

GENDER, CLIMATE AND SECURITY IN YEMEN

The Linkages and Ways Forward

Muna Luqman and Dr. Nadia Al -Sakkaf



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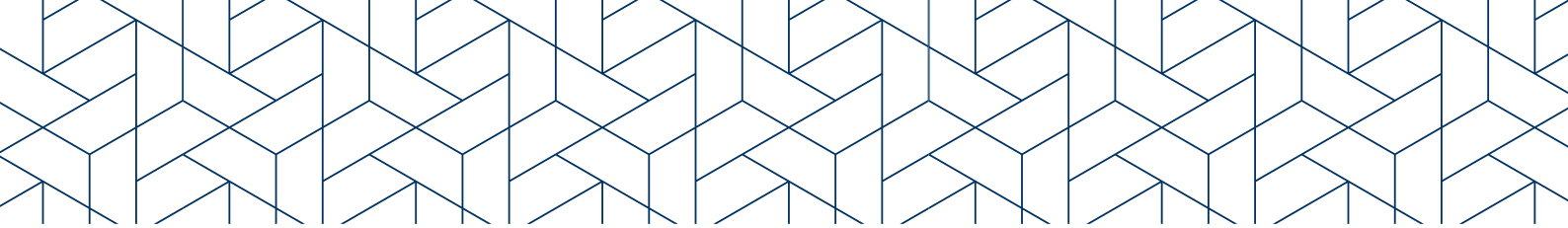
Muna Luqman and Dr. Nadia Al -Sakkaf

*“Raising women’s voices, hearing women’s words:
Empowering women’s rights organisations to put climate
change on the agenda in peace and security processes”*

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Contents

Executive Summary	i
Introduction	1
Theory of Change.	3
Key Findings.	5
Women’s agency in peacebuilding.	9
Impact of advocacy work in the nexus	11
Next steps: what is needed?.	15
References	19





Executive Summary

A growing body of research recognises the gendered impacts of climate change, and how these are affected by armed conflict. Women often bear the brunt of conflicts over land and natural resources, climate-related displacement, and gender-based violence. While the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda has catalysed support to Women's Rights Organisations (WROs) in peace processes, gendered climate advocacy has not been in focus. With climate garnering attention in peace processes, peace building policy, and security sector reform, this is a critical moment to centre women's leadership in climate security, and to build our understanding of how climate and WPS policy can be mutually reinforcing.

DCAF's Gender and Security Division leads DCAF's work promoting gender equality in security sector reform and governance (SSR/G) by providing policy advice, conducting practical research and implementing operational projects. See <https://www.dcaf.ch/gender-and-security>

DCAF, with funding from the United Kingdom's Conflict, Stability and Security Fund, has undertaken a project to **strengthen the capacity of women's rights organisations to advocate for a gender-climate lens to be included in their countries' peace and security processes** and **improve global policy tools on the gender/security/climate nexus**. The project has been implemented in Colombia, Mali and Yemen.

The project has two main objectives:

- To strengthen the capacity of WROs in Colombia, Mali and Yemen to advocate for a gender-climate lens to be addressed in their countries' respective peace and security processes through strategic messaging, support networks, skills, confidence and plans.
- Translate learning from Colombia, Mali and Yemen into the global policymaking agenda: document women's knowledge and experience; craft and share recommendations for WPS National Action Plans, UN Peacebuilding actors and UNFCCC mechanisms.

This report presents a summary of discussions with WROs regarding peace processes, gendered climate advocacy in Yemen and the linkages of the climate/security/gender nexus in their communities, and what they see as priorities. It provides a guiding framework for international and national policy makers and the donor community supporting Yemen's stability and development.





Introduction

A mapping conducted by DCAF indicated gaps in Yemeni WPS organizations advocacy work especially with respect to integrating gender and climate change. Similarly, the mapping also showed that WROs that undertake climate change advocacy work do not always engage in WPS advocacy and are also not always responsive to gender considerations. While the WPS Agenda has catalysed support to WROs in peace processes in Yemen, gendered climate advocacy has not been in focus. With climate garnering attention in peace processes, peace building policy, and security sector reform, this is a critical moment to centre women's leadership in climate security, and to build understanding of how climate and WPS policy can be mutually reinforcing.

