating.

V. Partners Programs:

1. Local Civil Society Participation Program (Funded by the Dutch Government):

Working with 21 local NGOs in tribal areas, the program's objective is to build the capacity of local civil society at the governorate level to operate in the new decentralized system of governance. The organizations are trained to identify, prioritize and strategize solutions for community problems in partnership with local councils using cooperative advocacy and participatory planning tools.

2. The Balqees Initiative (funded by the US Embassy):

The primary objective of TBI is to train influential women in a range of skills, creating a thriving network of key communicators that can disseminate messages pertaining to health, youth empowerment, gender equity, education, conflict resolution, and other critical development subjects in Yemen.

3. Community Development Dialogue Forum (Funded by the US Embassy):

The purpose of the Tribal Leader Symposium (TLS) project is to create a regular forum that brings tribal leaders from tribes in Marib together with the Republic of Yemen Government (ROYG) officials, donors, officials, interested corporations, and NGOs. The Symposium has a multi-tiered focus: first to discuss issues that concern the tribes, corporations, and NGOs that are living in and operating in Marib; second to train the tribal leaders in planning and development for their area; and third to forge good communication and cooperative relationships that will allow this planning and development to occur in a safe and productive environment.

4. Community-based Conflict Mitigation Program (Funded by USAID CMM):

The objectives of the program are:

- To increase in-country capacity to manage conflicts over natural resources, educational and health services, and conflicts between corporations and communities;
- To enhance the ability of CBOs and local councils to implement participatory, community, conflict-mitigation programs; and
- To empower CBOs and local councils to establish sustainable systems and structures for community-based conflict mitigation and reconciliation.

VI. Challenges

- **Building trust:** The government is very suspicious of organizations working on conflict issues.
- **Security:** Personal and organizational
- **Measuring success:** Donors expectation to see conflicts resolved in short term programs.
- **Raising expectations:** Local communities usually have expectations of organizations which work in their areas. If conflict mitigation programs are not tied to capacity building and quality of life improvements, it can lead to frustration among local partners and might undermine trust.

VIII. Recommendations

- **Understand the context:** spend time and effort understanding and analyzing the conflict, the institutions, structures and actors involved in it. Use local experts to help you understand the context. Conduct wide consultations with local leaders and other segments of the local community to understand precautions and incentives that should be highlighted in a project.
- **Engage locals/ community actors:** Programs can start with broad guidelines and plans, but people in conflict areas should be involved in designing and implementing project activities on the ground. In the process, it is important to engage local leaders, local NGOs, local women and youth. It is important to work with people who are directly affected by conflict because they understand their context and they know what will and will not work.

- **Think long-term.** Do not expect immediate results. A short term project cannot result in resolving serious structural conflicts. Measure impact against new trends or indicators of change such as the emergence of new capacities for peace, dialogue between local government and community leaders to address conflicts, committees formed to resolve conflicts, active participation of youth and women.
- **Promote conflict-sensitive development project planning:** Donors should require conflict analysis by development agencies before implementing any projects in conflict areas.
- **Ensure Government buy-in:** to guarantee support, maximize effort, reduce sensitivity. “It is true that government might be part of the problem but because of that, it should be part of the solution”
- **Put a local face on the project:** Use sensitive language, avoid wording that might increase suspicion by indicating a challenge to existing power structures (e.g. phrases like conflict between government and people, women’s empowerment, gender, might be considered provocative).
- **Be transparent:** Transparency is key to building trust.