Partners Yemen and the Nexus Model

Eleven months of popular protests in 2011 led to Yemen’s purportedly peaceful transition, avoiding a potentially devastating civil war and securing the resignation of President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who had ruled the impoverished country for over three decades. The United Nations (UN)-supported transition roadmap established a plan for presidential elections (held February 2012) and the subsequent two years to restructure the military-security apparatus, address issues of transitional justice and launch an inclusive National Dialogue Conference with the goal of revising the constitution before new elections in February 2014. Yemen has been widely cited as a successful peaceful transition, but there remain many doubts about the country’s continued democratization process.

In 2012, Partners for Democratic Change International and Partners Yemen summed up the contextual dynamics of their interventions in Yemen:

“For peace-building practitioners, Yemen is a country rife with challenges and abundant with opportunities. Officially a democracy, Yemen is made up of hundreds of tribes and clans historically intertwined through successive allegiances and protracted quarrels. At the state level, the government is often criticized for its centralized authoritarian approach, and yet the state wields little sway in Yemen’s remote rural areas.”

Partners Yemen, the locally run affiliate of Partners for Democratic Change International, operates a series of interventions to promote peace, stability, and, potentially democratic change at the local level. The table below presents a snapshot of challenges at the local and state levels as well as opportunities for peacbuilding and democracy building in Yemen.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Opportunities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inter- and intra-tribal fighting over resource distribution (water and food insecurity)</td>
<td>Promote capacity and governance at the local level</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weakened traditional conflict resolution mechanisms</td>
<td>Improve traditional conflict mitigation mechanisms</td>
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<td>Traditional exclusion of women and youth</td>
<td>Improve development allocation</td>
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<td>Local apathy to national dialogue</td>
<td>Increase role of women in development and conflict resolution</td>
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<td>Absence of an inclusive political agreement regarding the future of the state and its political system</td>
<td>UN Security Council support for National Reconciliation with promised aid after transition</td>
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<td>Existence of Southern separatist groups, al Qaeda, and tribal conflicts</td>
<td>Support the national dialogue and creation of new constitution (likely to adopt of a federal system or other decentralised model)</td>
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<td>Political infighting, feuding politicians</td>
<td>Increase civic education and voter awareness for elections in 2014</td>
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<td>Weak state institutions</td>
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<td>Ongoing power struggles over military reform</td>
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<td>Continued exclusion of civil society, women, and youth</td>
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The Theories of Change underlying Partners Yemen’s Work:

Partners Yemen integrates cultural norms and customs in programming that builds networks in local communities and local capacity for conflict mitigation, development, and women’s empowerment. In the documentation produced by PDC and PY, it is clear that underlying PY’s interventions that build this local capacity is an understanding of how skill building can add to societal level change:

- “Democratic and inclusive mechanisms – both espoused and practiced by Yemenis and by the non-profit programs and for-profit ventures that touch the Yemeni people – can bring accelerated and permanent social development to add to the rich cultural traditions and customs that have made Yemen unique over the centuries. Perhaps the greatest untapped resource for the future lies in Yemen’s youth and women. ‘With the right skills and the appropriate sensitivity, they will be able to tackle Yemen’s challenges, instill a culture of positive change and eventually build more open and inclusive societies.’”

- “In Yemen democratic change means providing young people in marginalized communities with the skills necessary to resolve conflicts peacefully.”

Individual PY programs are based on programmatic hypotheses that target change at the local level:

1. The Yemen Community-Based Conflict Mitigation Program (Y-CCM) lists the following explicit theory of change, depicted in the diagram below:

   - “Increasing the capacity of local actors to manage conflicts over natural resources and development will enable these local actors to establish local commissions that can mediate local conflict and be resources to the community to resolve or prevent local conflict.”

2. The Bilqees Initiative (TBI) presents its stated programmatic goal and approach, from which we extrapolated an implicit theory of change.

   - Goal and approach: “The Bilqees Initiative (TBI) aimed to create a thriving network of key female communicators who would raise awareness about relevant development issues in Yemen and contribute to enhancing stability in the governorates of Mareb, Al-Jawf and Shebwa. The expected end result was to establish a viable dissemination network in rural, low-density areas of Yemen that can be leveraged to disseminate messages and ideas that tackle the drivers of instability and reinforce the positive aspects of Yemen society.”

