

BETTER ASSISTANCE IN CRISES RESEARCH



A Literature Review on Social Assistance and Capacity in Yemen

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Better Assistance in Crises (BASIC) Research (funded by UK Aid) aims to inform policy and programming on how to help poor and vulnerable people cope better with crises and meet their basic needs through more effective social assistance. All costs related to BASIC Research are covered by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office.

Summary

Yemen is experiencing one of the worst crises in the world in terms of levels of suffering and humanitarian need. Intense civil war since 2014 has devastated the national economy, and approximately two-thirds of the population (21.6 million people) were assessed as being in need of humanitarian assistance and protection services in 2023 (OCHA 2023a). In response to such huge levels of need, a substantial humanitarian aid operation has been ongoing for the past eight years.

The social assistance landscape in Yemen is a complex mix of humanitarian aid and the legacies of social protection systems, with local institutions still playing a role in the delivery of assistance. This paper reviews the literature, looking at the following issues: how best to balance humanitarian and social protection approaches; how to balance meeting acute immediate needs and support for longer-term systems in an ongoing conflict; and how to maintain support in the face of donor fatigue, and a complex and dynamic political landscape in Yemen. In a context where aid actors are committed to localisation, and in order to strengthen the nexus between development, humanitarian and peace-building approaches, it is vital to understand how local capacities have been affected by conflict and how the international aid effort is trying to engage with national and local actors. However, efforts to strengthen local capacities also need to take into account the divided governance in Yemen, ongoing conflict, and tensions between the main donor governments' funding of assistance and the *de facto* authorities in the north of Yemen. This paper provides an empirical building block that will help to inform efforts to engage with local capacities by comprehensively mapping the complex mix of local and national actors involved in the management, delivery and regulation of social assistance.

This review summarises the key literature and evidence on the capacities of national and international actors involved in providing social assistance in Yemen. It has been undertaken to inform a Yemen study on social assistance capacities and systems, part of the Better Assistance in Crises (BASIC) Research programme.¹ The primary audience is donors providing social assistance in Yemen, to help their decision-making on how to support local actors' capacities for social assistance.

Social assistance refers to the non-contributory transfers (provided as food, cash or vouchers) to poor and vulnerable households and individuals. Today in Yemen these transfers support millions of people, funded by humanitarian and development aid, and implemented by international aid agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with national quasi-governmental bodies and national and local NGOs. Other local stakeholders (national and local governance authorities in the north and south of the country, and community members and beneficiaries) are also involved.

This Yemen study feeds into broader BASIC Research work on the resilience of social protection systems in crises. We draw on the inception review by Slater, Haruna and Baur (2022) to frame our understanding of capacity along three interlinked dimensions: institutional, organisational and individual capacities.

We found a small published literature on capacities for social assistance in Yemen (mainly donor and aid agency strategic and programme documents and some independent analysis of aid effectiveness).

In this report, we summarise the political economy of international support in Yemen (Section 2). We map the social assistance landscape (Section 3), as well as the capacities of key national actors (Section 4) and international actors (Section 5 and Annexe). Section 5 sets out some preliminary conclusions.

¹ A UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO)-funded programme, BASIC Research is led by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) working with a range of partners across 11 countries affected by protracted crises.

Emerging themes that will be explored in ongoing BASIC Research are as follows:

- Collectively, international humanitarian and development actors struggle to provide a coherent and coordinated response in Yemen. Unharmonised targeting of social assistance beneficiaries across multiple programmes creates overlap, errors and a perception of unfairness. Better coordination requires political and financial investment from the international actors in more collaborative relationships and interoperable systems.
- The Yemeni context of long-standing conflict, divided governance and competing *de facto* authorities is challenging for advancing localisation agendas. So far, there have been limited budgets for local partners and little strategic capacity support, including for social assistance.
- Donor support to the Social Fund for Development and other quasi-governmental bodies is seen as the key approach to sustaining and developing capacity for a nationally owned social protection system when the conflict ends. There may be relevant learning in broader capacity literature on ‘cocooning’ projects and investing in ‘pockets of effectiveness’.
- There has been a tendency towards disconnected narratives on aid and national capacities in Yemen. The current approach essentially attempts to freeze the politics of social assistance while maintaining the technical capacity of national organisations to deliver assistance. It leaves in stasis questions about how to adjust transfer values, review targeting approaches and develop greater coherence between World Food Programme (WFP) food assistance and World Bank-supported cash assistance.

About the authors

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List of acronyms

ACLED	Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project
BASIC	Better Assistance in Crises
CBT	cash-based transfer
CCY	Cash Consortium of Yemen
DAC	Development Assistance Committee (OECD)
DG ECHO	Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
ECRP	Emergency Crisis Response Project
ESPECRP	Emergency Social Protection Enhancement and Covid-19 Response Project
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
FSSN	Food Security Safety Net
FTS	Financial Tracking Service (OCHA)
GDP	gross domestic product
GFA	general food assistance
HCRF	Handicap Care and Rehabilitation Fund
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IRG	internationally recognised government
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MIS	management information system
MOPIIC	Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation
MOSAL	Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour
NGO	non-governmental organisation
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (United Nations)
ODA	official development assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PIU	project implementation unit
PWP	Public Works Project
RRM	Rapid Response Mechanism
SCMCHA	Supreme Council for the Management and Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and International Cooperation
SDRPY	Saudi Development and Reconstruction Program for Yemen
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UCT	unconditional cash transfer
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UN ESCWA	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
USA	United States of America
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WFP	World Food Programme
YeSP	Yemen Social Protection Programme

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1. Introduction

Globally, there is awareness of the shortcomings of recurrent humanitarian aid in protracted crises – situations with deep-rooted fragilities and chronic, broad-based food insecurity alongside acute need. Donors and aid agencies want to support linkages across humanitarian, development and peace-building interventions, including by strengthening national capacities, thereby fostering resilience and sustainability over time (Longhurst *et al.* 2020; OECD DAC 2019). However, the Yemeni context of long-standing conflict, divided governance and competing *de facto* authorities is challenging for advancing localisation agendas. Collectively, international humanitarian and development actors have struggled to provide an effective, coherent and coordinated response.

Yemen is experiencing one of the worst crises in the world in terms of levels of suffering and humanitarian need. Intense civil war since 2014 has devastated the national economy, and approximately two-thirds of the population (21.6 million people) were assessed as being in need of humanitarian assistance and protection services in 2023 (OCHA 2023a). In response to such huge levels of need, a substantial humanitarian aid operation has been ongoing for the past eight years.

The social assistance landscape in Yemen is a complex mix of humanitarian assistance and the legacies of social protection systems, with local institutions still playing a role in the delivery of assistance. This paper reviews the literature, looking at the following issues: how best to balance humanitarian and social protection approaches; how to balance meeting acute immediate needs and support for longer-term systems in an ongoing conflict; and how to maintain support in the face of donor fatigue, and a complex and dynamic political landscape in Yemen. In a context where aid actors are committed to localisation, and in order to strengthen the nexus between development, humanitarian and peace-building approaches, it is vital to understand how local capacities have been affected by conflict and how international aid is trying to engage with national and local actors. However, efforts to strengthen local capacities also need to take into account the divided governance in Yemen, ongoing conflict, and tensions between the main donor governments' funding assistance and the *de facto* authorities in the north of Yemen. This paper provides an empirical building block that will help to inform efforts to engage with local capacities by comprehensively mapping the complex mix of local and national actors involved in the management, delivery and regulation of social assistance.

Building on the Better Assistance in Crises (BASIC) Research inception phase, this non-systematic but rigorous review searched for academic and grey literature on government and donor social assistance capacity and capacity-strengthening policies, strategies, interventions and impact in Yemen. It focused on relevant studies from 2017 to the present day. The search deployed different combinations of key search terms in Google and academic journal databases, and the websites of Yemeni authorities and international actors, including aid agencies, international financial institutions, consultancies, thinktanks and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Study team members also recommended documents and collated grey literature from engagement and interviews with key stakeholders.

The review found a small published literature on capacities in social assistance in Yemen, with relatively scarce up-to-date evidence. There is relevant information in donor and aid agency strategy and programme documentation, in particular from the World Food Programme (WFP), the World Bank, and the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO). There are some recent evaluations and reviews of social protection and humanitarian assistance in Yemen. These include reviews of the overall international response, such as the 2022 Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation (Sida *et al.* 2022) and research by Vuylsteke (2021a, 2021b, 2022); reviews of individual programmes, such as those by Demetriou (2019) and FCDO (2022); and reviews of the humanitarian cash–social protection nexus (Ghorpade and Ammar 2021; Nimkar 2021). There have also been a number of unpublished reviews of the social protection–humanitarian nexus and interoperability (for example, commissioned by FCDO BASIC) as well as unpublished capacity assessments of national organisations.

This review has been informed by the following definitions of the key terms of ‘social protection’ and ‘social assistance’, identified during the BASIC Research inception phase:

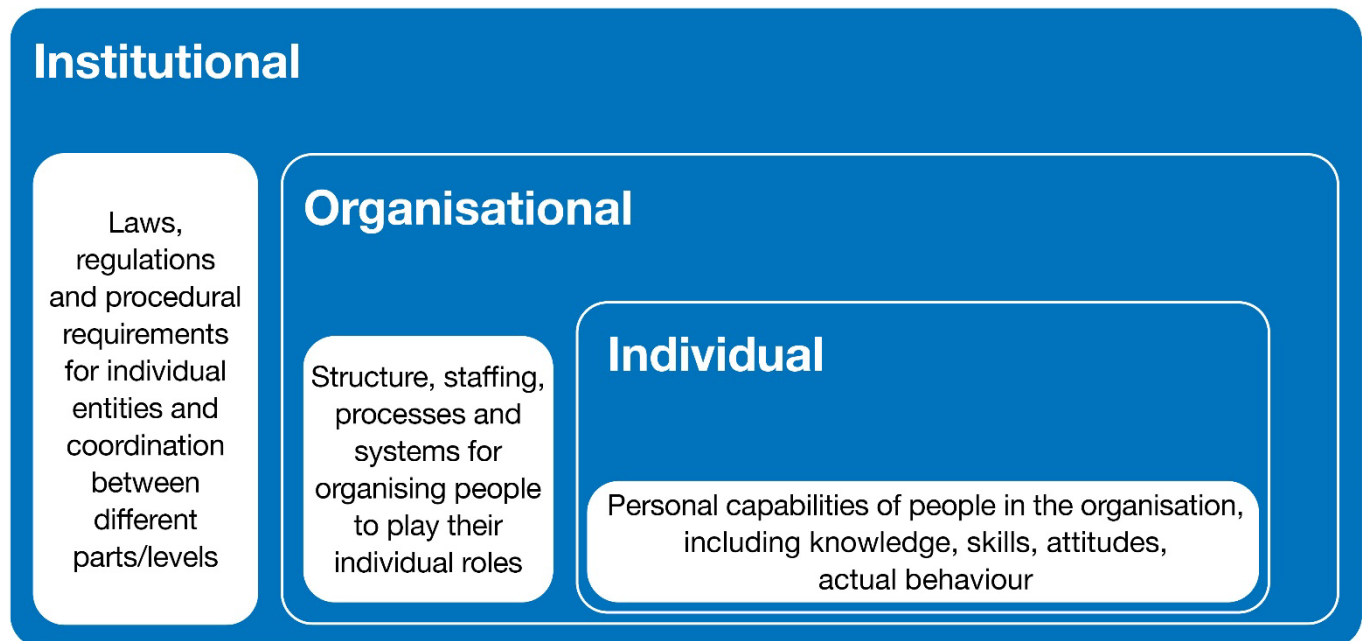
- **Social protection** refers to ‘a set of policies and programmes aimed at preventing and protecting all people against poverty, vulnerability, and social exclusion, throughout their life cycle placing a particular emphasis on vulnerable groups’ (SPIAC-B 2019: 2), through protective, preventive, promotive and transformative measures (Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler 2004).
- **Social assistance** is one pillar of social protection. A key form of social assistance is non-contributory transfers to households or individuals; other forms include fee waivers (for example, for education or health) and state subsidies for the poorest households. Social assistance transfers can be provided as food, cash, vouchers, or other assets, and they can be unconditional or conditional support. Some conditional programmes link the transfers to participation in public works or attending health clinics or other services. Transfers that involve integrated livelihoods, nutrition or other support are referred to as ‘cash-plus’ programmes. Social assistance in crises can be provided by development or humanitarian actors. Humanitarian assistance uses the same modalities of food, cash, vouchers and other in-kind transfers as development assistance, with a focus on saving lives and alleviating suffering (Slater and Sabates-Wheeler 2021).

This study is part of the broader BASIC Research work focusing on the resilience of social protection systems in crises. In the inception phase, this included (among other working papers) a review of the literature and evidence on capacity and coordination issues in crises situations (Slater *et al.* 2022) and, subsequently, the development of an analytical framing for researching capacity in situations of protracted crisis (Slater forthcoming). Slater *et al.* (2022) found substantial knowledge gaps on: (1) what capacity exists for the delivery of social assistance in crises; (2) how capacity deficits can undermine effective delivery; and (3) what can be done to overcome these deficits. The review also identified useful frameworks to explore capacity issues in more depth in crisis contexts, which we draw on to provide the conceptual framing for our study on capacities for social assistance in Yemen.

Key definitions and frameworks identified by Slater *et al.* (2022), which we have used to inform this literature review, are as follows:

- Viewing **capacity** across three aspects: institutional, organisational and individual.

Figure 1.1: The three faces of capacity



Source: Authors' own. Created using definitions by TRANSFORM (2017), as summarised in Slater *et al.* (2022).

- **A contextually grounded approach to assessing social assistance capacities.** This begins with a review of real-life practice and identification of capacity deficiencies as evidence of capacity weakness, as opposed to a theory-driven approach that attempts 'to define a theoretically-desirable level of capacity, examining current capacity and endeavouring to measure the gap between the two' (Kardan *et al.* 2017: 5).
- **There is no commonly accepted universal set of criteria to measure capacity, either more generally** (Scott *et al.* 2015) **or specifically for social assistance capacities in crisis contexts.** Slater *et al.* (2022) summarise work undertaking a supply chain approach to the delivery of social protection, which identifies capacity deficits at each stage of the programme cycle. We have also considered the World Bank's Stress Test tool for assessing the adaptability of social protection systems and their readiness to scale up in response to a crisis (World Bank 2021). These approaches tend to lead 'to a focus on technical elements of systems at the expense of more functional and behavioural elements' (Slater *et al.* 2022: 6).
- **The broader literature on capacity development supported by international aid actors offers multiple guidance documents and tools for how to undertake capacity assessments, with useful principles, approaches and frameworks.** It includes guidance on how to interpret, adapt and apply the multiple organisational assessment tools that are available to establish goals, benchmarks and targets and to monitor progress. For example, INTRAC's guidance sets out how to support participatory, reflexive processes of organisational change (Squire 2022). Some aid agencies have also published guidance on capacity assessment tools and how to use them (for example, USAID 2022). In our ongoing BASIC study, we will explore the application of this work for assessing and supporting capacities in social assistance in crisis settings.