This mapping and a needs assessment of WROs identified in the mapping, shaped the **participatory gender, climate and security learning and advocacy workshop** for Yemeni WROs held in November 2021, which including participants from 21 women's organisations, from seven different Yemeni governorates. As a result of this workshop, the participants identified a number of **priorities in this nexus** that should be included in any future political agreements, at both national and governorate (regional) levels. An overarching **national-level priority** was the creation of an independent body to manage natural resources and address the climate change impacts in a way that is inclusive, fair and empowers local actors especially WROs.





Theory of Change

This project builds the substantive and technical advocacy capacity of WROs and other civil society actors on the nexus of climate change, gender, peace and security, on the basis that this will lead to greater awareness by peacebuilding stakeholders. Clear articulation of the nexus and the impetus for its inclusion in peacebuilding is intended to contribute to policies and approaches that enhance community resilience to climate change impacts in connection to conflict, taking into account gender considerations.

Context

Yemen is currently suffering the world's worst humanitarian crisis, with 80 percent of Yemen's population in need of humanitarian assistance. Since the conflict started in 2014, it has exacerbated fatality rates from COVID-19 and other outbreaks, and natural disasters such as flooding, which in turn have damaged already fragile and limited infrastructure, especially regarding natural resources such as water and agriculture. This has further reduced access to basic services such as health, education, and shelter, disproportionately affecting women and girls, who are consequently also at a higher risk of gender-based violence and displacement. Migrant and refugee women, as well as women from other marginalised groups, are particularly at risk.

Yemen has one of the highest national rates of population growth in the world. It is also the country with the highest rate of exhaustion of water sources in the Middle East.¹ The combination of high population growth and exhaustion of water has contributed to a severe water crisis in Yemen that may be one of the most catastrophic in the world: Sana'a is the only capital city in the world that may run out of water within the next decade.

Compounding this are the severe effects of climate change and its related impacts, including drought, extreme flooding, pest and disease outbreaks, rainfall pattern changes, increased frequency and severity of storms and rising sea levels. Research shows that drought and desertification are adding more complexity to the protracted humanitarian crisis, the armed conflict, and the collapse of the economy. Further evidence shows that the weaponisation of water

1. Glass, N., "The Water Crisis in Yemen: Causes, Consequences and Solutions", Global Majority E-Journal, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2010), pp. 17-30, available at: https://www.american.edu/cas/economics/ejournal/upload/glass_accessible.pdf

in Yemen has prolonged conflict and aggravated acute famine.² Water has become both a weapon and casualty of war: due to its unaffordability, it has been used by both sides of the conflict as a military strategy to weaken the other side through siege and blockades, and to increase their leverage. Water scarcity is further exacerbated by pre-existing unsustainable water resource management practices, including the over-use of groundwater in the agriculture sector, such as the widespread cultivation of the narcotic qat (green leaves that Yemenis chew and have a mild narcotic effect). A 2014 study from the World Bank found that the cultivation of the shrub qat has compounded Yemen's water problems: qat covers 38 percent of Yemen's irrigated areas; in places, food crops are being uprooted and replaced with it. Yemenis are addicted to the drug: 90 percent of men, as many as 73 percent of women, and a growing number of children under 10 habitually chew its leaves.

Consequently, the combined impact of climate change and conflict multiplies the risks for populations already in crisis, especially women and girls.

2. Suter, M., "An Update on Yemen's Water Crisis and the Weaponization of Water", Atlantic Council Blog, (2018), available at: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/an-update-on-yemen-s-water-crisis-and-the-weaponization-of-water/>



Key Findings

Mindful of the gendered impact of the prolonged conflict, Yemeni women-led civil society organisations have been working relentlessly to fill the gap left by authorities and international organisations, especially in providing assistance to communities in remote and frontline areas. For example, Yemeni women community leaders and activists continue to provide food and essential services, facilitate negotiations to open humanitarian corridors and the release of detainees; and work to demilitarise schools, and divert youth from taking up arms and mobilise them towards peacebuilding instead. Women were also the first to warn all parties of an impending crisis with the COVID-19 pandemic and to call for a ceasefire so urgent health needs could be met. WROs continue to carry out this work with extremely limited resources and financing.

