

## Local perspectives on vulnerability and capacity in Hadramawt: Al Mukalla and Sayun

### OVERVIEW

More than nine years of conflict in Yemen has left 18.2 million people in need of assistance in one of the largest and most complex humanitarian responses in the world (OCHA 01/02/2024). The pervasiveness of needs and the protracted nature of the crisis have spawned repeated cycles of emergency humanitarian assistance supporting a large population in need. These cycles of emergency assistance have mostly focused on meeting immediate needs rather than addressing the underlying causes of vulnerability. As a result, there has been limited focus on enhancing resilience. On that note, conditions in Yemen are changing. Since the truce between April–October 2022, major clashes have largely ceased. Although tensions remain, confrontations between conflict parties have fallen markedly (Rand 13/12/2023; ACLED accessed 01/03/2024).

Since the crisis is considered to be at a critical juncture, there is an opportunity to focus beyond immediate needs and vulnerabilities to consider their drivers and reasons for persisting (OCHA 01/02/2024). A durable settlement to the conflict remains elusive, but there is growing recognition of the need to focus on assistance that not only meets immediate needs but also builds resilience.

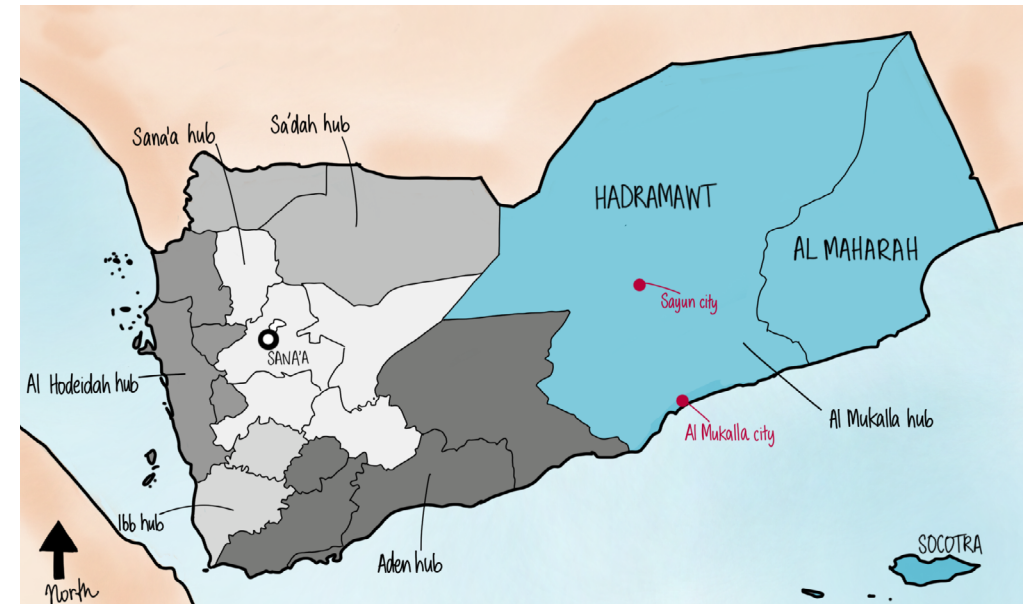
### ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report is the first in a series of six localised studies. Primary data collected in the different locations aims to identify potential entry points for to improve program designs and targeting by:

- providing insights into the drivers of multidimensional vulnerability
- revealing local perceptions about which categories of people are most vulnerable to being unable to meet their needs
- contributing to understanding how people are coping with challenges and meeting their own needs.

This approach is based on the idea that understanding how households meet needs can inform ways of enhancing these capacities, avoiding their degradation, and, where appropriate, providing alternatives to strategies that have or will have negative outcomes.

Map 1. Areas covered by humanitarian hubs in Yemen



- Governorates covered by the Al Mukalla hub
- Locations where data was collected

Source: ACAPS using data from OCHA (04/06/2018)

The purpose of taking a localised approach is to identify any location-specific causes and manifestations of vulnerability and how people face it. Understanding the causes of vulnerability and available capacities by location may reveal the differences within Yemen that can inform programming, making interventions more context-specific and impactful. The areas selected for the studies are based around the humanitarian hubs established for coordinating the response in Yemen. This study reflects findings from two locations within the area the Al Mukalla hub serves in Hadramawt governorate: Al Mukalla city and the smaller city of Sayun.

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## Aim

This analysis intends to support humanitarian assistance planning and implementation by enhancing the understanding of the factors affecting the overall vulnerability of people in Al Mukalla and their capacity to meet their own needs. This report is intended to be a tool to support the identification of programmatic entry points by providing insights on three questions.