2. Background

Situated on the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula, Yemen has long been one of the poorest countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and today is experiencing one of the world's worst humanitarian crises (UNDP Yemen 2021). The ongoing conflict has caused an estimated 158,000 reported fatalities from 2015 to 2022 (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) 2023). Hanna, Bohl and Moyer (2021) estimate that the conflict had caused up to 377,000 deaths directly and indirectly by the end of 2021, of which 60 per cent were due to lack of access to food, water and health care. In 2022 there was a six-month truce that ended in October that year, but as of early 2023, violent clashes continued in some areas (Center for Civilians in Conflict 2023). In April 2023, a swap of nearly 900 prisoners between the Saudi-led coalition and Houthis raised hopes of a more permanent ceasefire (Al Jazeera 2023).

Yemen's nation state is under challenge, with divided governance, spaces of disorder and many armed non-state actors (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2022; UNDP Yemen 2021). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Yemen and other literature describes how for decades Yemen has been 'resistant to stabilisation... locked in a poverty-conflict trap' (UNDP Yemen 2021: foreword). Following three decades of authoritarian rule by Ali Abdullah Saleh, the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings forced a handover of power to his deputy, Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi (BBC News 2023). However, beset by economic and security challenges, Hadi struggled to maintain support and control, with violent conflict scaling up in 2015 (*ibid.*). During the conflict, historical political, tribal, ethnic and religious divisions have deepened (ACAPS 2023a). Since 2014, the Iran-backed Houthis (also referred to as the *de facto* authority²) have controlled state institutions in north-west governorates, where approximately 70 per cent of the population of around 32.7 million³ live (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2022). This includes the nation's capital, Sana'a. The larger south-east area is under the nominal, heavily contested control of the internationally recognised government of Yemen (IRG)⁴ and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)-backed Southern Transitional Council (STC) (the latter mainly Aden, Lahj and Socotra) (ACAPS 2023b; Harvey *et al.* 2022). In April 2022, President Hadi handed over power to a new presidential council (Al Jazeera 2022). In November 2022, ACAPS estimated there were approximately 25.39 million people living in areas controlled by the *de facto* authority and 5.35 million in IRG areas (ACAPS 2022). Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula is also present in some territories.

There is limited capacity to ensure security and stability. Weak and under-resourced state institutions are not able to consistently exercise authority, which is fragmented. Public sector salaries have not been paid consistently since 2016 (World Bank 2022a, 2020). Armed non-state actors have 'created parallel power centres, alternative *ad hoc* "public" institutions, and their transnational networks' (UNDP Yemen 2021: foreword). Subnational governance is characterised by elite-based patronage networks and pervasive corruption (Harvey *et al.* 2022; UNDP Yemen 2021).

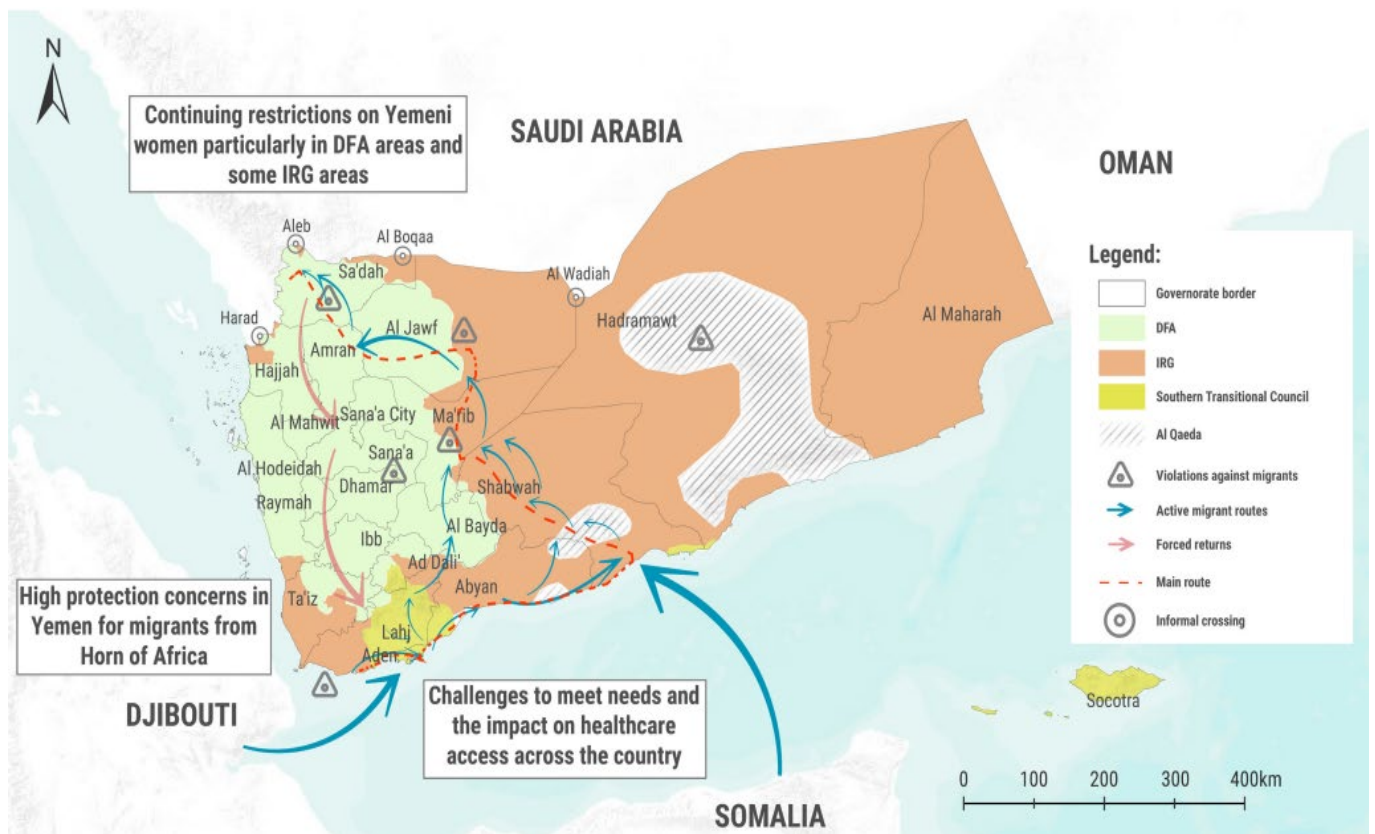
In this protracted conflict, the international humanitarian response has become 'a partial substitute for government' or even 'a shadow government', with large humanitarian resources channelled through the United Nations (UN) and international NGOs rather than the state (Sida *et al.* 2022: xvi). There are substantial differences in terms of how authority is exercised between IRG and Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen, which will be explored in more depth in a forthcoming BASIC Research study examining the politics of social assistance in Yemen.

² Also referred to in the literature as 'Ansar Allah', the official title of the Houthi political organisation (Sida *et al.* 2022).

³ Population figure estimated from the 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan, which reports that the 21.6 million people in need are approximately 66 per cent of the total population (OCHA 2023a).

⁴ 'This covers a range of groupings, including the separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC), which controls Aden and its surrounding areas, and is formally part of the IRG since the formation of the current government in December 2020 in implementation of the 2019 Riyadh agreement' (Sida *et al.* 2022: 13).

Figure 2.1: Zones of control and highlighted events in Yemen, October–December 2022



Disclaimer: The boundaries, names and designation provided on this map do not imply endorsement or acceptance by ACAPS.

Notes: DFA, de facto authority (meaning Houthis); IRG, Internationally recognised government.

Source: ACAPS (2023b). [CC BY-NC-ND 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

The World Bank’s 2022 Risk and Resilience Assessment also identified drivers of resilience in Yemen. These assessments analyse risks and resilience to fragility, conflict and violence, and they cover political economy, elite capture of resources, regional inequalities, social tensions, security and violence issues. The full assessment for Yemen is not publicly available, but the World Bank’s Country Engagement Note for the financial year 2022–23 provides this summarised list of the factors of resilience identified by the Risk and Resilience Assessment:

- (a) Adaptability to protracted instability and conflict;
- (b) Decentralised government structures and role of local institutions;
- (c) Social safety nets, and role of religious and cultural norms, informal and non-state frameworks, including tribal structures;
- (c) A vibrant civil society;
- (d) Role of women in community resilience and fostering social cohesion, and rising youth participation;
- (e) Contributions of the private sector;
- (f) Remittances and support from the diaspora.’

(World Bank 2022a: 7)

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimates that approximately two-thirds of the population (21.6 million people) will need humanitarian assistance and protection services in 2023, given the compounding impacts of conflict, floods, Covid-19, cholera, and global fuel and food price rises (OCHA 2023a). About 4.6 million people (an estimated 14 per cent of the population) are currently displaced and face considerable hardship. Children and women are particularly at risk, as are other marginalised communities (especially the Muhamasheen) who are affected by historical systematic discrimination (*ibid.*).

The humanitarian response has impressively scaled up life-saving support in a highly complex and challenging environment, but coverage remains sparse with ‘unacceptably low’ quality in many areas (Sida *et al.* 2022: xiii). Aid actors struggle with funding constraints, a lack of effective oversight and lack of sustained access, in particular in the north. Humanitarian aid staff face threats and violence, corrupt officials delay and attempt to divert aid projects, and data collection restrictions impede evidence-based decision-making (Harvey *et al.* 2022; Human Rights Watch 2023; 2020a; Sida *et al.* 2022). Due to security restrictions, donors rely on third-party monitoring and community hotlines, which ‘have not been able to halt diversion, mismanagement and appropriation of aid’ (Vuylsteke 2021b: 4). In June 2020, these issues came to a head, leading to a partial collapse of donor funding to UN agencies (Human Rights Watch 2020b). Galvanised efforts on coordinated humanitarian advocacy between 2020 and 2022 achieved ‘removing a 2 per cent levy on implementation assessments, easing the approval of NGO project sub-agreements and international NGO principal agreements and the removal of regulatory obstacles’ (Sida *et al.* 2022: 107). Also in 2022, a UN-brokered truce opened up humanitarian access to hard-to-reach, vulnerable populations and allowed greater freedom of movement for civilians (Charles 2022).

Particularly in the north, restrictions on humanitarian aid have ‘become more centralised’ (Harvey *et al.* 2022: 10). A Humanitarian Outcomes assessment includes an extract from an unpublished analysis of a ‘deliberate intention to extract resources from humanitarian organisations, play a more robust role in controlling and directing humanitarian programs in line with their internally developed strategies and place these organisations under tight security constraints’ (*ibid.*). Restrictions on the movement of humanitarian workers or goods are strictest in Houthi-controlled areas. From October to December 2022, 81 per cent of recorded movement restriction incidents (such as refusal or delays in granting travel permits for needs assessments and aid activities) were recorded in Houthi-controlled areas (OCHA 2023b). The imposition of a *mahram* policy across all Houthi areas and some IRG areas, which only allows women to travel with a male guardian, has made travel difficult for female aid workers and impacted on access to aid for vulnerable women and girls (ACAPS 2023b; OCHA 2023b).

However, one aid worker (Vuylsteke 2021a: 5) argues that ‘the bulk of the most fundamental problems with the Yemen response are internal’ to the humanitarian system. Her assessment highlights:

- Aata opacity that hinders scrutiny and allows for exaggerations, combining ‘to create the institutionally vested narratives relied upon to fundraise’;
- Questionable proportionality of security measures that ‘leans heavily towards bunkerisation’ of aid workers;
- The humanitarian community’s ‘unwillingness and inability to draw and enforce redlines’, which ‘has only emboldened authorities who continue to insert obstacles to aid delivery’ (*ibid.*: 8, 9, 12).

Box 2.1: National mechanisms for coordinating the humanitarian response

In IRG-controlled areas of Yemen, the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MOPIC) along with the High Relief Committee is the governmental coordinating body for humanitarian assistance (Tamdeen Youth Foundation *et al.* 2022a). MOPIC’s functions are affected by its limited capacity: state institutions in Yemen are under-resourced, lacking power and authority (UNDP Yemen 2021). The Minister of Planning and International Cooperation has called for direct funding to local and national actors, to strengthen their capabilities and reduce international actors’ administrative costs (Tamdeen Youth Foundation *et al.* 2022a).

The Supreme Council for the Management and Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and International Cooperation (SCMCHA), established in 2019, is the main interlocutor for local and international NGOs and humanitarian agencies in the north (ACAPS 2020). SCMCHA has financial and administrative independence, reporting directly to the President of the Supreme Political Council (*ibid.*). It issues permits for access, data collection and local organisations’ funding proposals (which require approval before submission to external donors) (Tamdeen Youth Foundation *et al.* 2022a). Vuylsteke (2022) details SCMCHA’s control over the 2022 Integrated Food Phase Classification data collection exercise.

Source: Authors’ own. Information sources cited.

3. Social assistance landscape

This section provides an overview of social assistance in Yemen, first summarising key developments that took place from 1990 to 2015, and then looking in more depth at initiatives and actors since the conflict escalated in 2015 to the present day. Box 3.1 summarises the timeline of key events across these two periods.

Box 3.1: Timeline of key events in social protection in Yemen

1991: Constitution of the Republic of Yemen enshrines **the right for all citizens to enjoy equal political, economic, social, and cultural opportunities.**

1994: Constitutional amendment **guarantees social security for all citizens.**

1996: Social Welfare Fund established to deliver unconditional cash transfers (UCTs) to the poorest and most vulnerable households using a combination of poverty and categorical targeting. **Public Works Project** set up to deliver community-driven labour-intensive public works.

1997: Social Fund for Development established to deliver community development interventions, capacity building of local partners and microfinance interventions, and (since 2004) cash-for-work.

2012: Transitional Programme for Stabilization and Development 2012–14 calls for urgent expansion of social protection interventions to support poor and vulnerable people.

2015: Social Welfare Fund UCT programme suspended due to the violent conflict, leaving 1.5 million households without social protection support.

2016: World Bank starts emergency support for UNDP to deliver through Social Fund for Development and Public Works Project cash-for-work, short-term employment and basic service access for the most vulnerable. Around 33,132 individuals benefited in 2017 from wage employment through participating in cash-for-work and labour-intensive public works.

2017: Emergency cash transfer starts: with World Bank support, taking on the UCT programme, UNICEF delivers emergency cash transfers to Social Welfare Fund UCT household beneficiaries, benefiting nearly 9 million people, about one-third of the population.

2018: By 2018 Yemen has become one of the largest UN humanitarian operations in the world, with 200 organisations helping nearly 8 million people each month.

2020: World Bank sets out plan for some functions of the UCT to shift to the Social Fund for Development. World Bank support for (1) UNICEF in partnership with the Social Fund for Development to deliver the UCT programme with the long-term intention to transfer back to the Social Welfare Fund; (2) UNDP in partnership with the Social Fund for Development to deliver smaller cash-for-nutrition and cash-for-work interventions, and in partnership with the Public Works Project to build/rehabilitate community assets relevant for food security and nutrition through contractors and using community and other labour.