The Yemeni experience reflects research demonstrating that women often bear the brunt of conflicts over land and natural resources, climate-related displacement, and gender-based violence. Yemen faces climate change-related threats to human security, such as displacement, epidemics, and food insecurity; and this is fueled by the conflict, particularly the mass displacement of women and young girls, which also leads to conflict-related gender-based violence.

The effects of climate change in Yemen include droughts, flooding and devastating weather events all of these threaten communities, particularly those in vulnerable contexts. The effects on women are particularly significant as they have to travel long distances to fetch water and because climate change exacerbates water scarcity, their suffering increases.

These factors drive conflict and limit the capacity to adapt to climate change, poverty, weak governance, political marginalisation and corruption. Exposure to risk and an insufficient coping capacity of the state system and communities to manage, absorb or mitigate those risks also lead to negative outcomes including violence, the breakdown of institutions, displacement, humanitarian crises or other emergencies. While there are existing national mechanisms, including at the local and regional levels, to mitigate disaster management and climate change impacts, the effectiveness and inclusiveness of those mechanisms are questionable. Accordingly, a **key initial advocacy priority** is to evaluate these mechanisms and start to engage at the local and regional levels with them. The outcomes of this engagement can then inform more specific policy demands to present to mandated authorities and influential entities with respect to both management of natural resources and engagement in peacebuilding activities.

Poverty, weak governance, political marginalisation and corruption are key challenges. Poverty is more prevalent among women because of the socio-economic context that renders women as more subject to malnutrition and economic hardships. This has been exacerbated by the conflict and food scarcity. The number of households headed by women has increased from 9% in 2015 to 30% in 2021.³

Before the conflict, around half of the population (48.6%) were already living in poverty on an average of 1.90 USD per day. The number of people living in poverty has increased including due to non-payment of salaries to civil servants and loss of livelihood opportunities. Many people are not even able to afford food and when they do women and girls are usually last to eat, increasing their risks of malnutrition. Early marriage has increased, since families resort to marrying off their daughters as a means to make income from dowries. Poverty and hunger have also been a powerful contributor to the increase in child recruitment. Internal displacement due to the conflict has caused the agricultural sector to lose nearly 50% of its workforce.⁴

Yemen is highly vulnerable to climate change-related impacts and natural hazards such as drought, extreme flooding, pests, sudden disease outbreaks, changes of rainfall patterns, increased storm frequency/severity and sea level rise. These are serious concerns as Yemen's economy largely depends on its rural natural resources. Women are more subject to extreme weather phenomena: one example is their increased risk of drowning in floods because they are less likely to have learned to swim. Between April and August 2020, heavy rains and flooding devastated communities, causing deaths and injuries, destroying infrastructure and livelihoods, and increasing the spread of deadly diseases. Tens of thousands of families were affected, many of them already displaced. Other natural hazards pose a threat, including desert locust infestations, which are expected to cause damage and loss worth \$222 million.⁵

Access to clean water is fundamental to reducing poverty, breaking cycles of violence and improving the health and well-being of Yemeni women and girls. All the more so as climate change is predicted to further increase pressure on Yemen's water resources, and environmental degradation has been found to drive or exacerbate gender-based violence.

Humanitarian aid delivery continues to face impediments, and the situation is further worsened by a collapsing economy. In many parts of the country, water and power plants, factories, and markets have stopped functioning. Government salaries stopped years ago. Civil servants, cleaners, construction workers, street vendors, and public transport drivers say that if they stay at home they will die of starvation.

3. OCHA, "Humanitarian Needs Overview - Yemen", (2021), available at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Yemen_HNO_2021_Final.pdf

4. International Labour Organization, "Yemen Damage and Needs Assessment: Crisis Impact on Employment and Labour Market", (2016), available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/yemen-damage-and-needs-assessment.pdf>

5. OCHA, "Humanitarian Needs Overview - Yemen", (2021), available at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Yemen_HNO_2021_Final.pdf

Armed conflict in Yemen has had a devastating effect on Yemen's people and its infrastructure. Health, water and sanitation systems have been bombed to the point of collapse leaving over 15 million people without adequate access to clean drinking water and safe sanitation. Waste is piling up on the streets and in the settlements of displaced people because sanitation services, severely damaged by years of war.