- What are the main drivers of vulnerability?
- Which categories of people are perceived to be at a heightened risk of vulnerability (i.e. those that are most likely to have unmet basic needs)?
- What capacity to overcome vulnerability do people and their communities possess?

Table 1. Definitions of concepts used in the report

KEY CONCEPTS	
<b>Vulnerability</b>	This research defines vulnerability as a situation in which people are likely to have their basic needs unmet, experience harm, or have their interests overlooked (ICRC 01/03/2018).
<b>Multidimensional vulnerability</b>	Multidimensional vulnerability describes a state of vulnerability existing across more than one of the dimensions of vulnerability considered in this analysis. In this report, it describes the way in which vulnerability in one area has an impact on vulnerability in others.
<b>Category (of people)</b>	Here, we use categories of people to refer to individuals similar to one another in a certain way, e.g. having the same ethnicity, gender, religion, or nationality. We use it to differentiate between a category of people and a social group, which refers to "two or more people who regularly interact on the basis of mutual expectations and who share a common identity" (UC Davis accessed 14/03/2024). People may be in the same category, e.g. women, and not necessarily have common beliefs or ideas.
<b>Capacity</b>	Capacity in this report describes the resources, tools, knowledge, or structures used to overcome a circumstance of vulnerability.
<b>Resilience</b>	Resilience is the capacity to withstand, overcome, or circumvent the conditions shocks of any kind can bring about (OCHA 11/05/2013).
<b>Basic needs</b>	Basic needs is a term often used in refugee and displacement contexts, and it references access to "basic services and assistance in health, protection, nutrition, WASH, food, shelter, energy, education, and domestic items and specialised services for people with specific needs" (UNHCR 20/04/2017).
<b>Safety net</b>	Safety net indicates a system of informal support at the local level based on social connections and understood by those included (FIC 04/2022).

## BACKGROUND

### Hadramawt governorate

This analysis focuses on Al Mukalla and Sayun cities in Hadramawt, the largest governorate in Yemen. Hadramawt comprises 28 districts and is located towards the east of the country, bordering Saudi Arabia to the north and the Arabian Sea to the south. Hadramawt is among Yemen's wealthiest governorates, possessing natural resources, including oil and gas. The governorate is informally divided politically and militarily.

### Coastal Hadramawt includes the capital of Al Mukalla

The commercial and oil export ports of Al Mukalla and Ash Shihr, and key energy infrastructure. The Emirati-backed Hadrami Elite Forces control this area, and the Southern Transitional Council (STC) de facto rules over it, with its leader, Governor Mabkhut bin Madhi, maintaining ties to the Internationally Recognized Government of Yemen (IRG).

### Central and northern Hadramawt, where Sayun is located

Includes key international routes connecting to neighbouring Saudi Arabia and Oman. The Al Wade'a border crossing in the northwest is the only land port that has remained open to Saudi Arabia since the start of the current conflict. The First Military Region based in Sayun city, which is loyal to the IRG, controls this area.

At the start of the current conflict, as the armed forces focused on the Houthis in the north, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) capitalised on the general breakdown in security. AQAP took over the governorate's capital of Al Mukalla in April 2015, holding the city for over a year (ACLEDAccessed 31/01/2024). Since then, Al Mukalla city has seen relatively limited fighting and has been under the control of the UAE-backed Hadrami Elite Forces since they ousted AQAP in April 2016, paving the way for a long-term presence (ICG 02/02/2017). Parts of Hadramawt remain tense, but Al Mukalla itself has experienced relatively limited direct conflict-related damage. After ousting AQAP, the Hadrami Elite Forces gradually extended their operations to the inner regions of Hadramawt, creating tensions within the governorate.

The conflict's impacts on operations at the Mukalla port have resulted in port congestion, lengthy customs inspection wait times, and limited clearance capacity because of the customs department's operating hours, heightening humanitarian needs. Indirect impacts relate to import-reliant supply chains, particularly for food. These irregularities at all Yemen

ports, along with increased shipping costs and elevated insurance rates, contribute to increasing food prices and the cost of other imports (UNDP 26/04/2021).

Local groups in Hadramawt, such as the Hadramawt Tribal Confederation, protest a combination of issues, including calls for greater autonomy and control over resources, political tensions, worsening economic conditions, and the breakdown of public services. The IRG has responded to these forcefully at times (ACLEDAccessed 31/01/2024).