2022: WFP (World Food Programme) continues to be the largest humanitarian actor in Yemen providing general food assistance to 13.2 million people and school feeding to 2 million children, alongside other social assistance transfers.

2023: International humanitarian organisations aim to provide emergency food assistance (of which 30–40 per cent will be cash or vouchers) to 14 million people and multi-purpose cash assistance to 2.5 million people.

Sources: Authors' own. Created using data from Anon. (2011); MOPIC (2012); OCHA (2023a); OCHA (2018); UN ESCAP (2019); UNICEF (2023a); World Bank (2023); World Bank (2022b); World Bank (2017); World Bank (2016); WFP (2023).

3.1 1990 to 2015

Following the 1990 unification of Yemen, the right to social protection for citizens was enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Yemen (1991, amendment 1994). With rising poverty following 1995 economic reforms that removed state subsidies from basic services, food products and fuel, the government introduced a set of social protection programmes (Azaki 2015). Over the next two decades, sequential national development plans set out the intent to expand social protection to protect poor and vulnerable people, including in response to the adverse socioeconomic impacts of the 2011 popular uprisings (Azaki 2015; MOPIC 2012).

Yemen's emergent national social protection system consisted of regressive energy subsidies and low coverage of pensions and social assistance (Ghorpade and Ammar 2021). *Ad hoc* programmes were implemented by various ministries and quasi-governmental bodies, with no overarching social protection policy (Azaki 2015). Semi-autonomous government organisations delivered the main social assistance programmes, primarily the Social Welfare Fund, the Social Fund for Development and the Public Works Project, with financial and technical support from external donors. The largest social assistance programme was the unconditional cash transfer (UCT) implemented by the Social Welfare Fund. By 2014, the UCT targeted 1.5 million of the poorest and most vulnerable households (29.1 per cent of the population) with quarterly transfers through a combination of proxy means testing and categorical targeting (elderly, female-headed households, orphans, vulnerable children and people with disabilities) (Ghorpade and Ammar 2021; UNICEF 2021c). From 2008, the Social Fund for Development operated a cash-for-work programme in response to the impacts of the global food crisis, but coverage remained low (2 per cent of the population in 2014) (Ghorpade and Ammar 2021). Other smaller programmes included school feeding (benefiting 5 per cent of households), Social Fund for Development cash for nutrition and other interventions, Public Works Project active labour market programmes, and a disability fund (*ibid.*).

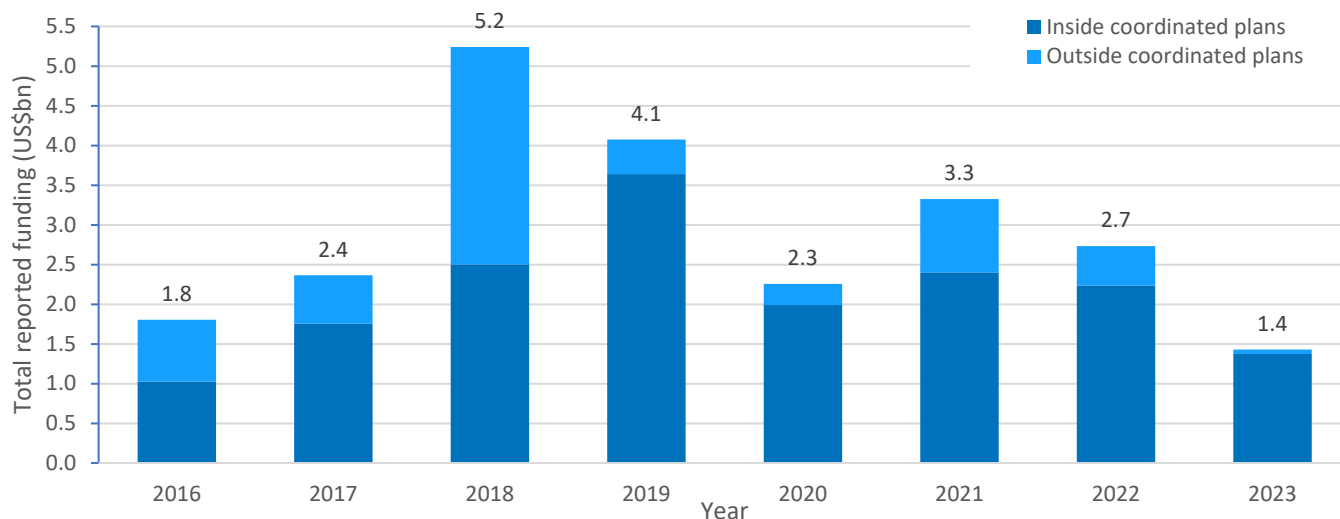
Traditionally, remittances, social networks and *zakat* (almsgiving) have been important social safety nets. Remittances are a key source of income for many households, sent from other regions of Yemen, the Middle East (primarily Saudi Arabia but also UAE, Oman and Egypt), and North America (ACAPS 2021; Cash Consortium of Yemen 2023; McLean 2020). Yemen received approximately US\$3.8bn in remittances in 2019 – 13 per cent of its gross domestic product (GDP) and more than the total aid for Yemen's Humanitarian Response Plan in that year (Financial Tracking Service (FTS) 2023b; Oxfam 2020). Approximately 9 per cent of Yemenis receive remittances from abroad (*ibid.*). Informal social networks – traditionally primarily along tribal lines – have also been an important safety net in Yemen, in particular for remote, dispersed communities in the mountainous north (Anon. 2011). *Zakat* (or almsgiving to benefit the poor, one of the five pillars of Islam) has been a revenue source for local councils, used mainly for financing infrastructure projects (Azaki 2015).

3.2 From 2015

Overall

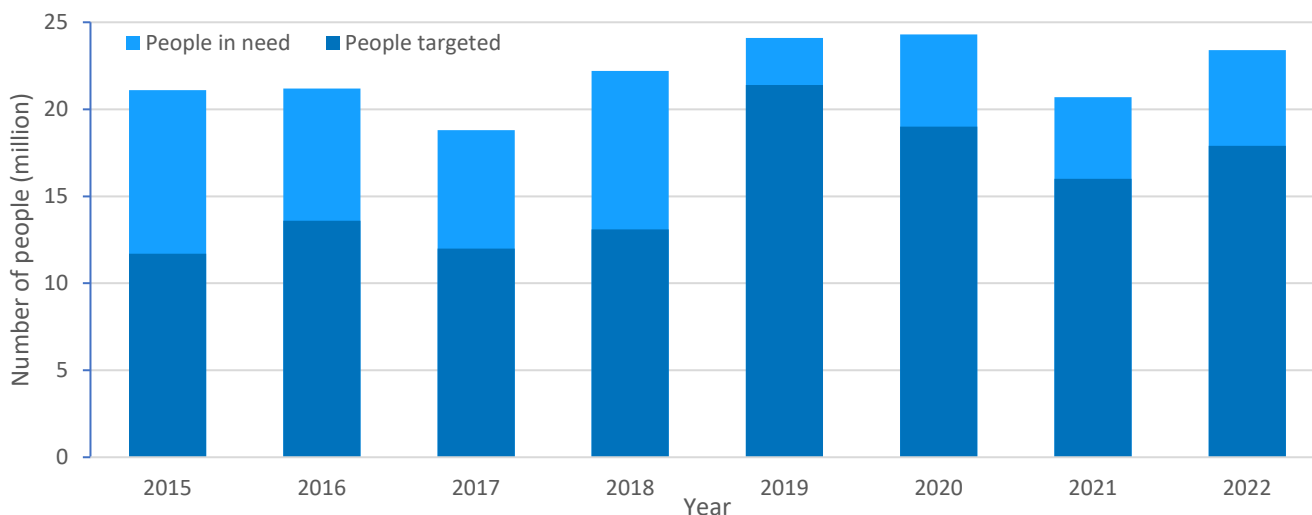
The conflict has disrupted social protection programmes while poverty has increased rapidly (from 35 per cent in 2005 to 62–78 per cent in 2016) **and humanitarian needs have grown year-on-year**, with conflict impacts compounded by other shocks, including locust plagues and floods (Al-Ahmadi and de Silva 2018; UNICEF 2021c). In the past five years, the humanitarian operation in Yemen has become one of the largest in the world, but funding is insufficient and millions of people in need do not receive aid. In 2022, only 55 per cent of the annual Humanitarian Response Plan was funded and 5.5 million people in need were not targeted (OCHA 2023a).

Figure 3.1: Trends in humanitarian aid to Yemen, as reported to FTS 2016–23



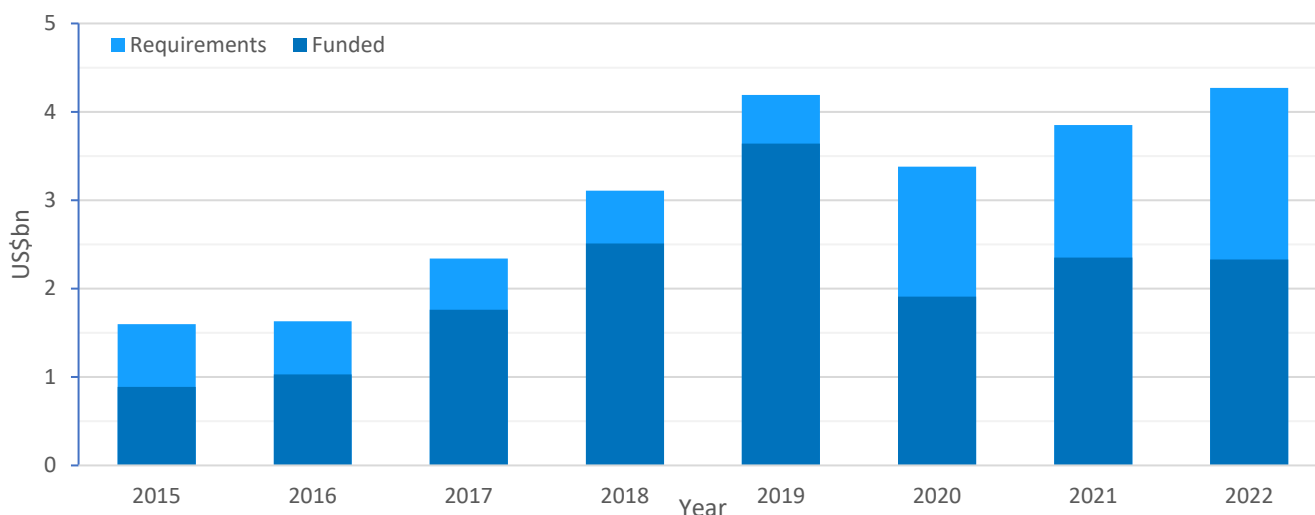
Notes: 'Trends from 2008 to 2018' data is currently under review. Data presented as of 13 September 2023.
 Source: Authors' own. Created using data from FTS (2023c).

Figure 3.2: Trends in the Humanitarian Response Plan in Yemen, number of people in need vs number of people targeted



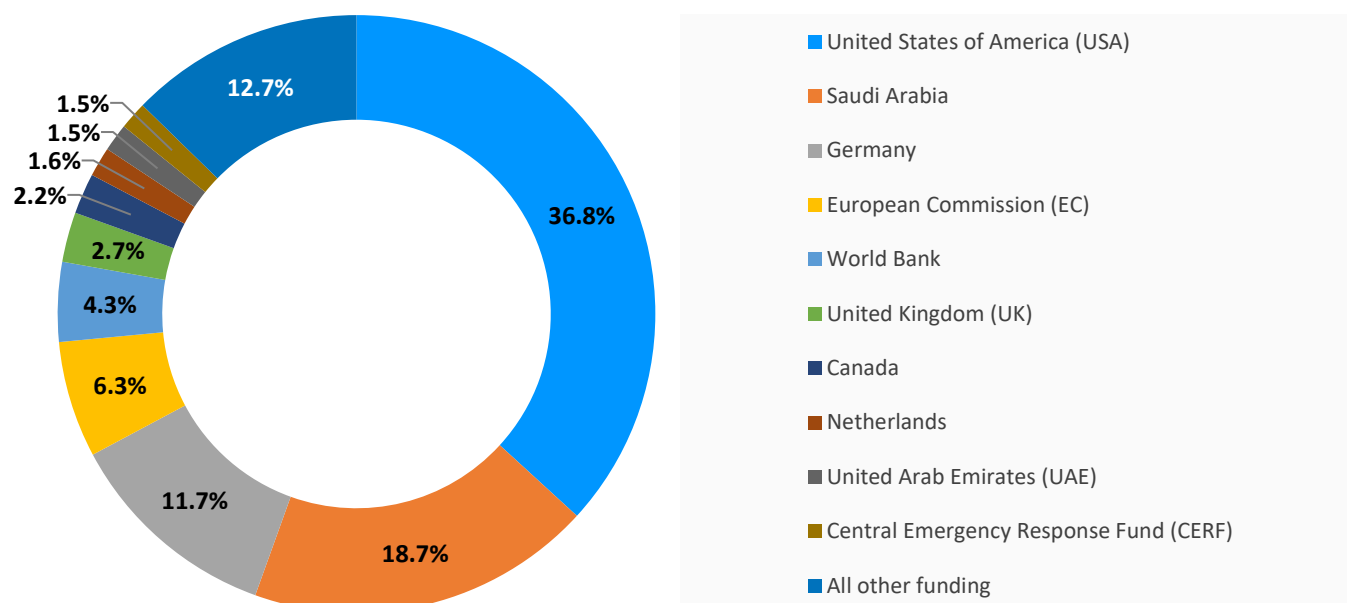
Source: Authors' own. Created using data from FTS as presented in OCHA (2023a).

Figure 3.3: Trends in the Humanitarian Response Plan in Yemen, financial requirements



Source: Authors' own. Created using data from FTS as presented in OCHA (2023a).