In rural areas, when wells run dry, social tensions escalate into local conflicts. Mass displacement from water scarcity causes migration and fuels the risk of wider conflicts. The dangers posed by flash floods increase in densely-populated cities, particularly for the urban poor.⁶

Displaced and refugee women are not sufficiently protected, especially in displacement camps, and they are exposed to violence, harassment, rape or the threat of such violence. Conflict and forced eviction led to the displacement of millions of Yemenis at home and abroad. Yemen ranks 4th globally for the number of displaced persons, which amounts to 3.5 million IDPs, 83% of whom are women and children, with 53% women and girls. All forms of violence against women and girls are widespread in different regions and social classes, at all levels in both the family and public sphere.

Mismanagement of resources and corruption exacerbate the impacts of climate change, while the conflict renders the state dysfunctional and unable to plan and deal with climate change impacts. For both local and outside actors, the humanitarian crisis is perceived as more urgent because it is more visible and direct. The conflict not only hampers adaptation to climate change but can exacerbate its impacts by negatively affecting the environment: whether directly through chemical pollution from warfare or indirectly through destruction of natural habitats.

The Yemeni government has struggled to put a modern water-governance framework in place. Fragile top-down regulatory approaches to water management have gained little traction: they require reform and to include water governance at the local levels.

Bottom-up approaches have had more success, with communities forming associations to demand better services and protect local water sources from pollution. Women's associations have played a strong role in resolving water and land disputes which make up to 70% of the non-political local armed conflicts. They are front line defenders in the conflicts and spearhead social cohesion efforts. For example, the Al-Malika Association in Sana'a governorate offers a positive example of how women have supported conflict resolution around water resources. Both global and local climate change impacts are likely to matter for future development, given Yemen's high levels of food import dependency, food insecurity, and poverty.

Gender relations⁷ in Yemen are shaped by diverse religious, cultural, social and political traditions. They are complex, and vary regionally across the country, between urban and rural areas, and between different tribes and generations. Historically, women in Yemen have had much less power in society than men. As the deadly conflict and military escalation persists in Yemen, millions of innocent families have been internally displaced, compounding already overwhelming

6. The World Bank, "Future Impact of Climate Change Visible Now in Yemen", (2014), available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2014/11/24/future-impact-of-climate-change-visible-now-in-yemen>

7. Oxfam, CARE and GenCap, "From the Ground Up: Gender and Conflict Analysis in Yemen", (2016) https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/rr-yemen-gender-conflict-analysis-201016-en_0.pdf

humanitarian challenges. Women IDPs remain the hardest hit in terms of protection and needs. It is worth noting that already existing unfair social norms exacerbate the vulnerability of these women and reduces their resiliency and ability to cope with the crisis.

Despite the challenging gender inequalities women have an ability to effectively mobilise communities to respond to disasters and have a clear understanding of needs and priorities in those situations. Women play a primary role in natural resource use and management and are often first responders to natural and human-induced disasters. Inclusion of women at all levels of governance is therefore especially critical for building peace and long-term development. Achieving this depends on an increase of access to livelihood support and promoting participation and leadership opportunities for women. In addition to promoting positive coping mechanisms, and sustainable livelihoods for marginalised women.



Photo: Workshop participants during group activity, Aden, Yemen, November 2021 © DCAF/Rakan Al Baadani



Women's Agency in Peacebuilding

During the last two years, there have been several advocacy activities by WROs on the peace process and security sector reform. In addition to prisoners' safety concerns caused by the pandemic, WROs have actively advocated on specific issues in Track II consultations lead by the UN in Yemen. These include ceasefire, security and humanitarian arrangements, as well as confidence building measures.

For example, the Peace Track Initiative (PTI) and its partners have been working with women political and civil society leaders to reflect the results of consultations with women in the Feminist Roadmap to Peace in Yemen. The Feminist Roadmap to Peace brings forward gender-responsive recommendations on the main issues related to the peace process. The feminist roadmap included several provisions dealing with climate change, such as:

- Addressing the Safer Tank impending disaster
- Addressing the impacts of the Corona virus and deadly epidemics
- Addressing the conditions of those affected by natural disasters and other humanitarian issues, through a gendered-lens
- Coordinating support to respond to the displacement crisis and facilitate the return of the displaced with special focus on women and girls.