In late 2022, economic pressures increased further when Houthi drone attacks shut down oil production, reducing revenue. Political tensions between the IRG and the STC also continued to increase into 2023 because of the STC's persistent attempts to expand its control in the south of Yemen. In June 2023, Saudi Arabia facilitated consultations between selected leaders from both sides in Riyadh. The outcome gave greater autonomy to the governorate but deviated from the STC's goal of secession for the south, meaning political tensions in the governorate remain (ACLEDAccessed 31/01/2024).

Al Mukalla city is the most significant urban settlement in Hadramawt governorate, and more than 312,000 people live within the confines of the city proper (OCHA 30/06/2023). Low-density urban sprawl and a comparatively abundant water supply characterise the southern coast of Yemen. The city's geographic location and administrative importance endow it with a relatively diverse economy, buoyed by strong social relations between the Hadramawt population and labour markets abroad, particularly in Saudi Arabia (SCSS 09/12/2021). Mukalla port is the country's third largest by cargo volume and is considered extremely important to commercial activities and the humanitarian response in Yemen (UNDP 26/04/2021).

Sayun city has a population estimated at 172,000 (OCHA 30/06/2023). It is 360km from Al Mukalla and the largest centre in the Hadramawt Valley.

### Methodology

This report is based on the analysis of primary data collected in December 2023, supplemented and triangulated with secondary data and expert opinions, where possible. Primary data collection was through semi-structured interviews with respondents representing their households, focus group discussions (FGDs) with men and women from the communities, and semi-structured interviews with several individuals about experiences in their communities. Respondents were selected purposively to focus on groups and categories of people understood from pre-existing research to be at high risk of having unmet basic needs. Data was collected in person from two locations within Hadramawt governorate: Al Mukalla and Sayun.



Table 2. Summary of primary data collection methods and samples

PRIMARY DATA SOURCE	NUMBER	DETAILS, INCLUDING INDICATIONS OF POSSIBLE VULNERABILITY
Household semi-structured interviews	22 in total 14 in Al Mukalla 8 in Sayun	12 household interviews with men 10 household interviews with women  7 IDP households 4 households including a member with a disability 4 households that self-identified as Al Muhasheen 9 households that self-identified as being economically vulnerable before the war  22 individuals representing approximately 242 individuals (including women, men, girls, and boys based on the average number of household members in Hadramawt according to the most recent data from 2016) (GDL accessed 10/30/2024)
FGDs	10 in total 6 in Al Mukalla 4 in Sayun	Approximately 8 people participated per group  Approximately 80 people in total
Semi-structured interviews with individuals regarding their experiences in their community	5 in total 3 in Al Mukalla 2 in Sayun	3 interviews with men 2 interviews with women
Total number of individuals consulted		Overall, 107 individuals were consulted in developing this report.  The household discussions reflected the experiences of all members of the households, not just the individual responding.  Overall, the information reflects the experience of approximately 250 people.

Semi-structured interview guidelines and questionnaires included a combination of open, closed, and ranking questions. Secondary data and learnings from previous ACAPS studies informed these questions, designed to support consistent data collection across the locations discussed here and those to be featured in additional reports. The content of the questions focused on seven key dimensions related to vulnerability relevant across Yemen (Table 3). These dimensions were selected after consultation with aid practitioners and conflict analysts and based on topics that avoided sensitive questions related to sexual and gender-based violence and other protection concerns. Notably, the dimensions included do not correspond directly to the humanitarian clusters.

Table 3. Seven key dimensions relating to vulnerability in Yemen

ANALYSIS DIMENSION	ISSUES TO UNDERSTAND
Healthcare access	Has healthcare changed during the conflict? If so, how? Have the changes affected people's capacity to access healthcare? If so, how? Which groups and categories of people have the hardest time accessing healthcare (i.e. who are the most vulnerable to reduced healthcare access and unmet needs in relation to health)?
Access to sufficient food (in terms of both quality and quantity)	Has food access changed? If so, how? Which groups and categories of people are most vulnerable to not having sufficient food and why?
Education	Has access to education changed in the community (e.g. how do children get to school)? If so, how? Are there any new or existing obstacles preventing children from attending school? Which groups and categories of children are at most risk of reduced or no access to education, and what barriers do they face?
Freedom of movement and access to transport	Are there barriers to movement and transportation? If so, what are they? Which groups and categories of people face the greatest difficulty in moving freely and why? Do impeded freedom of movement and access to transport affect people's ability to meet basic needs? If so, how?
Access to key utilities (Basic services indicate the key utilities of water, electricity, and communication networks.)	Has access to and the availability of key utilities changed during the conflict? If so, how? Which groups and categories of people face the greatest difficulty in moving freely and why? Do the reduced access to and availability of key utilities affect people's ability to meet basic needs? If so, how?
Housing and shelter	Have housing and types of dwellings changed during the conflict (e.g. the impact of displacement, household size, etc.)? If so, how? Which groups and categories of people face the greatest challenges in terms of living conditions and why?
Climate and environmental risk	Have climate or other environmental changes, including natural hazards, affected people's lives? If so, how? Which groups and categories of people face the greatest challenges related to climate and environmental risk and why?