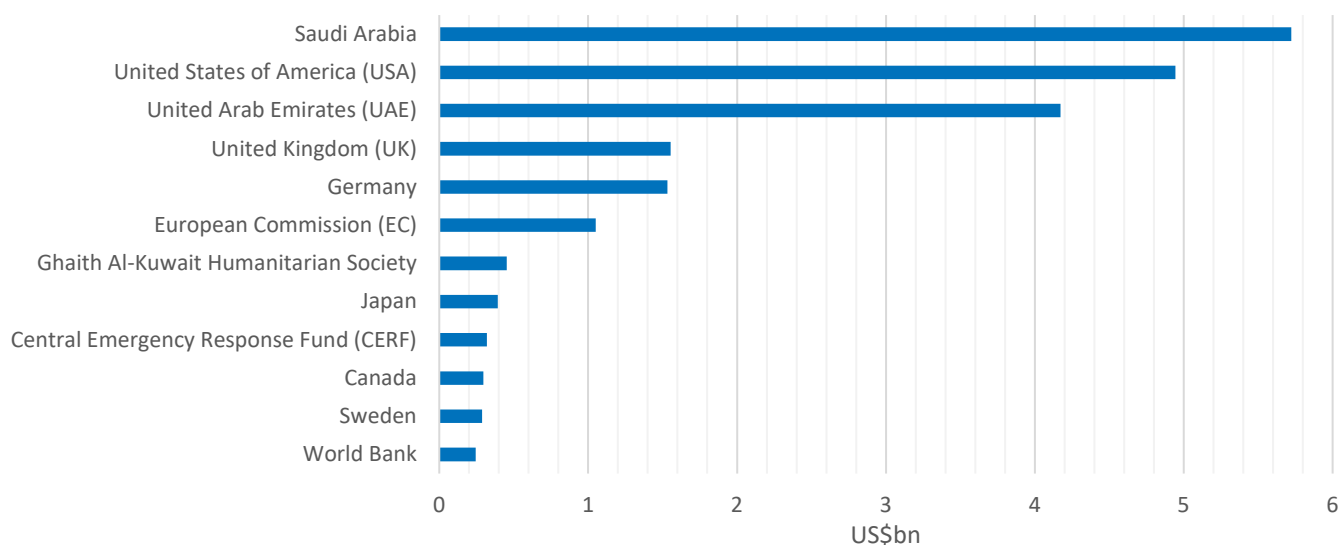
Figure 3.4: Reported humanitarian funding to Yemen by donor, 2022



Notes: Data presented as of 13 September 2023.
Source: Authors' own. Created using data from FTS (2023a).

From 2015–22 (Figure 3.5), the largest donors were Saudi Arabia, the USA and UAE, accounting for around 70 per cent of aid.⁵ These countries have also played a role in Yemen's conflict. Other large humanitarian donors have been the UK, Germany and the European Commission (EC), while in 2022 the World Bank was the fifth-largest donor supporting Yemen's humanitarian response (as reported to OCHA's FTS).

Figure 3.5: Reported humanitarian funding to Yemen by donor, 2015–22



Notes: Data presented as of 13 September 2023.
Source: Authors' own. Created using data from FTS (2023d).

Social assistance

In Yemen, social assistance is currently provided through a combination of humanitarian and development finance, but humanitarian aid dominates (Table 3.1). Although development support for social protection has increased in recent years, the total remains a small proportion of overall aid: only 5 per cent of official development assistance (ODA) reported to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC) Creditor Reporting System for Yemen in 2021 was for social protection, of which 76 per cent was provided by the World Bank.

⁵ Authors' calculation based on FTS data presented as of 13 September 2023.

Table 3.1: ODA disbursements to Yemen 2015–21, US\$m, reported to OECD DAC Creditor Reporting System

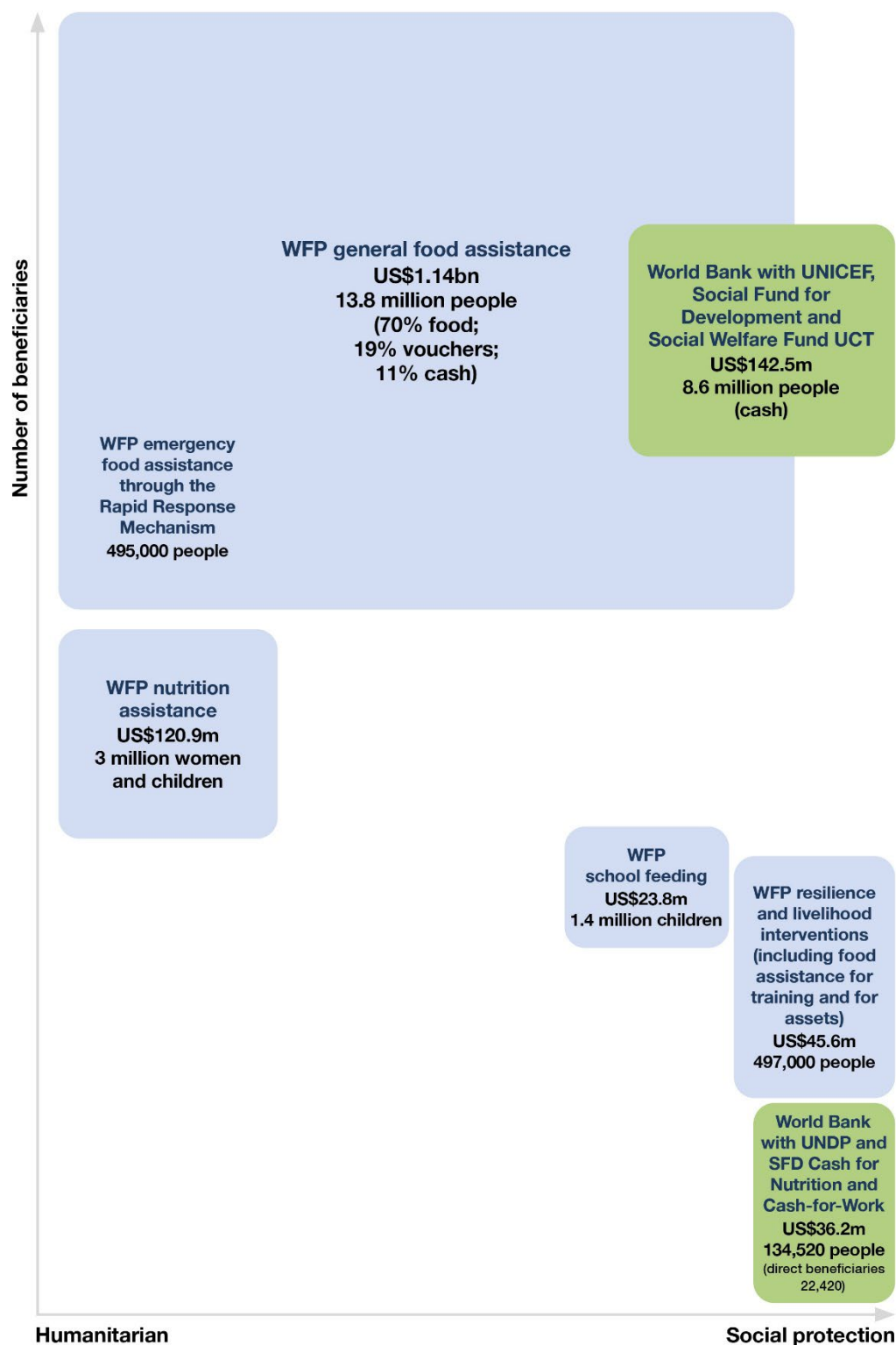
		2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Official donors	Total all sectors	2,034.5	2,572.7	3,496.5	8,181.9	3,941.9	2,673.3	3,735.5
	Social protection	19.3	34.2	16.4	24.1	42.8	80.0	192.3
	Humanitarian aid	842.5	1,167.4	1,600.4	3,020.3	2,509.6	1,657.2	2,076.6
Development Assistance Committee (DAC) countries	Total all sectors	590.4	818.8	1,348.6	1,376.8	1,577.6	1,608.9	1,721.5
	Social protection	3.5	12.4	16.3	15.9	41.9	68.7	40.2
	Humanitarian aid	384.6	651.4	1,187.1	1,081.9	1,288.6	1,201.9	1,225.8
Multilaterals	Total all sectors	210.3	254.0	854.4	650.8	901.0	524.3	726.8
	Social protection	15.8	7.9	0.0	7.5	0.7	5.8	147.9
	Humanitarian aid	50.2	102.6	163.8	158.9	198.7	206.6	225.4
EU institutions	Total all sectors	59.1	108.6	173.3	160.3	215.5	201.1	184.7
	Social protection	0.6	0.1	–	1.5	0.4	0.9	–
	Humanitarian aid	38.0	71.3	113.6	101.8	147.6	114.5	140.8
United Nations	Total all sectors	36.3	43.2	36.2	18.6	35.8	41.9	47.8
	Social protection	3.2	2.4	0.0	0.8	0.2	0.4	0.3
	Humanitarian aid	12.0	28.3	22.9	6.1	18.0	26.9	33.5
World Bank Group	Total all sectors	38.9	41.1	576.7	369.0	589.1	141.4	426.0
	Social protection	0.8	–	–	–	–	–	146.7
	Humanitarian aid	–	–	–	–	–	–	13.3
Non-DAC countries	Total all sectors	1,233.9	1,499.9	1,293.6	6,154.4	1,463.3	540.0	1,287.2
	Social protection	–	13.9	0.0	0.7	0.2	5.5	4.2
	Humanitarian aid	407.7	413.4	249.5	1,779.5	1,022.3	248.7	625.3

Note: Gross disbursements, constant prices 2020. Data presented as of 21 April 2023.

Source: Authors' own. Created using data from OECD (2023).

The two main social assistance interventions are WFP's general food assistance (GFA) programme, and the World Bank and UNICEF unconditional cash transfer (UCT) programme. In 2021, WFP's GFA (delivered as monthly food, cash or vouchers transfers) reached an estimated 13.8 million people, while the World Bank and UNICEF UCT reached about 9 million people (around 1.43 million households) (World Bank 2023; UNICEF 2022c; WFP 2022c). In 2021, WFP's expenditure on GFA of US\$1.14bn (not including direct and indirect support costs) is estimated to have been more than six times higher than the disbursements under the UCT (not including funding for UNICEF project management) (UNICEF 2022c; WFP 2022c; World Bank 2022b) (see Figure 3.6). This is because the amount of assistance provided per household by WFP is much greater than the amount provided through the World Bank-funded programme.

Figure 3.6. Comparing WFP and World Bank social assistance in Yemen in 2021



Notes:

- The size of the bubbles reflects the size of expenditure or budget. This diagram is not to scale, the proportions are approximate and illustrative.
- For WFP, the figures shown are 2021 expenditures (excluding direct and indirect support costs) reported in the Annual Financial Overview for the Yemen Country Portfolio Budget 2021 (WFP 2022c).
- The UCT figure of US\$184.6m is for three rounds of cash transfer payments in 2021, excluding UNICEF project management. The cash-for-work and cash-for-nutrition programme figures are for budgeted funding 2021–22, with an estimate of associated UNDP project management funding (World Bank 2020, 2022b).
- The number of people is for the year 2021 and either shows the numbers of individuals reached or (for the UNDP-Social Fund for Development programmes) the numbers intended to reach.
- Other social assistance interventions in Yemen are not depicted, notably the support provided by the Cash Consortium of Yemen, UNHCR, UNICEF and others, because this review was not able to find equivalent data.

Source: Authors' own. Created using data from UNICEF (2022c), WFP (2022c) and World Bank (2020, 2022b). Inspired by Nimkar (2021: 10).

Humanitarian social assistance consists of multi-purpose and multi-sector food, cash and voucher interventions delivered by a large number of actors (12 UN agencies, 58 international NGOs and 130 national NGOs) (OCHA 2023a), partnering with government and quasi-governmental bodies. Although in recent years there has been a push to expand the proportion of humanitarian assistance provided as cash, for now it accounts for a lesser share than other modalities. The 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan (*ibid.*) aims to provide:

- Emergency food assistance (of which 30–40 per cent will be provided as cash or vouchers) to 14 million people;
- Multi-purpose cash assistance to 2.5 million people;
- Emergency food/cash/in-kind assistance through the Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) to 378,000 newly displaced people;
- Other food/cash/voucher assistance in certain sectors: nutrition, protection, shelter/non-food items (NFI), water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), refugees and migrants.

WFP's operational coverage and budget eclipses that of other humanitarian actors. WFP has been by far the largest channel for humanitarian aid, with almost 40 of all humanitarian funds spent through WFP since 2015, consistent with food security and agriculture being 'the biggest humanitarian concern on an ongoing basis' over this period (Sida *et al.* 2022: 27). In 2022, WFP received 41 per cent of the total humanitarian funding; the next-largest organisational recipient, the Saudi Development and Reconstruction Program for Yemen (SDRPY), received 9 per cent (FTS 2023a).

WFP has scaled up from a caseload of 8 million beneficiaries in 2018 to 15.5 million in 2021 and 15.3 million in 2022 (making it WFP's second-largest operation worldwide) (WFP 2022c; 2023). WFP initially started providing food assistance to beneficiaries for limited time periods, but this approach has changed, with beneficiaries continuing to receive general food assistance for longer periods of time, in recognition of their 'chronic vulnerability and need for continued support' (Ghorpade and Ammar 2021: 15). While this life-saving support is critical, with the conflict now reaching its ninth year, international aid actors' strategic approaches have started emphasising the importance of 'switching to recovery-oriented solutions where possible' (WFP 2022d: 7).

The largest programme (for WFP and across all humanitarian activity) is the unconditional general food assistance operation; other interventions include emergency nutrition assistance, school feeding, and food assistance for assets and training. WFP is also part of the inter-agency RRM with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) as lead agency, and UNICEF, which distributes immediate response rations and basic hygiene and transit kits to internally displaced people within 72 hours of displacement (WFP 2023). Some of WFP's social assistance interventions are supported by projects funded by multilateral and bilateral donors, implemented in partnership with other UN agencies.⁶

Other UN agencies providing social assistance include UNICEF and UNHCR. As well as its involvement in the UCT programme, UNICEF works with the Social Welfare Fund and the Handicap Care and Rehabilitation Fund (HCRF) to implement an integrated social protection and services cash-plus scheme, reaching 229,923 beneficiaries in 2022 (UNICEF 2023b). About 300,000 children with severe acute malnutrition benefited from outpatient therapeutic programmes, and about 1.5 million pregnant and lactating women received iron supplementation (*ibid.*). Also, in collaboration with UNFPA and WFP, UNICEF provides displaced populations affected by conflict or climate change with first-line response packages through the RRM (UNICEF 2022b). UNHCR provides support to internally displaced persons and refugees. In 2021, it supported almost 198,000 households (1.23 million displaced people) in 20 governorates with multi-purpose cash assistance and rental subsidies (UNHCR Yemen 2022). UNHCR also gave cash grants to 4,440 refugees in urban areas of Sana'a, Aden, Mukalla and Kharaz camp (*ibid.*).

⁶ For example: Yemen Restoring Education and Learning project (with UNICEF and Save the Children) funded by the World Bank and the Global Partnership for Education; Yemen Food Security Response and Resilience Project 2021–2023, with UNDP, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) funded by the World Bank; Supporting Resilient Livelihoods, Food Security, and Climate Adaptation in Yemen (ERRY III) 2022–25, managed by UNDP, funded by the European Union and Sweden, and jointly implemented by WFP, FAO and ILO (WFP 2023).