Climate change and sustainable human development are interlinked and more comprehensive gender responsive projects should be the focus of the international community and donors. Recognizing and taking action on the nexus between conflict, displacement, and climate change, is key to achieving peace as it is integral to the conflict in Yemen.





Impact of Advocacy Work in the Nexus

In the time between December 2021 and February 2022, 20 WROs across seven governorates carried out a number of activities including mapping and data collection, communication and meetings with stakeholders, and lobbying activities. Here are highlights of these activities with a focus on success stories to demonstrate impact.

a) Mapping and data collection

The partner organisations first identified and reviewed existing national and local mechanisms working on the nexus in Yemen. They collected data on which government authorities are relevant, and also other NGOs working in the field. In some governorates, such as Taiz, the partners created a database with names and numbers of various entities and stakeholders, which is a valuable resource to sustain continued engagement and advocacy.

Another partner organisation has included this nexus in their operational mandate and has dedicated a team to research and include the nexus in project designs to continue organisational learning beyond DCAF's project.

b) Networking

The partner organisations met with representatives of the local authorities such as the local councils, ministry of environment, ministry of agriculture, civil defence and disaster management committees. The WROs discussed the challenges facing their regions regarding this nexus and presented themselves as part of the national network on climate change, women peace and security in Yemen. A stakeholder event held on March 10 was especially vital for this networking as it gathered a number of local and international stakeholders and provided the women with a platform to be recognised for their work and as advocates for this nexus in Yemen.

Additionally, since their engagement with this project, the WROs have started talking to potential donors and other NGOs to design projects and take action on the nexus at the local and national levels. Some are working to gain access to attend the COP27 in Egypt in November 2022.

c) Lobbying

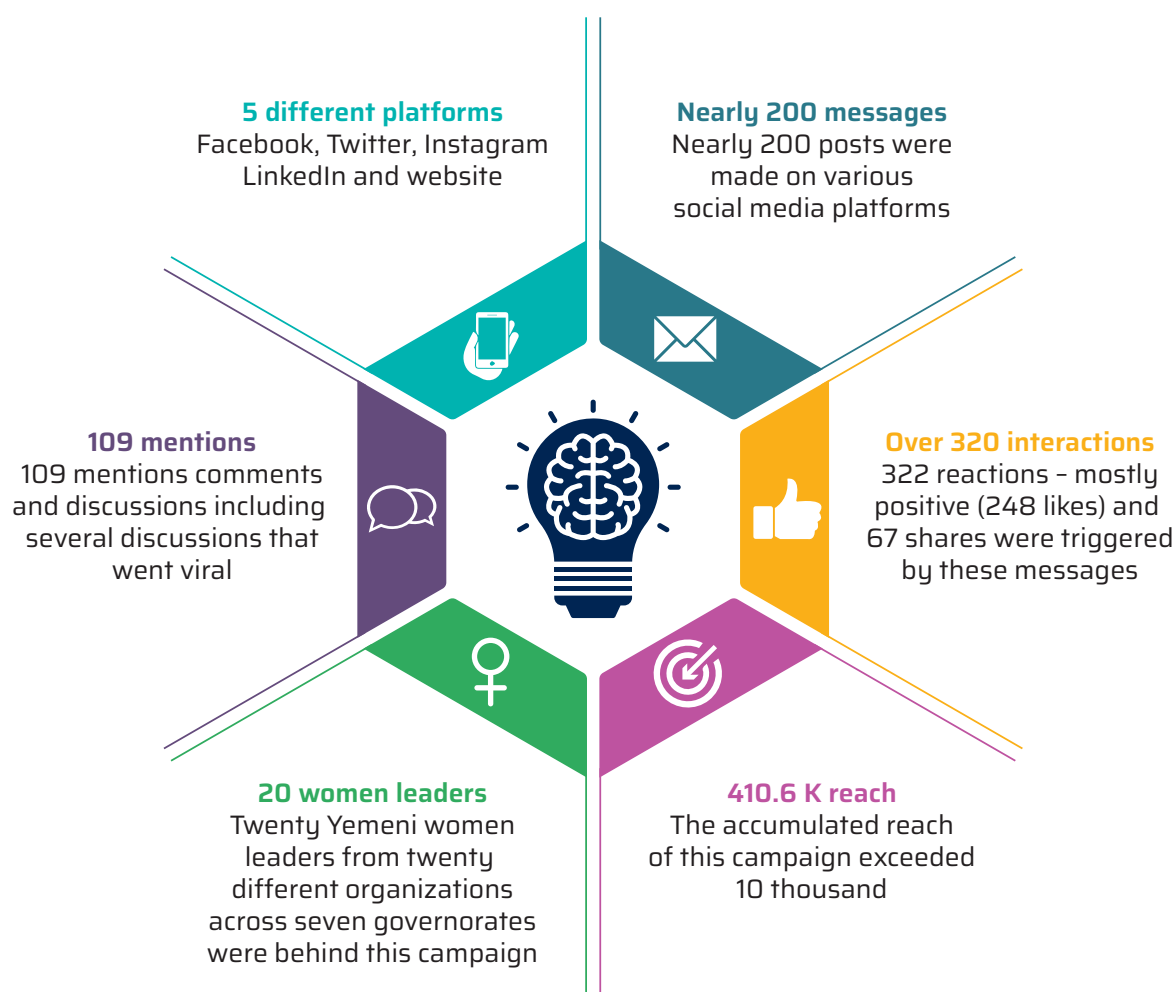
The WROs committed themselves to push local authorities and other stakeholders to take action regarding climate change risks in their local communities. After establishing contact, arming themselves with knowledge and understanding the context, they knew whom to talk to and what to say.