## Limitations and considerations when interpreting the findings

This report presents the ideas and perspectives of the Yemeni men and women with whom the research team spoke. The report's value lies in the context-specific information it provides on the specific locations covered. It can inform further assessments and support the granular analysis required for programme design. The report findings should be read in this light rather than be taken as representative of all people in the locations the AI Mukalla hub covers. The report may provide insights also relevant to categories of people and communities under similar conditions to the locations focused on here.

Triangulating and comparing the findings was difficult because of the limited number of studies available specifically on the locations of AI Mukalla and Sayun. Regardless, ACAPS is confident that the findings do present a realistic picture of people's experience based on their resonance with other, albeit less location-specific, information on household challenges and ways of coping, conversations with Yemen experts, and background information about the area.

Because this analysis is based on respondents' perceptions, it likely reflects their biases. It should also be noted that the groups and categories of people used in this report are not rigidly defined and can overlap. They should not be interpreted as monolithic or fixed categorisations. As a qualitative study of perceptions based on a small purposive sample, the data is not representative and cannot be disaggregated by group.

This report is based on data collected in December 2023, before the escalation of hostilities in Yemen over the Red Sea maritime shipping blockade. As at the beginning of January 2024, monitoring data suggested that there had been no significant changes in import flows in the Red Sea ports. The analysis indicates that November and December 2023 maintained steady food and fuel import volumes ([DevelopmentAid 29/01/2024](#)). As a result, this report does not address the potential future impacts of hostilities should they continue or escalate.

## KEY FINDINGS

- **The vulnerability people face in AI Mukalla and Sayun is almost always multidimensional and cannot be separated along sectoral lines.** Factors that drive vulnerability affect multiple aspects of people's lives, and vulnerability in one area likely accompanies vulnerability in others.
- **Four main drivers of vulnerability were identified:**
  - **economic conditions** linked to the inflation of key goods such as food and fuel, reduced purchasing power, limited income-generating opportunities, and increased costs in accessing key services
  - **conflict-related state fragility** resulting in the deterioration of services and utility provision
  - **climate and environmental risk**, including flooding and the resulting damage and destruction of dwellings and infrastructure
  - **social norms**, limiting access to certain social spaces and perpetuating exclusion based on gender, age, or disability status.
- **Multiple variables influence household financial challenges.** They are not merely the consequence of currency collapse or macroeconomic trends. The collapse in state service provision has shifted costs onto households. The implications include healthcare that can be prohibitively expensive and, in some cases, requires long-distance or even international travel, and high education costs, both among the most significant household expenses that respondents reported.
- People believe that **NGOs have been ineffective at addressing the practical effects of climate and environmental risk**, including damage to shelters and high-value (non-income-generating) asset losses from flooding.
- **People rely heavily on neighbours as a source of resilience and practical support.** This includes borrowing and sharing food and using neighbours' houses for storage during floods.
- **Respondents were highly suspicious of IDPs from elsewhere in Yemen. Because of this lack of social cohesion, IDPs did not benefit from the support available to permanent residents.** Considered efforts to foster social cohesion between IDPs and host communities may be one means of creating an environment where the benefits of social capital and connections support resilience and the capacity to meet needs among a greater range of people.
- **Limited information is available regarding resilience specifically in Yemen.** This makes triangulating findings from primary data challenging and points to the need for further research, including on how to build resilience and the differences that affect it, be they geographic or related to different groups or categories of people.

- **Three main groups were consistently identified as most vulnerable to having unmet basic needs in Al Mukalla and Sayun.** Individuals may belong to one or more of these groups simultaneously.
  - People with disabilities were identified as the most vulnerable in four of the key dimensions considered: access to basic services, mobility and freedom of movement, healthcare access, and food security. Respondents expressed that people with disabilities have less access to the main coping strategies, often including income-generating activities.
  - Women were identified as the group most vulnerable to climate and environmental risk, as they face the least mobility and freedom of movement and access to sources of capacity, such as social and economic capital.
  - Older people were also identified as being highly vulnerable to climate and environmental risk, particularly heat, and as having less access to livelihoods.