Box 3.2: The World Food Programme in Yemen in 2022

- *Unconditional general food assistance (GFA)*: 13.2 million beneficiaries across all 22 governorates. Of these, 11.8 million received food (of which 2.3 million originally received commodity vouchers that were phased out in October 2022); and 1.4 million (11 per cent of the total GFA beneficiaries) received cash-based transfers (CBTs). From 2020 to 2021, CBT beneficiaries increased by 37 per cent as WFP moved over beneficiaries from food and vouchers in areas with functional markets and biometric registration.
- *Emergency food assistance*: kits distributed to 401,000 people in response to sudden-onset emergencies, including conflict-induced population displacement and floods through the inter-agency Rapid Response Mechanism, 31 per cent less from 2021 given lower levels of population displacement following the 2022 April truce.
- *Nutrition support*: 3.3 million people (1.7 million children and 1.6 million pregnant and lactating women and girls).
- *School feeding*: 2 million children in 4,350 schools across 84 districts in 19 of Yemen's 22 governorates, a 44 per cent increase from 2021.
- *Resilience and livelihoods interventions, including food assistance for assets and food assistance for training*: assisted close to 500,000 people (49 per cent women), transferring US\$26m in CBTs.

WFP's implementation in 2022 was affected by suspensions and reduced coverage and rations due to lack of timely contributions and supply disruptions, including:

- reduced size of GFA rations (cut at end 2021 and in June 2022) for millions (see Box 3.4);
- not assisting about two-thirds of the planned 1.9 million schoolchildren over the first semester of the 2022–23 school year (start in late July–early August);
- In June, suspension of the malnutrition prevention programme (some districts resumed in October) and scale down of the moderate acute malnutrition treatment programme, affecting 1.4 million children and pregnant and lactating women and girls;
- suspension of resilience and livelihood activities from April to October.

Source: Authors' own. Created using data from WFP 2022c, 2023.

There is also a coalition of international organisations providing humanitarian cash assistance called the Cash Consortium of Yemen (CCY). The CCY is supported by the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (Nimkar 2021), with interventions delivered by the Danish Refugee Council, the Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development, the International Organization for Migration and the Norwegian Refugee Council (*ibid.*). The CCY aims to provide a bridge between giving one-off or time-limited support to people affected by shocks such as floods and displacement, and other very vulnerable beneficiaries, and then transition beneficiaries to the longer-term WFP general food assistance programme (Cash Consortium of Yemen 2020; Nimkar 2021). The CCY also aims to ensure that international actors 'respond to the most urgent gaps and use harmonized targeting and monitoring tools, making aid more effective' (IOM Yemen n.d.). Other international NGOs implement cash and other transfer programmes of varying scales, including CARE and the Yemeni Red Crescent Society (Nimkar 2021).

As already noted, the World Bank is a key actor providing finance and technical support for social assistance in Yemen. The World Bank is the largest provider of development finance for social protection globally, and has played an increasingly important role in crisis- and conflict-affected countries in recent years (World Bank n.d.). Following its suspension of funding to the Republic of Yemen in 2015, the World Bank re-engaged in 2016 through the Emergency Crisis Response Project (ECRP) to continue delivering the pre-conflict Social Fund for Development cash-for-work scheme and (from 2017) the Social Welfare Fund UCT programme for the most vulnerable households across all districts in Yemen. The latest programme iteration, the ESPECRP (2020–22), has been extended to 2026 with two tranches of additional financing (World Bank 2020, 2022a, 2023). The World Bank delivers this support through UNICEF and UNDP in partnership with the national organisations the Social Fund for Development, Public Works Project and the Social Welfare Fund. In 2022, key implementation functions of the UCT component shifted to the Social Fund for Development.

Box 3.3: World Bank-supported social assistance in Yemen

- *UNICEF delivers the UCT programme to nearly 1.43 million households* (from the targeted list of 1.5 million beneficiary households, with some reported deceased and some never having come forward to receive their benefits) in partnership with the Social Fund for Development (and with some Social Welfare Fund involvement) with the long-term intention to transfer the programme back to the Social Welfare Fund (World Bank 2022b). Since 2017, there have been 14 payment cycles (which have been intended to be delivered quarterly, but there have been some delays), which will shift to three payment cycles per year from March 2023 (increasing the value from US\$30 to US\$40 per household per cycle, and increasing the likelihood of delivering the full intended annual amount to beneficiaries, while decreasing operational costs) (World Bank 2023). The second additional financing in 2023 will start a digital payments pilot, complemented by support to acquire identity cards (IDs) and access to financial literacy interventions (*ibid.*).
- UNDP delivers the smaller cash-for-work and cash-for-nutrition programmes with the Social Fund for Development (and other interventions through the Public Works Project). The UNDP-Social Fund for Development cash-for-work programme aims to reach 38,000 direct beneficiaries. The number of direct beneficiaries of wage employment has reached 43,434 out of a target of 121,853; with second additional financing, the target has increased to 155,208 (by December 2026) (*ibid.*).
- *The cash-for-nutrition programme* prioritises Social Welfare Fund households receiving UCTs that have pregnant/lactating women and or children under five and other (non-Fund) households in the selected communities where pregnant/lactating women or their children under five are malnourished (World Bank 2022b: 19). In March 2023, the World Bank reported that ‘61,113 households against a target of 61,500 have received their cash assistance and have started benefiting from awareness sessions on nutrition. These households include 65,137 women, of whom 3,738 are from the SWF [Social Welfare Fund], and 96,878 children’ (World Bank 2023: 9). With the second additional financing in 2023, the target has increased to 106,500 beneficiary households by December 2026 (9,300 Social Welfare Fund households; 111,600 women; 153,000 children) (*ibid.*).
- *The World Bank funds other social assistance activities implemented by UN agencies*, including under the Yemen Restoring Education and Learning Project and the Yemen Food Security Response and Resilience Project.

Source: Authors' own. Information sources cited.

In addition to those already mentioned, other international donors support social assistance activities in Yemen. The UK FCDO's £250m five-year Food Security Safety Net (FSSN) programme (2021–26)⁷ supports the UCT through funding to the World Bank (FCDO 2022). Saudi and UAE government funding is channelled through UN organisations, including WFP and other funds and international organisations. In 2018, Saudi Arabia set up the Saudi Development and Reconstruction Program for Yemen (SDRPY), while the Emirates Red Crescent is also active in Yemen, providing food and other aid.

Turning to evidence on impact, overall the 2022 Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation found that **the huge scale-up in food, cash and vouchers nationally has reduced macro-level food insecurity** between 2015 and 2021 (Sida *et al.* 2022). WFP analysis shows how food insecurity rises as food distribution volumes drop, consistent with the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation finding ‘that the humanitarian operation is achieving a measurable outcome’ (*ibid.*). Looking at 2022, WFP reports that ‘famine was averted in Yemen in 2022, with WFP food assistance a key factor’, though there were also other positive mitigating factors, including a reduction in hostilities and increased fuel availability following the truce and above-normal rainfall (WFP 2023: 7, 17). The Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation also found that ‘the very high levels of acute malnutrition had been on a downward trajectory as well, in line with a scaled-up response (although this may be affected by funding cuts)’ (Sida *et al.* 2022: 64). The situation remains critical and progress remains fragile; WFP reports that ‘6.1 million people were projected to be one step away from famine (IPC Phase 4, Emergency) by late 2022 – the highest number of any country in the world. 3.5 million people, including 2.3 million children and 1.3 million pregnant or lactating women and girls, were estimated to suffer from acute malnutrition, with indications of further deterioration’ (WFP 2023: 8).

⁷ The FSSN replaces three programmes: the Yemen Social Protection Programme (YeSP), the Yemen Multisector Humanitarian Response Programme, and a programme that provided support via WFP (FCDO 2022).

Looking at the UCT, the World Bank finds that the programme has ‘a significant mitigating effect on food insecurity and extreme poverty’ (World Bank 2023: 35). Third-party monitoring data for the UCT reports that beneficiaries spend the transfer on food (82 per cent), repaying debts (65 per cent), and health care (28 per cent) (*ibid.*: 9). Nimkar (2021) highlights that poverty has increased due to the protracted conflict, and the low value of the UCT transfers limits the programme’s impact (Box 3.4). Previous evaluations of the Social Welfare Fund UCT programme and the Social Fund for Development cash-for-nutrition programme found positive impacts on nutrition outcomes (Kurdi and Ecker 2019).

Key issues highlighted by the literature on social assistance interventions in Yemen converge on three central themes: coverage, adequacy and data:

- 1. Not everyone in need currently receives social assistance in Yemen but the lack of harmonised beneficiary targeting means that the gaps and overlaps in coverage are not known.** The UCT uses the Social Welfare Fund’s pre-war beneficiary list; WFP started with this list for its general food assistance (GFA) programme and changed it over time to respond to humanitarian needs (Nimkar 2021; Sida *et al.* 2022). Some households may be beneficiaries of both WFP and World Bank transfers, while others, including the most vulnerable, may not receive any support (Ghorpade and Ammar 2021; McLean 2020). There are political as well as technical challenges to harmonising targeting in Yemen. The UCT list is ‘stuck’: owned by the Social Welfare Fund, the World Bank and UNICEF have not undertaken any re-targeting in the past seven years of delivering the UCT programme. Meanwhile WFP’s last major re-targeting exercise was in 2019 (Sida *et al.* 2022). WFP has been attempting to progress with biometric registration, but this has been delayed in areas controlled by the IRG and has not progressed beyond a pilot exercise in areas under control of the *de facto* authority, with negotiations ongoing (WFP 2023). The current lack of coordinated targeting results in – and simultaneously obscures – inclusion and exclusion errors, leading to a widespread discontent among Yemeni stakeholders (from officials, community members, staff in facilities or people who are displaced) with the ‘palpable sense of the arbitrary nature of aid’ and ‘a perceived lack of fairness’ (Sida *et al.* 2022: 39). The technical challenges around improving the coordination of targeting between programmes include interoperable databases and the risks involved in opening up and sharing data. Moreover, aid actors’ interests in maintaining their own systems and operational footprint may act as countervailing interests to harmonisation efforts (Smith 2020).
- 2. People who do receive social assistance do not receive enough support to meet their daily minimum needs.** The humanitarian transfers have been considerably more generous than the UCT. Some payment cycles of the UCT were topped up to respond to Covid-19 impacts. However, delays in the UCT payment cycles mean that households have not been getting the full intended annual benefit (World Bank 2023). In 2022, WFP food assistance rations were cut and some activities and programmes were suspended or scaled back (see Box 3.2 and Box 3.4) (Reuters 2022; WFP 2023). In June 2022, funding shortfalls required further reductions to GFA rations, which were already at reduced levels (Box 3.4). Food aid rations have remained at these reduced levels after a pledging conference in Geneva in February 2023 raised US\$1.2bn – well short of the US\$4.3bn target (Zawya 2023). Also, given the strong social solidarity norms in Yemeni society, studies have found that aid is commonly shared when coverage is not sufficient, reducing further the amount a recipient household has for their own use (Sida *et al.* 2022).
- 3. There is limited data on the outcomes and impacts of the social assistance interventions, which affects the ability of aid actors to understand the effectiveness of their interventions and how to improve them.** There is also limited data on informal safety nets, yet the significance of remittances has grown during the conflict. In 2020, an estimated 1 in 10 Yemenis (or 20 per cent of households) relied on remittances to meet essential needs, although they are susceptible to market shocks (e.g. from the pandemic) and labour market reforms in key host countries (Saudi Arabia in particular) (ACAPS 2021; UNDP Yemen 2022). Recent research exhorts international actors to improve their limited understanding of these informal social protection networks, so that ‘external interventions reinforce—and at the very least, do not undermine—critical sources of coping and survival’ (Kim *et al.* 2022: i).

Box 3.4: Adequacy of social assistance transfers

The humanitarian transfers were set to meet 80 per cent of a household's minimum dietary needs. However, citing funding gaps, global inflation and the impact of the Ukraine conflict, WFP cut ration sizes twice at the end of 2021 and again in June 2022. Rations for 8 million beneficiaries were reduced to around 25 per cent of the daily requirement, and 5 million people at risk of famine conditions also had their rations reduced to less than 50 per cent (DG ECHO 2022; WFP 2021).

Until payment cycle 11 (October–November 2021), the UCT transfer value was fixed to pre-conflict levels, 'varying between YR [Yemeni rials] 3,000 to YR 6,000 per household, per month, depending on the size of the household, and averaging YR 5,000 per family per month' (World Bank 2022b: 16). With steep price increases, by August 2021 the transfer value 'was only 10 percent of the Minimum/Survival Food Basket for a family of seven... in the north, and only seven percent in the south, compared to 42 percent pre-conflict' (*ibid.*). Mitigating measures to improve the adequacy of the transfer have included a new foreign exchange (Forex) strategy and top-up financing (in response to the Covid-19 pandemic), but this has now been phased out and the Forex strategy did not protect against global food price inflation. Moreover, with the security situation leading to inevitable delays, four payment cycles per calendar year have not been achieved – 'in effect, beneficiaries have received a lower annual benefit value than what was intended by the program' (*ibid.*).

The Social Fund for Development cash-for-nutrition programme transfers YR 20,000 (about US\$35) per family per month (World Bank 2020). The cash-for-work programme transfers are capped at a total benefit of US\$500 for one household (over 6 months) (regardless of the number of participating workers from the household) (Nimkar 2021; World Bank 2020).

Source: Authors' own. Information sources cited.

4. National actors and social assistance capacities

In this section we provide a descriptive overview of the main national actors involved in social assistance in Yemen. This includes a brief overview of the role of decision-making institutions, such as the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (MOSAL), the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MOPIC), and the Supreme Council for the Management and Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and International Cooperation (SCMCHA), as well as sub-national bodies and local NGOs. We look in more depth at the literature on the quasi-governmental organisations set up in the 1990s to deliver social assistance programmes, which continue to be the key national implementing actors today. We focus on the Social Welfare Fund and the Social Fund for Development.⁸

4.1 National and sub-national governing bodies

The internationally recognised government (IRG) is involved in social assistance policy discussions and project approvals, and partnerships with UN agencies to build capacities for the future national social protection system. The IRG took part in the UN-supported Arab Region Ministerial Forum in November 2021, signing the Declaration which affirms the critical importance of strengthening social protection systems and expanding programme coverage to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic (Ministerial Forum Declaration 2021). MOSAL and MOPIC respectively chair and deputy-chair the UNICEF-supported Social Protection Consultative Committee, which has held meetings in Sana'a and Aden to discuss social protection coordination and programmes (UNICEF 2022b). Turning to individual programmes, for school feeding WFP partners with the Ministry of Education and the School Feeding and Humanitarian Relief Project (on behalf of the Sana'a-based Ministry of Education), and under the nutrition programme provides technical assistance to the Ministry of Public Health and Population and community health volunteers (WFP 2023).

This review has found little published information about the organisational and individual capacities of IRG ministries beyond general descriptions of their weaknesses, in particular the lack of civil service salaries. There has been some support for building institutional capacities for recovery and reconstruction, which may bolster capacity for social assistance provision in due course. For example, the OECD and the Islamic Development Bank are providing capacity-building support for policy-making and basic service delivery at central and local government levels, funded by the MENA Transition Fund of the G7 Deauville Partnership (OECD 2021).