The women leaders have now become advocates for the nexus in the various events and platforms they attend. For example, one of the workshop participants shared with participants of a separate women's empowerment-related event the importance of including climate change-related burdens on women, and the connection between conflict and climate change especially through a gender lens.

All the partners have committed to continuing their advocacy messages in their social media platforms, stating that now this nexus is considered a priority for them.

An example of this is the action of a representative of the Yemeni Women's union in the region of Abyan, who was concerned that the collapse of a dam due to heavy rain and flush flooding would particularly affect certain communities, and women especially. Local authorities responded to her lobbying by repairing the dam site.

The Advocacy Campaign in Numbers



In the period between 15th February and 1st March 2022, the WROs took on various themes that are relevant to the nexus at both the national and local levels. It can be seen from the chart that the messages regarding women were those with most reactions. This could be attributed to two reasons: the first is that the women's organisations' circles of influence involve many who are feminists or supporters of women's rights and therefore were more inclined to like and share such messages. The second reason relates to a few incidents by men on social media who did not approve of the suggestion that climate change impacts women differently, which prompted a debate on this issue ensued generating engagement.

The second most popular theme was regarding the impacts of climate change on the communities. This is understandable especially since many of the illustrations used aimed at triggering emotion: at the same time, the Yemeni community still remembers the impact of floods, storms, droughts and various other impacts of climate change and could strongly relate to these messages.

It was interesting to see that calling on authorities to act and the demand for institutionalising climate action as well as the specific messaging regarding certain groups did not receive much reaction. This could be because of the general mistrust of the local authorities and their ability or desire to do something, and the fragmentation of the Yemeni online community does not focus on the plight of diverse groups. Further investigation needs to be done to understand these results.

Finally, the connection between conflict and climate change hardly triggered reactions. It is worth noting that this was also the theme posted less frequently by the women leaders to start with, which could partially explain the lack of interest. However, this could also be an indicator that there is a shortage in understanding the full extent of this relation by both the civil society actors and the community online.





Next Steps: What is Needed?