## DRIVERS OF VULNERABILITY

The protracted conflict has forced Yemenis to face vulnerability on multiple fronts. They have lost homes and livelihoods, endured displacement, witnessed their purchasing power decline markedly, and faced more challenging access to services. At the same time, utility provision has become more and more inconsistent and expensive (ACAPS 22/05/2022). This has resulted in humanitarian needs and has eroded the resilience and capacities that may have existed before the war. Single-sector humanitarian action is not enough to address the resulting multidimensional vulnerability. Multiple factors drive vulnerability, and vulnerability in one area often leads to vulnerability in another. Challenging economic conditions lie at the heart of households being unable to meet needs. The strategies that households then use to address needs in one dimension can contribute to vulnerability in another. This points to the need for multisectoral programming and area-based approaches that address household and community circumstances holistically, not in silos built around individual sectors.

Respondent views indicated four main drivers of vulnerability in Al Mukalla and Sayun:

- economic conditions
- conflict-related state fragility effectively disabling provision of utilities
- climate and environmental risk
- social norms.

## Deteriorating economic conditions

Deteriorating economic conditions have long been recognised as among the foremost challenges facing Yemenis, with currency depreciation and intense inflation among the most significant and widely observed factors worsening humanitarian needs. In large part because of a 300% rise in food prices in the past five years, 17 million Yemenis are at Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or Emergency (IPC Phase 4) food insecurity levels (Action for Humanity et al. 02/10/2023; NRC 08/12/2023). Recurrent disruptions to public sector salaries, sometimes paid only partially, compound the effects of currency depreciation and the rising cost of goods. As a result, Yemenis have resorted to adjusting their food consumption by eating less and lower-quality food, often prioritising children's nutritional needs, relying on credit, and resorting to coping strategies with potentially detrimental consequences, such as child labour and the sale of assets (ACAPS 09/02/2024). In response to these pressures, the research data indicates that income generation to meet immediate needs consumes respondents, preventing them from addressing other challenges in their lives. As one household-level respondent stated, "People's lives and their living conditions don't allow them to make any decisions", that is, apart from meeting financial needs (Household interview 27/12/2023).

When reflecting on their current situation in Al Mukalla or Sayun, household-level respondents identified economic conditions as the single most significant challenge they faced in meeting needs, followed by a lack of work opportunities. These two choices account for over half of all responses. Of the 22 household-level respondents, 20 identified food costs as among their most significant household expenditures. 14 of 22 households indicated that one way they coped with high food prices was by relying on less expensive foods. This is in line with findings across Yemen more generally that rising food costs, not availability, are contributing to food insecurity (Action for Humanity et al. 02/10/2023).

The second household expenditure mentioned most was paying off debt. It is not uncommon for Yemeni households to take out loans and purchase essential items on credit (Nevola 2015; ACAPS 22/05/2022). What is less clear and requires more investigation is whether indebtedness is increasing and what the repercussions of unpaid debts are.

18 of 22 household-level respondents reported that regular healthcare, including medication for chronic illnesses, was not affordable and that they paid for essential healthcare by going into debt. Households mentioned other coping strategies, each with the potential of becoming an additional source of vulnerability. These included delaying medical attention, often resulting in worsening conditions; travelling to access free services (possibly meaning a loss of income during travel while still having to cover travel costs); or using cheaper options, sometimes not of the same quality.

## State fragility disabling the provision of utilities

A lack of access to reliable utilities affects essential services and creates challenges at the community and household levels. Economic conditions, conflict, the fragmentation of administrative control, and governing authorities' preoccupation with the conflict rather than governance and service provision have affected the provision of electricity, water, and communication networks in Yemen. The resulting costs have burdened **Yemeni households**. For example, the electricity grid is sporadic and unreliable in areas under IRG control (IGC 24/11/2021). This impairs the function of hospitals, schools, government offices, and businesses of all kinds. Roughly half of Yemen's health facilities are out of service or function at reduced capacity because of shortfalls in electricity generation (OCHA 20/12/2022). In 2024, 17.8 million Yemenis were in need of health assistance, a rise of 12% from 2023 (OCHA 01/02/2024). Similarly, on a per-capita basis, water access in Yemen is among the worst globally, contributing to WASH-related disease prevalence. 50% of the population reports serious issues with water quality (USAID 23/01/2023). According to the 2024 Humanitarian Needs Overview, 17.4 million Yemenis were in need of WASH assistance, a 12% increase from 2023 (OCHA 01/02/2024).