In the north-west, the Houthis have ruled through a supervisory system, with an increasing grip over the formal institutions of government (ACAPS 2020). They have also set up some new institutions, notably where there is the possibility to capture revenue (Al-Deen 2022). For example, since 2019, the SCMCHA has overseen aid activities in Houthi-controlled areas, including by granting project approvals and travel permits. SCMCHA incorporates responsibilities formerly assigned to MOPIC and reports directly to the President of the Supreme Political Council (ACAPS 2020). Technical line ministries are also functioning in the north but there is a lack of published information on their work. As noted in section 2, over time, SCMCHA's control has become more restrictive, prompting renewed efforts by international humanitarian actors to negotiate effectively as a collective. At the same time, SCMCHA communicates its role in facilitating delivery of the UCT programme, including through working with UNICEF on determining the transfer value, and supporting delivery of the transfers to older and disabled people through fixed and mobile agent centres (SCMCHA 2022). SCMCHA has also declared its support for the localisation of humanitarian action in Yemen. In 2021, it organised a first meeting of local organisations, announcing the intention to hold regular meetings and establish a joint committee to assess their performance (Tamdeen Youth Foundation 2021).

⁸ As described in section 3, another quasi-governmental organisation – the Public Works Project (PWP) – was established by the government in the 1990s to provide job opportunities and improve community assets through small-scale infrastructure projects. It continues to deliver labour-intensive infrastructure works today, including in partnership with UNDP, with funding from the World Bank through the ESPECRP. Some reports include the PWP and its activities as part of Yemen's social protection landscape (Ghorpade and Ammar 2021; World Bank 2022b).

At the sub-national level, governorate authorities also play roles in the regulation of assistance and are involved in implementing interventions. However, it was beyond the scope of this review to explore this in depth. Findings from the literature highlight that local public institutions still function despite the conflict and irregular salaries, regardless of the controlling authorities (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2022). However, the governorate and district-level councils – which pre-conflict were responsible for day-to-day service delivery and which, for many Yemenis, remain their only contact with the state – are under-resourced and open to manipulation (*ibid.*). ACAPS (2020) describes how the Houthi supervisory system co-opts and dominates local governance institutions, with the power configurations in each governorate shaped by relationships between Houthi inner-circle and local elites. At the same time local councils, while struggling to function with diminished revenue and public violence and disorder, have in many places been resilient, mediating local ceasefires and facilitating the delivery of aid, including social assistance such as the UCT programme (Al-Awlaqi and Al-Madhaji 2018; Baron *et al.* 2016). Village councils alongside other community leaders are included in the UCT programme local facilitation groups to raise awareness and foster local-level support (World Bank 2023).

Analysis highlights the importance of capacity support for these essential local bodies, including from the international community, noting their likely key post-peace role given the *de facto* decentralised self-governance emergent in many areas (Al-Awlaqi and Al-Madhaji 2018). An ongoing US\$82.4m programme funded by the European Union and implemented by UNDP aims to support Yemeni formal local authorities.⁹

4.2 Social Welfare Fund

The Social Welfare Fund was set up in 1996 as a financially and administratively independent organisation supervised by the Ministry of Social Affairs (and from 2015 by the Minister of Social Affairs and Labour), financed by the government of Yemen and a few donors (Azaki 2015). Before the conflict, in 2014, it was delivering the UCT programme to 1.5 million households, with a decentralised organisational structure (including 23 governorate branches and 335 district offices) with 1,907 employees (of which 405 were women) (*ibid.*).

Under the Social Welfare Fund, the impact of the UCT programme was affected by low benefit levels, targeting errors, and weak administrative and operating systems (World Bank 2010). The programme reached a low proportion of the poorest households¹⁰ and had little impact on overall poverty (*ibid.*). To address this situation, in 2010 the government started reforms to improve targeting and the management information system alongside other activities, supported by US\$10m from the World Bank (Al-Ahmadi 2015; World Bank 2010: 2).

Following suspension of the UCT in 2015, it was restarted in 2017 with World Bank support, delivered by UNICEF, with the Social Welfare Fund involved in a limited role (World Bank 2022b). The longer-term ambition has been to transfer the UCT programme back to the Social Welfare Fund when conditions allow. Staff at the Social Welfare Fund are contracted as short-term consultants to help with UCT field activities, and the organisation is involved in meetings with the World Bank, UNICEF and the Social Fund for Development (World Bank 2023). Recently, UNICEF has been transferring some responsibilities of the UCT programme to the Social Fund for Development; the World Bank notes that this ‘does not preclude the intent to ultimately hand over the UCT program back (as well as support the transition) to SWF [Social Welfare Fund], when conditions permit’ (*ibid.*: 26).

The UK FCDO (2022: v) notes the ‘solid consensus that providing cash payments outside government systems is a temporary measure to help those in need, and that the objective should be to transfer back to SWF [Social Welfare Fund] as soon as the situation allows’. This analysis finds that the transfer of responsibilities from UNICEF to the Social Fund for Development is ‘to shift more resourcing to national institutions until SWF is able to operate independently is a positive interim measure’ (*ibid.*). It goes on to note that ‘SWF’s future as an institution appears fragile and needs safeguarding’ (*ibid.*).

⁹ The three-year Strengthening Institutional and Economic Resilience in Yemen (SIERY) programme started in 2020 and aimed to scale up support to the Yemeni formal local governance system, rebuild community trust in the Yemeni state, and help redefine the central-to-local relations (EU and UNDP 2020; UNDP 2020).

¹⁰ ‘The 2007 Poverty Assessment concluded that the SWF covered only 13 percent of the poorest population and nearly two-thirds of beneficiaries were above the national poverty line’ (World Bank 2010: 2).

The Social Welfare Fund will require considerable capacity investment and support to take on a leading management role of the UCT programme. On the one hand, the organisation's human resource and physical infrastructure will have been affected by the protracted conflict. On the other, the UCT programme has changed substantially since it was managed by the Social Welfare Fund; UNICEF has added to and improved the operational systems and processes over time to manage risks and support efficient delivery in the conflict context (UNICEF 2021c). These improvements include strengthening facilitation, payment, grievances redressal, and third-party monitoring, underpinned by a management information system (*ibid.*). Other changes include using private banks for payments (in place of the previous use of post offices) and directly contracting a previous Social Welfare Fund payment service provider¹¹ (Ghorpade and Ammar 2021; Smith 2020; UNICEF 2021c).

The Social Welfare Fund has been receiving capacity-building support from UNICEF and the World Bank. In 2022, UNICEF undertook a capacity assessment with the aim of strengthening the Social Welfare Fund's capacities 'to support the implementation of UCTs, particularly in the areas of field facilitation and collection of grievances' (World Bank 2023: 26). Under the Integrated Model of Social Economic Assistance (IMSEA) in Aden in September 2022, UNICEF delivered a three-day training to 95 staff (39 men, 56 women), social workers and their supervisors to build the capacity of Social Welfare Fund case management to provide safe referrals for gender-based violence survivors to specialised services (UNICEF 2022b).

4.3 Social Fund for Development

The other key national organisation for social assistance is the Social Fund for Development, a quasi-governmental organisation established in 1997 to contribute to achieving national social and economic goals for poverty reduction. Administratively and financially autonomous, its board of directors is chaired by the Prime Minister, and includes other cabinet ministers (Anon. 2011). Initially financed entirely by the World Bank, it grew from a US\$44m operation in 1997 to a US\$912m operation (2010–15), with government funding increasing from zero to 20 per cent (Al-Ahmadi and de Silva 2018; Azaki 2015). In recent years, the organisation has received funding from multiple donors and has headquarters in Sana'a, with branch offices covering all 22 governorates (*ibid.*).

During the conflict years, the Social Fund for Development has pivoted its portfolio to crisis response, which includes cash-for-work and cash-plus programmes (with livelihoods and nutrition linkages) (Social Fund for Development 2020). Other key activities include community and local development through providing temporary employment opportunities, small and micro enterprise development through microfinance loans and grants, and various health, education, and water and sanitation initiatives. In 2020, the organisation disbursed US\$126m and implemented 825 projects, with cash-for-work interventions reaching 224,525 households (*ibid.*).

The Social Fund for Development has become more prominent in the social assistance institutional landscape, most recently with its new management role for some of the key functions of the UCT. The World Bank (2023: 16) identifies that this transition 'may attract a larger share of resources from donor partners that prioritize institutional sustainability behind their investments'.

The Social Fund for Development is taking on responsibility for UCT facilitation, payment and grievance redress mechanism components. The handover has been informed by readiness and capacity assessments (conducted by UNICEF, building on previous assessments by the World Bank and UK FCDO), risk-mitigation measures, and an agreed gradual transition plan (World Bank 2022b). The step-by-step plan has involved handover of facilitation activities in the north and then the south; then grievance collection (through the call centre) and grievance case management; and lastly, the Social Fund for Development contracting payment agencies (*ibid.*). To take on these responsibilities it was envisaged that the organisation needs 'a Project Management Unit (PMU) mirroring that of the UNICEF PMU with around 30 persons' (UNICEF 2021b: 5).

¹¹ The European Commission (2019) provides further detail on which aspects of the Social Welfare Fund systems and programme parameters UNICEF adopted, and what changes and innovations it made at the start of implementing the emergency cash transfer project.

However, not all UCT functions will be handed over to the Social Fund for Development; management of third-party monitoring, the management information system (MIS), capacity building, quality support, reporting and external communications functions will remain UNICEF's responsibility. UNICEF will continue to house and manage the MIS, giving the Social Fund for Development access to whichever MIS modules it needs to perform its function 'based on data management protocols developed by UNICEF to ensure data protection' (World Bank 2022b: 24). This raises questions of which data has been collected and stored in the MIS by UNICEF that cannot be viewed by the Social Fund for Development for data protection reasons, and whether in due course this data can be handed over to the Social Fund for Development and the Social Welfare Fund.

In addition to the UCT, the World Bank-funded cash-for-work and cash-for-nutrition programmes are also being implemented through the Social Fund for Development, with management by UNDP.

UNDP supervises and supports the Social Fund for Development to carry out project-specific tasks (UNDP 2021). UNDP has developed a new MIS to monitor the project, which is interoperable with the systems of the Social Fund for Development (and the Public Works Project) (World Bank 2022b).

Reviewers highlight the strengths of the Social Fund for Development (Al-Ahmadi and de Silva 2018; European Commission 2019; FCDO 2022; World Bank 2020), including the following:

- Institutional autonomy and political neutrality enabling successful liaison with multiple authorities. The board has not met since the conflict began, helping maintain its neutrality (FCDO 2020);
- Nationwide presence and long-standing relationships with vulnerable communities in every governorate;
- Lean and flexible staffing and management structure: staff are hired on performance-based contracts allowing the organisation to expand or downsize as needed, and it can pay attractive salaries and recruit competitively (Anon. 2011; FCDO 2022);
- Effective delivery and administrative systems, with transparent financial management and robust procurement policies;
- Funding from multiple donors.

There also some overarching challenges that have become priorities for donor support (FCDO 2022), including the need to strengthen the following:

- Inclusion, including through improved targeting approaches and a gender strategy;
- Operational strategies, processes, safeguards and risk management;
- Monitoring and evaluation, including improving the quality of data and reporting, and evaluating the effectiveness of cash transfer approaches;
- Grievance resolution mechanisms;
- Data protection.

Currently, many donors partner with the Social Fund for Development for delivery of social assistance interventions, maintaining and building its prominent role, which in turn facilitates practical coordination across activities (Collin and Al-Nabhani 2022). An evaluation of the World Bank's Yemen Emergency Response Crisis Project (ECRP) grants to UNDP from 2016 to 2022 found that the support to the Social Fund for Development and Public Works Project had a leverage effect in attracting funding from other donors (*ibid.*). Looking at UNDP partnership with those two organisations, the evaluation found that while there were few formalised coordinated mechanisms, and coherent targeting approaches were absent, 'the same teams are often in charge of overseeing several projects from different donors, which contributes to a *de facto* harmonization' (*ibid.*: 55).

The World Bank, UNDP and UNICEF have provided support to the Social Fund for Development's processes and systems to meet project diligence and compliance requirements (*ibid.*; FCDO 2022).

The World Bank, UNDP and UNICEF have worked with the organisation to develop an environmental and social management framework and provide training on environmental and social safeguarding, including on gender, gender-based violence, and sexual exploitation and abuse (UNDP 2021; UNICEF 2021a). One challenge has been the 'tendency to view safeguards as a compliance requirement rather than as part of the project's overall management approach to risk' (Demetriou 2019: 52).

The UK FCDO has also worked closely with the Social Fund for Development to strengthen inclusion, targeting, data quality, monitoring and evaluation, safeguarding training, risk management and complaint-handling (supported by the 2018–21 £62m Yemen Social Protection Programme (YeSP)) (FCDO 2022). The inclusion support arose when the Social Fund for Development did not meet the 30 per cent target for female cash-for-work beneficiaries under the YeSP (*ibid.*). The FCDO has also supported development of a targeting and prioritisation strategy to feed into the Social Fund for Development's 2022–24 Operational Plan (*ibid.*).

Going forward, donors continue to prioritise supporting the Social Fund for Development's governance, systems and procedures. For FCDO, this includes feeding into the organisation's crisis response plan and providing 'a challenge function on strategic issues', given the impacts of the conflict on the Social Fund for Development's governance arrangements (FCDO 2020: 63). Priority areas for support include 'reporting and third-party monitoring, evaluating the effectiveness of cash transfer approaches (including value), developing strategies (Gender, Risk Management and Data protection strategies), and operational safeguards' (FCDO 2022: iii).

The FCDO suggests improving donor coordination to sequence capacity-strengthening to the Social Fund for Development, given the demands on the organisation, with its expanding responsibilities and the challenging operating environment (*ibid.*). Moreover, with the proliferation of donor support, donor-funded monitoring is 'a significant burden on SFD, both at headquarters and branch level', and the organisation 'would welcome stronger coordination or, ideally, a joint donor approach' (*ibid.*: xvi).

4.4 Yemeni NGOs and other civil society actors

It is beyond the scope of this review to consider in depth the literature on NGOs in Yemen, but it is important to note they play key roles in the social assistance field. These include Yemeni NGOs who act as implementing or cooperating partners for WFP, other UN agencies and international NGOs. WFP worked with 18 national NGOs in 2022 (WFP 2023). Donors are seeking to support and strengthen these local capacities: for example, a new FCDO-funded project agreed in February 2023 – Building Resilience through Integrated Community-based and Humanitarian Systems Transformation and Leadership in Yemen (BRIGHTLY) – will be delivered by an NGO consortium working with and through local and international NGOs to provide cash transfers and livelihoods support to up to 40,000 Yemenis each month (FCDO 2023). The project intends to channel 30 per cent of the total funding over the programme's duration to local organisations, starting with relatively low amounts but increasing each year.