   - Implicit Theory of Change: If women are trained to take on culturally sensitive leadership roles to promote development and their work is brought to scale through a training of trainers design, then this increase in local capacity will address drivers of conflict and ultimately promote peace and development in Yemen’s local communities.

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6 Hammond et al. (2012), quoting Nadwa al-Dawsari of Partners Yemen.
Partners Yemen’s interventions and the Nexus model: Scaling Vertically from the Local to the State Level

After reviewing the final evaluation reports of TBI and Y-CCM and the Partners Yemen promotional videos, we applied it to the conceptual model:

Capacity Building and Civil Society

✓ TBI builds local capacity as it seeks to create a strong network of women who have the skills to be both local leaders and work to build peace.

✓ CCM builds the capacity of civil society by encouraging the inclusion of CSOs in community-based dialogue processes and requiring that Community Facilitators be familiar with civil society in order to incorporate their important perspectives into conflict mitigation efforts.\(^8\)

✓ Not only does PY use local capacity building and the tools of conflict resolution to promote change, PY builds civil society when it works with women to establish their own groups and organizations. PY sees these as pieces of promoting change, as does the nexus model.

Democratic Institutions

➢ Localized self-determination in a weak democracy is a step in the right direction, according to the nexus model. Giving people the means through local governance to handle conflict, change laws, and develop a measure of sustainable self-determination certainly constitutes peacebuilding and is arguably within the scope of democracy-building. The CCM program strengthens democracy writ small, especially locally, by improving resource distribution

➢ When Yemen’s democratic transition evolves, if TBI can enhance women’s participation in the democratic process, it will diversify and deepen the country’s democratic accountability.\(^9\) Incorporating women into the process is important and could pay dividends for the character of democratic governance that many in Yemen plan to adopt.

“Across a spectrum of programs, Partners [Yemen] works to empower local leaders and bring people together across traditional divides, pinpointing the interface between business, civil society and government, and combining the best of international experience with local traditions, knowledge and leadership...”

— PDC and PY in “Applying a Conflict-Sensitive Approach to Development Interventions” (2012)

Does the work of Partners Yemen link the Local with State Level?

➢ Through the narrative of the women in PY’s promotional video, it is shown that, by joining national protests, participants may have the tools for change at the local level yet want the national government level to follow suit in a way.

➢ Building the local capacity for democracy is important, and can help civil society take root, but if civil society, women and youth continue to be excluded from the National Dialogue, the sphere is underutilized. The Nexus calls for an integrated approach to all three areas; therefore if the national agenda remains exclusive, the whole system continues to weaken.

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\(^8\) CCM Evaluation Report, 9.

Points of discussion for Partners Yemen moving forward

1. **Given the conceptual model of the nexus**: How might PY consider its conflict analyses and conflict sensitive approach to program as part of a larger system beyond local conflict dynamics?

2. **Further conceptual work to support Partners Yemen**: Further integration of theories of development could help PY in framing its overall approach. For example, how does development, as a catalyst for peace and democracy, interact within the larger system?

3. **Using models for articulating relationships**: How could PY and PDC articulate a more systemic understanding of their work? Can and should program documentation reflect the understanding that each intervention is embedded in and affected by a larger system of actors and dynamics? Is it in PY’s best interest to make explicit the causal linkages that it believes might lead to macro level impacts?

4. **Remaining true to the principles of “do no harm”**: Has PDC considered the ripple effects that could stem from their programming and how it could increase the risk for violence against those who choose to oppose the status quo?

5. **The impact of increased knowledge, awareness and leadership**: Does Partners Yemen plan for how increased empowerment at local levels could spread to state-level domain outside of its programs to positive and negative results? How might it systematically capture this potential outcome of its intervention through evaluation?

6. **Linking local interventions with reforms at the state-level**: What opportunities exist for PY’s involvement in the national dialogue given that civil society has been sidelined? Is a link with the constitution writing process feasible?

7. **A focus on decentralized governance**: Assuming that Yemen continues its transition toward a decentralized federal system, how might it still be beneficial to make PY’s work scalable to the state level?