Household-level respondents **identified the weakening of basic state services as a foremost driver of vulnerability in Al Mukalla and Sayun**. All respondents identified the collapse of state service provision as a leading factor of heightened multidimensional vulnerability. For example, **FGD respondents described rolling brownouts as causing financial hardship because of lost income, food spoilage, and damage to expensive home appliances**. As one respondent from the FGDs noted, "How many refrigerators, washing machines, or televisions have broken down because of the frequent power outages and weak electricity?" (FGD 26/12/2023). Respondents also described how power outages would discourage individuals from leaving their homes because of security concerns at night, further affecting freedom of movement and access to income-generating opportunities. One household-level respondent mentioned the possibility of using alternative (solar) energy systems and battery storage to make up for shortfalls in the provided power grid but noted that the cost of such systems is prohibitive for many households.

Ineffective government services also cause challenges for citizens in relation to accessing civil documentation. This included delays in the issuance of documents and the absence of relevant offices. Household-level respondents said **that lack of supporting documentation is the main impediment to accessing civil documentation and that without the right documentation, people are unable to access aid and services that could reduce vulnerability**. FGDs supported this. One FGD respondent said a lack of documentation "greatly affects" access to humanitarian aid, and without an ID card, organisations are unable to confirm aid recipient status and distribute aid. This is problematic for anyone who has lost their ID card

or other key documents. 15 of 22 household respondents said they face civil documentation challenges "occasionally", while five said they face such challenges "regularly". Multiple FGD respondents discussed the inability to travel abroad for work because of the lack of a valid passport and the challenges of obtaining a new one. In one of the FGDs, a respondent shared the example of a physician who recommended travel abroad for healthcare to a patient who was then unable to do so because of passport issuance delays. Respondents also considered remittances from family members abroad an important boost to livelihoods.

## Climate and environmental risk

Respondents in both locations indicated that climate risk is among the most significant drivers of vulnerability, **flooding and extreme heat** being the most frequently identified.

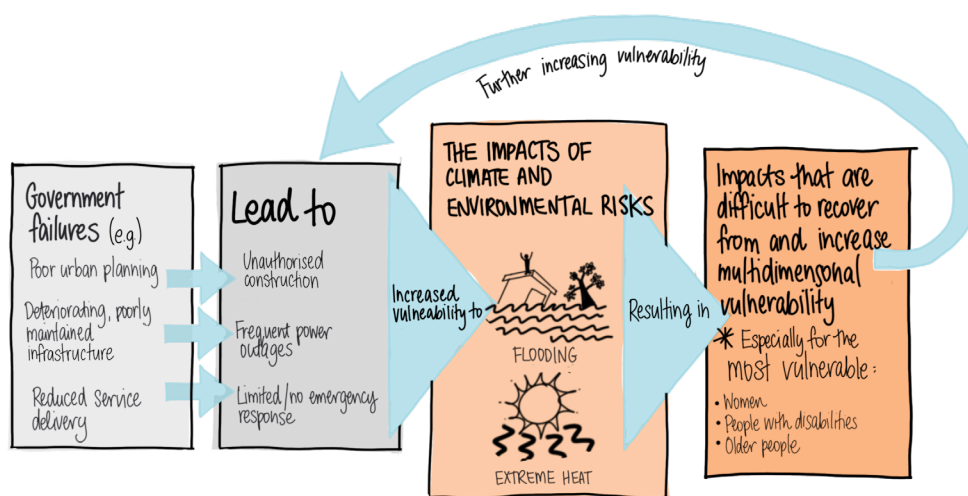
**Yemen ranks third highest in terms of climate vulnerability globally** and is among the countries least prepared to withstand climate shocks (EC/IASC 16/05/2022). In 2022 alone, Yemen experienced more than 430 flooding incidents. Respondents described diverse impacts from flooding, including infrastructure damage and roads being washed away. This results in reduced travel and the loss of access to work opportunities, schools, and hospitals. When reflecting on the impact of flooding in Al Mukalla and Sayun, household-level respondents identified flood damage to dwellings as a driver of vulnerability, particularly in the case of mud structures susceptible to moisture. Flood damage requires costly home repairs or pre-emptive mitigation measures, such as moving belongings to neighbours' homes. Respondents noted that the impacts of flooding also put households under further **financial strain, as flooding damages or destroys houses, shelters, and household items**. These impacts are more likely to affect IDPs and other marginalised populations, as they are more likely than established residents to reside in flood-prone areas (ACAPS 14/04/2023).