Key recommendations for a gender-sensitive climate action response:

To the Government and non-state armed actors:

- Consider the impact of military confrontations and operations on the environment, livelihoods and civilians and take appropriate measures to prevent, mitigate and remediate the negative consequences
- Abide by the law of armed conflict, including the principles and rules on distinction, proportionality, military necessity and precautions in attack, should be applied. Failure to do so will threaten the long-term sustainability of any peacebuilding project or programme, and could even contribute to increased fragility and the emergence or re- emergence of conflict
- As part of the peace process, including in peace agreements, address matters relating to the restoration and protection of civilians during disasters, climate change impacts and protect the environment damaged by the conflict
- Ensure that remnants of war at sea do not constitute a danger to the environment (Safer tanker)
- Immediately lift all impediments to the access and transport of aid and other goods essential to the survival of the civilian population in the country
- Take immediate steps, including agreeing to an immediate ceasefire, to allow for an urgent, life-saving response in Yemen that will protect families from vulnerability to climate shocks and natural disasters and reduce violence related to resources

To international organizations involved in peace processes in Yemen

- Facilitate the use of climate change and climate impacts to create dialogue between conflict armed groups. This will help establish trust and confidence, promote peace, and address prevention and adaption measures
- Integrate peace-building, development, humanitarian and climate change adaptation approaches into programmes working in Yemen to prevent cycles of violence that erupt from lack of resources
- Adopt a 'Do No Harm' approach into the project cycle of climate resilience programs

For humanitarian and development programming in Yemen

- Strengthen local social and institutional capacity to manage climate and conflict risks, including support for effective adaptive capacities and conflict management mechanisms including support for effective adaptive capacities and conflict management mechanisms with gender-responsive actions to climate change
- Balance addressing immediate humanitarian needs with reducing vulnerability in the longer term
- Humanitarian organizations must develop policies with women's strategic and long-term needs in mind
- Support climate-resilient livelihoods by integrating climate risk management into livelihood support
- Strengthen community initiatives for resilience to climate extremes enable women to develop their future livelihoods, avoid dependency on humanitarian assistance, and design their own protection mechanisms
- Initiate early action to prevent and mitigate crises with longer-term interventions to protect or re-establish people's livelihoods, that focus on building systemic and community capacities to withstand future shocks
- Partner with grassroots initiatives and community based women and youth organisations and networks to maximize impact and effectiveness – particularly as they have access to remote areas and knowledge of local contexts, ensuring the provision of flexible multi-year funding and lifting restrictions to access Humanitarian funding
- Support long-term sustainable protection programmes for women and girls in Yemen

The Government of Yemen (GoY)

- Provide basic services, such as education, health, and water and sanitation, as well as the return and reintegration of displaced populations
- Restore core government functions and focus on economic revitalization support and inclusion to the private sector, in terms of employment opportunities, livelihoods and rehabilitation of basic infrastructure and promote long-term Community Resilience to climate change impacts in Yemen
- Empower and finance women to be change agents for climate preparedness and resilience activities in the community
- Respond effectively to long term displacement, livelihood needs not only crisis response which is usually during a disaster and short term
- Build resilient governance, and social environment to support vulnerable households and communities to deal with climate-related shocks in Yemen
- Build adaptive capacity to enable management of uncertainty and change-Integrate current and future climate trends and risks into economic planning for natural resource sectors
- Integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning
- Improve education, awareness raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning

- Ensure that crisis response planning for climate shocks, frameworks and programming are gender inclusive and responsive: this will include providing tools and guidance on gender analysis and on strengthening the agency, voice and capacities of women's networks and organizations, civil society and gender advocates to engage effectively in planning and programming

Women Rights Organizations (WROS) and civil society in Yemen

- Advocate, participate and coordinate with stakeholders to activate the national disasters strategy
- Assist in identifying the locations and activities that may come or contribute to environmental disaster
- Work with governmental and non-governmental stakeholders to create awareness and exert pressure for dealing with environmental emergencies caused by climate change, and facing hazardous accidents and disasters including opening humanitarian corridors and restoring basic services
- Highlight the intersections among climate change and sustainable development, gender inequities and climate risks, gender-related vulnerabilities to climate change; and the positive and important roles that women play in climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts to ensure sustainable peace and prevention of local conflicts and violence
- Support and advocate for the neutral coordination of climate change entities and monitoring networks
- Contribute to developing national, programs to face and deal with environmental emergencies caused by climate change
- Advocate for the integration of a gender perspective into national and community-level climate change initiatives
- Create advocacy strategies that aim to strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate change impact





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Gender, Climate and Security in Yemen

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