Further BASIC Research work on NGO social assistance capacities in Yemen will be informed by the broader evidence on national and local NGOs and their participation in the humanitarian response. A joint statement by Yemeni civil society organisations to the 77th UN General Assembly in September 2022 urged the donor community to: (1) provide direct and flexible funding to local organisations with reduced and harmonised due diligence requirements and simplified procedures; (2) ensure that national and local NGOs have a role in leading the humanitarian response; and (3) to prioritise (long-term and flexible) funding for women-led and women's rights organisations and support Yemeni female humanitarian workers to conduct fieldwork (Tamdeen Youth Foundation *et al.* 2022b).

Beyond Yemeni NGOs, there are other civil society actors involved in how social assistance is governed and provided at local levels, such as committees that act as interlocutors for aid agencies at the community level, religious actors such as mosques, as well as tribal bodies and women-led organisations. These other local stakeholders were beyond the scope of this review and are often neglected in the literature on aid and localisation, but are important to bring into further discussions on localisation and capacity-strengthening.

5. International actors and social assistance capacities

In this section we profile the approaches taken by WFP, the World Bank and UNICEF towards supporting national capacities for social assistance in Yemen. We also provide a brief summary of findings on some of the other international actors involved in supporting social assistance capacity.

Across these actors, we find a shared ambition to link meeting immediate needs with building resilience in the longer term, in order to move beyond short-term recurrent interventions with limited impact. In the latest strategic plans, there is a common shift in emphasis from siloed interventions to integrated multisectoral and geo-targeted or area approaches. This is seen as a concrete approach to operationalising the humanitarian–development–peace nexus in Yemen.

5.1 World Food Programme

WFP is the largest humanitarian actor in Yemen, across the whole response and for social assistance. In its 2023–25 Interim Country Strategy Plan, WFP (2022d) sets out its intention to leverage this ‘to advance an interoperable and people-centred response, enabling improved coordination and shared approaches to the gender-responsive assessment, targeting and delivery of assistance’ (*ibid.*: 2). Its strategic approach is premised on operationalising the humanitarian–development–peace nexus by linking humanitarian and recovery-oriented programming and promoting stability (WFP 2022d). WFP’s activities in Yemen are detailed in section 3.2. As the organisation’s operations have expanded, its personnel have increased: in 2019, WFP country office headcount expanded by 65 per cent in one year to 754 staff (WFP 2020).

Turning to evaluations of the impact of WFP’s food, cash and voucher assistance, the following studies have reported positive findings (as summarised in WFP 2022d: 7):

- The 2022 Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation (IAHE) found that ‘WFP’s response saved lives and contributed to an improvement in food security over time’. IAHE ‘recommendations included continuing to prioritize the preservation of food security and basic services, improving collective efforts to target the most vulnerable for assistance, enhancing accountability to affected populations, and switching to recovery-oriented solutions where feasible’.
- A 2021 UNICEF evaluation (not available online) ‘confirmed the effectiveness of community management of acute malnutrition and the importance of maintaining a continuum of services for the prevention and treatment of severe and moderate acute malnutrition at scale’.
- A 2020 WFP participatory review of food-for-asset programmes and a mid-term evaluation review of the Enhanced Rural Resilience in Yemen Project reported positive findings on the impact of assets built on improving community access to markets and basic services, and a multi-agency resilience-building approach.

WFP intends to ‘lay the ground for future social safety nets and extend the use of its expertise in assessment, targeting and beneficiary management into the social protection domain’ (WFP 2022d: 2 [emphasis added]). However, the Interim Country Strategy Plan is short on detail around what this will involve and how it will be achieved. The Plan explains that WFP is carrying out re-targeting exercises to minimise inclusion and exclusion errors, as well as continuing to expand biometric registration in its SCOPE beneficiary and transfer management platform,¹² but does not explain how this will advance humanitarian–development coordination or support the building blocks of a future national social protection system (WFP 2021, 2022d). Previously, before the current conflict, WFP deliberately sought to avoid parallel social safety nets, seeking to work in a way that would reinforce and complement the Government of Yemen’s social protection system (and in particular the Social Welfare Fund’s cash transfer programme at that time) (WFP

¹² WFP (2022d: 19) reports that ‘In areas under the control of the Sana’a-based authorities, 60,500 people were registered in 2021. In areas under the control of the internationally recognized Government, 2.2 million people had been registered by the end of 2021. Of those registered, 43 percent are women and girls.’

2012). This review did not find information in the published literature on WFP engagement with the Social Fund for Development and the Social Welfare Fund in the immediate or longer term.

WFP's strategy sets out that it 'will seek to expand the technical cooperation and organisational capacity strengthening support it provides for social assistance policies, programmes and delivery systems' (WFP 2022d: 17). The organisation works with multiple partners. It works closely in partnership with the authorities in IRG and *de facto* authority-controlled areas to implement the school meals and nutrition activities (WFP 2022d). Implementation of WFP's food assistance is closely coordinated with the Food Security and Agriculture Cluster, and in collaboration with 19 cooperating partners (including local and international NGOs) (WFP 2022c).

WFP aims to develop capacity plans for local and national institutions involved in delivering social safety nets (WFP 2022d). In 2021 there was a particular focus on building the capacity of WFP and its partners on issues related to gender, gender-based violence, protection, and accountability to affected populations, as well as inclusion (through the Yemen Inclusion and Empowerment Initiative) (WFP 2022c: 25). This review was not able to find details of which national NGOs WFP is working with to strengthen capacity, or with what results.

The WFP country audit conducted in 2019 noted that WFP's 'management of cooperating partners required improvement, mainly relating to financial and operational reporting, timely reconciliations and, above all, payment to WFP's cooperating partners in a timely manner' (WFP 2020: 4 [emphasis added]). Underlying causes included recurrent issues with collection of partner reports and data capture, leading to delays in clearances and payments (*ibid.*).

5.2 World Bank

The World Bank's strategic approach is to address immediate needs through partnerships with UN agencies and engaging national organisations (Social Fund for Development and Public Works Project), while also 'preparing for post-conflict recovery and reconstruction by establishing and enhancing social protection delivery systems' (Ghorpade and Ammar 2021: 15). Its current programme prioritises multisectoral integrated approaches and geographically targeted packages of interventions (World Bank 2022a). The Bank has been operating without direct operational engagement with the government, through partnership with UN agencies as grant recipients,¹³ and without a country presence.

The World Bank finds that **the International Development Association (IDA) programme in Yemen 'is achieving results at scale and portfolio performance has been consistently strong'** (World Bank 2022a: 13). As noted in section 3.2, while evidence is limited, the World Bank reports significant mitigating effects of the UCT programme on food insecurity and extreme poverty in Yemen (World Bank 2023: 35).

The World Bank's Country Engagement Note 2022–23 (World Bank 2022a) finds successes and challenges in the model of partnering with UN agencies as grant recipients. Noting the overall positive experience in enabling access to most of the country and upholding of impartiality and non-interference principles among other points, continued improvements were identified as being needed in: '(i) fiduciary, environment, and social requirements; (ii) implementation costs; (iii) Third-Party Monitoring (TPM); (iv) sustainability' (World Bank 2022a: 14).

Overall, the Country Engagement Note 2022–23 finds that the context of **'protracted conflict warrants a more sustainable institution-building and system-oriented approach to deliver support'** (*ibid.*: 15). It details the following area of focus going forward, which will shape the World Bank's support to national capacities for social assistance in Yemen:

- Securing the 'fundamental objective' of 'institutional preservation', deepening its engagement in three complementary ways: '(i) strengthen the role of local institutions in project implementation and capacity building; (ii) deepen engagement with local governments (by implementing partners, and ultimately the Bank); (iii) explore possible support at the central level on core government functions and salaries for service delivery, when circumstances on the ground allow' (*ibid.*: 5).

¹³ Under the World Bank's Fragility, Conflict and Violence Policy.

- Supporting inclusive bottom-up approaches involving authorities and citizens, civil society and community-based organisations will ‘further social cohesion and strengthen accountability at the local level’, essential for sustainable peace and development (*ibid.*: 20).

Looking at the role and positioning of the UCT programme in the evolution of the development–humanitarian–peace nexus, the World Bank aims to invest in dialogue ‘anchoring the UCT program to some measure of food security, impact adequacy, and helping it transition to a more affordable and sustainable path, possibly with the support of a broader coalition of development partners’ (World Bank 2023: 16).

5.3 UNICEF

In Yemen, UNICEF balances support to strengthening systems with direct service delivery (UNICEF 2023b). UNICEF’s Country Programme for 2023–24 prioritises ‘achieving collective humanitarian and development outcomes that reduce needs, risks and vulnerabilities over several years, while ensuring a greater focus on the quality of assistance and an appropriate balance between at-scale actions and targeted approaches to reach those most in need, as well as strengthening monitoring’ (UNICEF 2022a: 5). The Country Programme highlights the importance of ‘strengthening convergence between humanitarian and development interventions within the humanitarian–development–peace nexus agenda in Yemen’ (*ibid.*) but does not look into the connections between humanitarian and development actions and potential pathways for peace.

UNICEF (2023b) lists multiple evaluation exercises, including in 2022 the completion of an evaluation of the Infant and Young Child Feeding programme and an evaluation of the Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM). These do not appear to be available online. UNICEF (2023b) also identifies lessons learnt that informed the development of UNICEF’s 2023–24 Country Programme, including the need to integrate programme interventions and provide cross-sectoral approaches. In social protection, UNICEF wants to strengthen ‘an integrated multi-sectoral social protection response to multi-dimensional poverty and vulnerabilities’ through ‘the Cash Plus approach’ (*ibid.*: 9). Such multisectoral approaches require different strategies in different locations and dedicated donor support (*ibid.*).

UNICEF has led implementation of the UCT programme for seven years and has built up considerable capacity and know-how in the process. UNICEF has been directly responsible for: overseeing the implementation of UCT component activities; monitoring progress; sub-contracting and supervising all contracted service provider organisations; managing UCT component funds; coordinating activities of all service provider organisations; reporting functions (financial and progress implementation report); communicating and reporting to donors and funders; and building capacity of the envisioned national implementing partner (Social Fund for Development) and the Social Welfare Fund (UNICEF 2021c). UNICEF has developed a management information system enabling real-time payment and grievance data collection integrated in a single platform (World Bank 2020). UNICEF also reports setting up a Consultative Committee to improve implementation quality, through sharing updates and receiving feedback during payment cycles from MOSAL (Social Welfare Fund), MOPIC and the SCMCHA (UNICEF 2021c).

UNICEF set up a project management unit with central and field-level staff to supervise the implementation of the quarterly unconditional cash transfers, operating between Yemen (Sana’a Country Office and five field offices) and Jordan (Amman) (UNICEF 2021c). ‘Unlike a typical UNICEF programme section, this self-contained delivery unit works in real time with delegated accountabilities that enables it to act swiftly to deliver a range of services’ (UNICEF 2021a: 18). In February 2021, the UNICEF project team had 42 members, which included specialist functions such as: programme and operations managers and coordinator; contracts, monitoring and evaluation; a cash transfer specialist; case management; field outreach and coordination; finance officer; field monitoring; fraud analyst; database, data analyst and Java developers; supply and logistics; and assistants (UNICEF 2021b). The project management unit was seen as playing a custodian role in maintaining the payment system until such time as it could be handed back to national actors.

UNICEF is playing a key role in supporting the Social Welfare Fund and Social Fund for Development capacities for implementing the UCT – as described in sections 4.2 and 4.3. In 2023, UNICEF was supporting the handover of some management functions of the UCT to the Social Fund for Development (see section 4.3).

UNICEF also delivers other social assistance interventions (as described in section 3), including partnering with the Social Welfare Fund and the Handicap Care and Rehabilitation Fund on cash-plus interventions, and as one of the agencies involved in the RRM for displaced people.

Finally, UNICEF also plays a convening role supporting dialogue on the development of a national social protection system. In collaboration with ILO and UNDP, UNICEF supports ‘the development of a scenario-based framework for a national social protection system, including strengthening coordination structures, information systems, payment management and grievance mechanisms’ (UNICEF 2022a: 9). Since 2018, UNICEF has supported the Social Protection Consultative Committee platform/forum (chaired by MOSAL and deputy chaired by MOPIC) ‘to facilitate and coordinate social protection policy and programming and maintain strategic dialogue’ (UNICEF 2022b: 5).

5.4 Other international actors

Other international donors and aid agencies are involved in social assistance in Yemen. They also have strategies for strengthening national capacities for social assistance. Interesting findings on their approaches include the following:

- The Saudi Development and Reconstruction Program for Yemen (SDRPY) aims to move from humanitarian relief to supporting longer-term development objectives, including through building the capacity of Yemeni government institutions. SDRPY partners include the Yemeni government and non-government agencies, ministries, development funds, local authorities in governorates, and various regional and international development organisations. SDRPY launched capacity-building programmes for MOPIC in 2019, and the Ministry of Finance in 2021, and signed a joint cooperation agreement with MOPIC in 2021 (SDRPY 2021).
- In its Country Programme for 2023–24, UNDP Yemen (2022: 4) prioritises ‘Putting subnational actors in the lead at early programme stages’ through capacity development and empowerment. UNDP partners with the World Bank to deliver small-scale cash-for-work and cash-for-nutrition programmes with the Social Fund for Development (and other interventions through the Public Works Project). A review found that UNDP went beyond ‘acting as fiduciary “pass-through” agent’ for World Bank funds, progressively expanding from fiduciary management, oversight and quality control to include technical guidance and capacity-building support to the implementing partners (Social Fund for Development and Public Works Project) (Demetriou 2019: 16, 50). Lessons learnt from UNDP’s capacity-strengthening support include the need to conduct an in-depth capacity assessment before implementation, which informs a capacity-development plan that is integral to the project; and ensuring that aid agency capacities (in this case UNDP’s project management unit) are factored into intervention design (*ibid.*).
- The UK FCDO’s long-term vision for addressing food insecurity in Yemen ‘is a nationally owned and financed social protection system. The pathway to this long-term vision is one starting with harmonisation and complementarity between humanitarian cash and social protection interventions, with humanitarian assistance building blocks for the future national system’ (FCDO 2020: 15). FCDO supports the UCT programme through funding to the World Bank and has provided technical assistance to the Social Fund for Development for support on internal systems for inclusion, targeting, data reporting among other areas (see section 4.3). In 2022, FCDO also started a programme to work with and develop the capacity of Yemeni NGOs, including to deliver cash transfers (see section 4.4). UK’s support to Yemen has been affected by FCDO budget cuts, as UK aid spending has decreased from 0.7–0.5 per cent of gross national income (GNI); from a peak of £260m in 2019, UK aid fell by more than half, to £114m in 2021 (Loft 2022).

5.5 Coordination and localisation

Multiple humanitarian and donor actors are involved in providing social assistance in Yemen and will be for the foreseeable future. How they do – or do not – work effectively together has consequences for national social assistance capacities (Smith 2020). The international response in Yemen has struggled both to ensure coherence across the humanitarian response, and to build linkages between humanitarian activities focusing on immediate needs and development interventions supporting longer-term capacity and resilience.