The **negative health impacts of flooding and excessive rain were a feature of FGD conversations**. The most commonly identified impacts were the spread of mosquito-borne diseases (e.g. dengue fever) and poor public sanitation measures related to stagnant water. Some respondents described purchasing insecticide to counter insect-borne diseases, but such measures require economic capital and are inadequate to meet the wider public health challenge that environmental and climate risks pose.

Climate risks are particularly severe in Yemen because of the absence of an efficient state or administrative apparatus to coordinate adaptations and emergency responses following individual incidents. **FGD respondents frequently identified government failure, poor urban planning, deferred infrastructure maintenance, and reduced service delivery as key factors underpinning vulnerability related to climate and the environment**. For example, one FGD respondent stated that unauthorised construction aggravates the impact of

flooding, indicating the extent to which the weakening of the administrative state may have unanticipated secondary effects. Another FGD respondent described the summer season as “a nightmare for the community” because of the combination of flooding and power outages. Extreme heat also has far-reaching impacts. FGD respondents pointed to how insufficient electricity worsens the health impacts of heat events. The resulting conditions make it difficult to engage in income-generating activities, particularly among older workers, people with disabilities, and those facing nutritional deficiencies. Notably, respondents said that aid is inadequately tailored to meet their needs following climate-related events.

Figure 1. Failures in service provision and governance that increase vulnerability to the impact of climate and environmental risk



Source: ACAPS

## Social norms

**Social norms further drive multidimensional vulnerability, including vulnerability based on gender, displacement, or disability status.** Gender dynamics across Yemen vary by region, social class, and other factors. Various forms of systemic marginalisation based on gender were already widespread even before the conflict introduced additional pressures, heightening vulnerability (ACAPS 17/11/2023). For instance, women in Yemen are generally unable to marry without the permission of a male guardian (Mahram), nor do they enjoy equal rights in matters related to divorce, property inheritance, or child custody (ACAPS 11/04/2023). The absence of full legal protections and inadequate inclusion in political processes add other dimensions to the marginalisation of women and girls (Oxfam/Saferworld 30/01/2017; ACAPS 17/11/2023). Conditions such as these have potentially devastating direct impacts on them, such as increased risk of protection threats, including different forms of gender-based violence. They also increase women’s and girls’ multidimensional vulnerability, such as by reducing women’s ability to exercise their housing, land, and property rights or secure land tenure or housing or by affecting girls’ ability to attend school. Economic conditions have brought more Yemeni women into the labour force, both through paid work and subsistence labour, but greater workforce participation may bring with it a double burden of employment as their responsibility for household tasks, such as cooking and childcare, continues (ACAPS 11/04/2023).

**People with disabilities were identified as the most vulnerable group overall**, but the distinct drivers of vulnerability are difficult to discern from the primary data collected. More research on the location-specific conditions of people with disabilities is needed. Other research specifically focused on the lives of people with disabilities has found that they are among the most vulnerable in the country, that the discrimination and challenges they faced before the war have worsened during the conflict, and that they are often left behind when households displace, leaving them to face extreme challenges or possible exclusion from humanitarian assistance (HI 23/05/2022).

Numerous examples of gender-based vulnerability driven by social norms emerged from the conversations with household-level respondents and focus groups in both Al Mukalla and Sayun. The two areas where there were multiple examples of this gender-based vulnerability were **mobility and freedom of movement** and **education**. Women and adolescent girls were identified as having limited access to mobility and transportation. This was mainly attributed to the fact that they needed a Mahram to accompany them outside the home.

7 of the 22 household-level respondents said girls faced more difficulty attending school, while one respondent stated that boys had more difficulty. FGDs indicated that girls were at risk of being withdrawn from school to reduce costs, contribute to household labour, and prioritise the education of their brothers. Loss of education access increases girls’



risk of multidimensional vulnerability, including reduced future employment opportunities, increased child labour risks, and other protection-related risks, such as early marriage.

**Various forms of racial and ethnic discrimination also contribute to social exclusion.** Examples of this mostly relate to AI Muhamasheen, who are traditionally employed in menial occupations, such as street cleaning and rubbish collection. AI Muhamasheen have limited access to conventional social structures, and their perceived ethnic African origins contribute to a broader set of material challenges fuelled by social stigma (ACAPS 03/08/2022). Social norms further affect access to support, examined in greater detail in Section 7.1 below. Multiple FGD participants indicated that AI Muhamasheen were seen as more likely to be forced to engage in begging for food because of their reduced access to livelihoods heightening their vulnerability.