There has been growing interest among donors and aid agencies operating in Yemen in strengthening cash harmonisation as a first step towards a more predictable social protection response in the future (Smith 2020: 4–5). Efforts to strengthen a coordinated humanitarian–social protection response include:

- Setting up the Donor Cash and Social Protection Working Group, which has identified priority reform areas for a sustainable and nationally owned social protection system;¹⁴
- Work by the Cash and Markets Working Group to develop a humanitarian cash strategy to strengthen humanitarian–social protection linkages (OCHA 2022);
- Coordination around transfer values, with the Cash and Markets Working Group (2022) publishing guidance on calculating the minimum expenditure basket and multi-purpose cash assistance transfer value;
- An ongoing push to strengthen humanitarian interoperability, involving DG ECHO, the Cash Consortium of Yemen and WFP (Nimkar 2021).

However, progress has been intermittent, partly due to capacity constraints – for example, the Cash and Markets Working Group is under capacity, and has no dedicated cash expert (McLean 2020).

Coordination is challenged by a combination of factors. These include: a focus on the delivery of inputs (over more complex activities); tensions in balancing short- and long-term funding priorities; the complexities in coordinating with various authorities and, in effect, differently governed regions; and competitiveness among individually funded, powerful aid agencies, which leaves the humanitarian community vulnerable to ‘divide and rule’ strategies by authorities in both areas (Sida *et al.* 2022), as well as the high turnover of staff, including in key coordination positions (Montemurro and Wendt 2021).

Research by the Humanitarian Exchange and Research Centre (HERE)-Geneva in 2021 found that the lack of communication between Gulf donors and other humanitarian donors contributes ‘to a feeling of fragmentation within the humanitarian community’, and constrains donors’ collective strategic coordination (Montemurro and Wendt 2021: 31). A new Famine Relief Fund set up with Saudi Arabia and the UAE each contributing US\$230m, which was intended to be an innovative, streamlined mechanism to expedite scaled-up deployment of funds, was criticised for its lack of transparency¹⁵ (Tett 2022). There have been recent joint initiatives: for example, in November 2022, SDRPY hosted a workshop in Riyadh with the World Bank and IMF to increase and develop the capacity of Yemeni institutions (Saudi Press Agency 2022).

The 2022 Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation called for the international humanitarian response to ‘pivot to structural solutions’, and develop a localisation strategy to ‘articulate efforts to develop national capacities for service delivery and the means to foster donors to increase the volume and quality of funding to local partners’ (Sida *et al.* 2022: xix). In line with Grand Bargain commitments on localisation, humanitarian actors have committed to removing barriers to partnerships with local and national NGOs, involving them in coordinating mechanisms, and developing their capacities (OCHA 2023a). Plans include ‘promoting localization of cash assistance by carrying out capacity building initiatives with local actors’ (*ibid.*: 40).

¹⁴ The group’s 2021 annual workplan included the following six priority reform areas: adequacy and equitability (harmonisation of cash transfers); targeting the vulnerable (common identification and targeting approaches); value for money (complementarity of coverage); accountability (common feedback mechanisms); measurability (common measurement of results); sustainability (multi-year funding); and linkages to livelihoods programming (Donor Cash and Social Protection Working Group 2020).

¹⁵ Led by a former UN Director, this Fund was launched with limited transparency around its donors and objectives, and an unusual structure as ‘a self-standing financial vehicle’ sitting ‘outside UN’s normal bureaucratic channels’ (Parker and Stenrod 2021; Tett 2022). Some international NGOs reportedly decided not to work with the Fund because of the lack of transparency as well as concerns around the requirement to spend the large grants within a four-month period (Montemurro and Wendt 2021: 18). In 2021, the Fund disbursed the total US\$460m (in the top 12 humanitarian donors worldwide) to WFP (64 per cent) followed by UNICEF (16 per cent), and smaller amounts to other organisations including UN agencies and international NGOs. In 2022, there were no more donations reported to this Fund for Yemen; UAE donated US\$1.7m to the Fund intended to support humanitarian response in Ethiopia. Sources: FTS 2023a; and Financial Tracking Service (FTS) search using ‘Famine Relief Fund’

<https://fts.unocha.org/data-search/results/incoming?usageYears=2021%2C2022%2C2023&organizations=11988&group=organizations#search-results> (accessed 22 March 2023).

However, in practice, the localisation agenda has not advanced much in Yemen. The Yemeni 2022 localisation baseline assessment found some positive examples of capability-building support to local and national partners, but also reported limited budgets and scope, and few coordinated approaches (Tamdeen Youth Foundation *et al.* 2022a). Opportunities for capacity inputs are few and are limited to a small number of organisations, sectors or areas (*ibid.*). International actors typically have an *ad hoc* approach to providing capacity support rather than building on each other's work supporting the same actors, and are focused more on capacity for specific donor projects, rather than supporting more strategic development of organisations (*ibid.*).

Yemen is not alone; globally, there has been little change in the share of humanitarian funding received by local organisations, and specifically overheads (unrestricted funding). The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC 2022: 1) has stressed that not paying local organisations' overheads is 'unfair and at odds with commitments to support institutional development and capacity strengthening'. If UN agencies, international NGOs and donors operating in Yemen followed IASC's 2022 guidance on providing or sharing their overheads with local organisations, given the large amount of humanitarian finance for Yemen, this would be a considerable investment in national capacities.¹⁶ In February 2023, Yemeni civil society organisations appealed for full direct and indirect costs to be provided for, asking donors to support this by requesting policies on paying local organisations' overheads from UN agencies and NGOs.¹⁷

The conflict, divided governance and *de facto* authorities as well as regional geo-political context present particular challenges for international actors that want to work with local organisations in Yemen. Some have robust restrictions on who they can work with. Donors do not allow taxpayers' money to fund terrorism, and have zero tolerance policies on fraud and diversion of aid funds. Evolving conflict dynamics may, over time, make it more or less possible to work with national actors. There is the very real risk of political interference with aid implementation and capture of supplies and resources by the various authorities (World Bank 2023). National organisations are vulnerable to threats and predatory behaviour (Tamdeen Youth Foundation *et al.* 2022a).

Perceptions of a lack of capacity can impede localisation. As discussed in a review of the broader evidence on localisation (Barbelet *et al.* 2021), there is a tension between, on the one hand, international actors wanting to strengthen local capacities, which requires more partnership working with local organisations, and on the other hand, international actors' perceptions of local organisations' lack of capacity being cited as an obstacle to localisation, framed in terms of risks to humanitarian principles and financial management. With evidence that 'local capacity is not well understood and rarely mapped by international actors', Barbelet *et al.* (*ibid.*: 59) call for an understanding of capacity beyond compliance requirements, and more systematic mapping of what capacities exist on the ground.

Strategies adopted by donors and aid agencies supporting social assistance in Yemen include: careful and continuous risk assessment; regular, proactive interaction with political and community actors at national, governorate and local levels; and adaptive programme design to adjust to changing realities. For example, the World Bank ESPECRP involves proactive engagement by the Social Fund for Development and UNICEF with the various authorities: as mentioned previously, local facilitation groups include local community leaders and village councils; and local social workers and consultants support facilitation (World Bank 2023). To take another example, FCDO has pre-engineered 'flex' into the design of its Food Security Safety Net (FSSN) programme, to allow for more or less funds to flow through local organisations as appropriate, with evidence-based 'triggers' throughout the programme cycle (see FCDO's adaptive design of its FSSN programme, FCDO 2022).

¹⁶ For illustrative purposes, here is a rough calculation of the sums involved: the humanitarian response of US\$2.33bn in 2022 equates to US\$163m of overheads at the standard 7 per cent. If Yemen is similar to global trends, then 1.2 per cent of that (about US\$2m) went directly to local actors (Development Initiatives 2022). This means there is more than US\$160m in overheads that is not being shared (every year), which adds up to about US\$1.3bn since the start of the conflict.

¹⁷ Abs Development Organization for Women and Children *et al.* (2023) '[Civil Society Organizations in Yemen are Calling for Increased Funding for the Humanitarian Response and Unification of Indirect Costs in the Humanitarian Sector](#)', ReliefWeb (accessed 28 September 2023).

For capacity support to be effective, external agencies need to support endogenous processes and nationally owned change initiatives (WFP 2022a). Recent technical support to strengthen the capacities of the Social Fund for Development highlights the limitations of externally led, short-term inputs. Learning from external support in fragile and conflict-affected contexts points to the need for ‘thinking and working politically’, including through continuous applied political economy analysis, and adaptive management (Christie and Green 2019; Whaites *et al.* 2023).

5.6 Building towards a national social protection system

The World Bank and other donors support national organisations in Yemen such as the Social Fund for Development, the Public Works Project and the Social Welfare Fund with the explicit intent of maintaining capacity and systems to (re-)build a nationally owned social protection system when the conflict ends. The broader literature on state capacity and donor approaches (see Box 3.5) discusses the benefits and pitfalls of ‘cocooning’ projects and investing in ‘pockets of effectiveness’.

Box 3.5: Wider literature on state capacity and donor approaches

There is a long-running debate on the efficacy of donor-supported project implementation units (PIUs) (referring back to the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness commitments to reduce the stock of PIUs by two-thirds by 2010). PIUs were renowned for their high costs, propensity to become parallel organisations led by donor agendas, and diluting of central government authority (Asian Development Bank 2005). But when there is a lack of implementation capacity, a common donor response is to ‘cocoon’ projects or sectors, creating parallel systems in order to ensure that the donor or NGO intervention succeeds in a low-capability environment (Andrews, Pritchett and Woolcock 2017). Project success may then be secured but often there is no plan on how to scale up. In fact, the parallel systems may be so resource-intensive that they are unscalable (*ibid.*).

Hickey’s discussion of bureaucratic ‘pockets of effectiveness’ in dysfunctional service delivery contexts draws out how they are likely to emerge when the task is specific, targeted and logistical, and as ‘an outcome of particular forms of coalition-building, whereby ruling elites form coalitions with bureaucratic actors and often donors in order to achieve politically significant reforms and goals’ (Hickey 2019: 28–29). He notes that these pockets of effectiveness tend to be characterised by upwards rather than downwards lines of accountability, suggesting that ‘they will tend to be poorly aligned with many aspects of an inclusive development agenda’ (*ibid.*: 28).

However, in the context of a divided, predatory and (in the south of the country) weak state unable to perform core functions, the Social Fund for Development (and the Public Works Project) is hailed as a success story (European Commission 2022; FCDO 2022; World Bank 2023). The Social Fund for Development has increased funding from multiple donors, and it is the primary national implementing partner for social assistance interventions nationwide, across both IRG- and Houthis-controlled areas, with a great network and acceptance at local levels and growing technical expertise (*ibid.*).

While waiting for greater governance stability to allow a transition to a nationally owned system (FCDO 2022), discussions on what that system would look like continue to develop, supported by donors such as the World Bank and UNICEF (UNICEF 2023a; World Bank 2022b). More broadly, there are attempts to support exploration of a consensus-based recovery vision for Yemen and to generate national ownership of the longer-term development agenda.¹⁸

¹⁸ See, for example, efforts by the United Nations (UN) Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in collaboration with the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation and other Yemeni public institutions, the UN Country Team, the World Bank and the IMF (UN ESCWA 2022).

6. Conclusions: capacity strengthening and humanitarian independence

As this review has shown, social assistance in Yemen involves a complex mix of national, local and international actors attempting to meet people's basic needs in the face of ongoing conflict, split and disputed governance, and political tensions between donor governments and the *de facto* authorities in the north of the country. Despite these challenges, there have been considerable efforts to work with and to support local institutions involved in the delivery of assistance, with the World Bank's strategy premised around the concept of 'institutional preservation' and substantial investments made in parastatal organisations, particularly the Social Fund for Development. These efforts are intensifying as aid agencies start to develop approaches to deliver on global commitments to localisation, and as donors and agencies try to find ways to cope with declining aid volumes. There are also hopes of positive political developments, leading to reductions in active conflict. But at the same time, humanitarian aid agencies note that authorities, particularly in the north, are trying to exercise authoritarian control over aid and limiting the ability of agencies to independently assess need and access those in need.

There has been a tendency towards disconnected narratives on aid and national capacities in Yemen. The social protection literature presents a narrative around institutional preservation and capacity building to key national organisations that have survived the war, with considerable donor support. The humanitarian response commitments and plans emphasise the need to work more closely with local and national partners, to build capacities and empower them. A separate literature on humanitarian challenge is critical of the aid restrictions enforced by national actors, and focuses on contestation between international and national actors.

Yet in practice, aid actors are navigating and negotiating these interrelated realities on a daily basis, balancing a focus on red lines and stronger stances against restrictions imposed by *de facto* authorities with working more closely with local actors and building local capacities. These tensions are explored in donors' risk assessments and mitigating strategies such as in the World Bank's project appraisal documents and FCDO business cases, which include analysis of mitigation strategies for political interference.

This navigation, however, creates an odd duality where international actors are simultaneously attempting to build the capacity of some parts of the state to deliver aid while trying to resist efforts by other parts of the state to influence how aid is delivered. The capacities for social assistance that aid actors are trying to strengthen are technical – capacities to manage information systems, to carry out targeting, to put in place safeguarding policies and to develop accountability systems. And the organisations where capacity strengthening is focused present themselves as de-politicised, 'politically neutral' and able to work on both sides of the conflict. However, the existing literature and published aid agency strategies largely fail to recognise and directly address these tensions and dualities.

The interference that aid agencies are developing mitigation strategies for is more explicitly political and sits in different parts of government. Aid agencies have to be registered, to sign project agreements (memorandums of understanding), get permits to travel, and negotiate around each step of the project cycle for permissions to carry out assessments, distributions and monitoring exercises (OCHA 2023b; Sida *et al.* 2022). In this regard, particularly in the north, the *de facto* authorities have developed considerable capacities to regulate, monitor and control assistance.

These tensions are inevitable in a political context where Western donors are financing the majority of assistance but are politically opposed to the *de facto* authorities in the north. Straightforward state-building, where international aid seeks to support and strengthen state capacities to deliver assistance, is not on the agenda. But attempting to de-politicise social assistance is problematic when questions of eligibility for assistance and balancing trade-offs between coverage and transfer values are inherently political.

The current approach essentially attempts to freeze the politics of social assistance while maintaining the technical capacity of national organisations to deliver assistance. That approach has enabled the World Bank-funded cash transfer project to continue and the strengthening of technical capacities within the Social Fund for Development, as a parastatal entity. But it has left in stasis questions about how to adjust transfer values, review targeting approaches and develop greater coherence between WFP food assistance and World Bank-supported cash assistance. Engaging with the authorities in the north and the south around the politics of social assistance is a necessary step that should not wait until the conflict ends. Unless these tensions are more directly addressed and acknowledged in analysis that feeds into strategies, policies and programming approaches, it will be difficult to tackle them in ways that enable politically sensitive and conflict-sensitive approaches to supporting local and national capacities for social assistance.

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