## CATEGORIES OF PEOPLE PERCEIVED TO BE MOST VULNERABLE

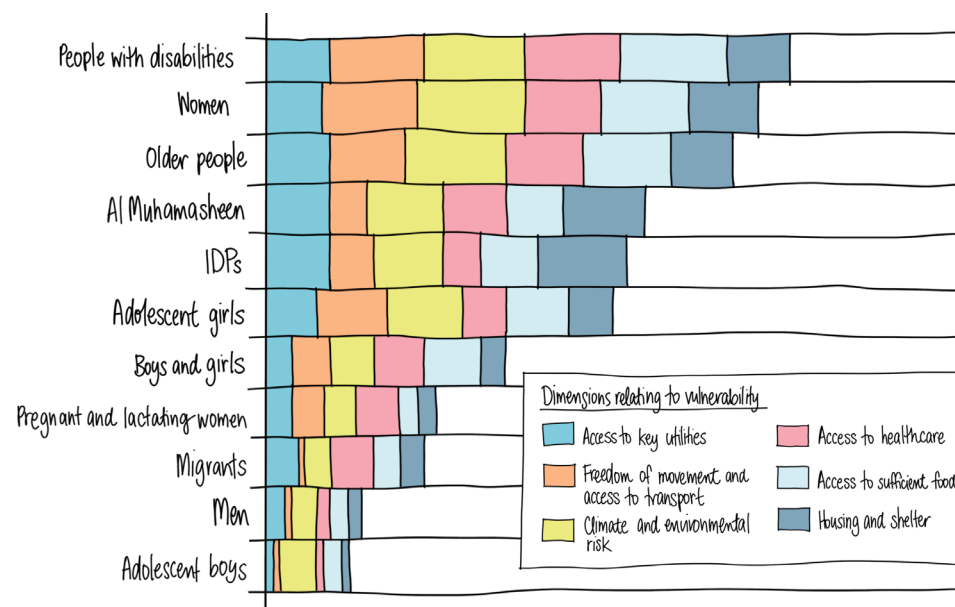
Because of underlying social hierarchies, disparities based on status, and divergent access to sources of capacity, the drivers of vulnerability discussed above do not affect all individuals and groups equally. **Household-level respondents consistently identified these three categories of people as the most vulnerable in Al Mukalla and Sayun:**

- **people with disabilities**
- **women**
- **older people.**

For each of the key dimensions outlined above used to frame the analysis (apart from education, which was assessed but excluded as it only applied to school-age children), household-level respondents were provided with a list of different categories of people. Some of these categories purposefully overlapped to understand the extent to which age and gender affected perceptions of vulnerability. They were then asked to identify **up to five categories** they considered most vulnerable to not having their basic needs met **for each of the key dimensions**. Figure 2 presents the responses to this exercise.

This diagram is intended to serve as a visual aid showing how comparatively vulnerable the household-level respondents in Al Mukalla and Sayun considered different categories of people across the key dimensions. It is important to note that this diagram represents a consolidation of the perceptions of a small sample and that it does not account for intersecting vulnerabilities, such as the fact that some people are members of multiple categories (e.g. a displaced adolescent girl with a disability or an older Muhamasheen man). The responses highlight the multidimensional nature of vulnerability.

Figure 2. Categories of people perceived to be most vulnerable in relation to different dimensions



Source: ACAPS

### People with disabilities

**Disability status can significantly affect a person's multidimensional vulnerability.** Physical, economic, and social barriers can impede their ability to meet their basic needs, often making them dependent on a family member and impinging on that person's capacity to earn money and contribute to the household. More than 4.8 million Yemenis are considered people with disabilities. The IRG is a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, but momentum to safeguard the rights of people with disabilities has been lost since the escalation of hostilities in 2015. It should be noted that the term disability encompasses a broad spectrum of individuals, so not every person with a disability is automatically extremely vulnerable. More targeted research is needed to assess vulnerability related to disability status. Still, it is clear that disability status has a pronounced impact on mobility and access to aid. 81% of Yemenis with disabilities surveyed in 2022 said that they were unable to reach humanitarian services (HI 23/05/22). Household-level respondents in Al Mukalla and Sayun said that they perceived people with disabilities to be the most vulnerable

group in four of the seven key dimensions: transportation and mobility, health access, food security, and access to basic services. This finding is linked to perceptions regarding access to income-generating labour opportunities and credit, which are among the most significant coping strategies to overcome vulnerability in relation to these dimensions.

## Women

**Gender norms have a pronounced impact on vulnerability across Yemen, with women and girls facing challenges and risks because of their gender and the socially constructed roles and expectations around it.** In the two locations of Al Mukalla and Sayun, household-level respondents identified women as the most vulnerable category in relation to two key dimensions, with different factors identified as driving vulnerability among women in these areas:

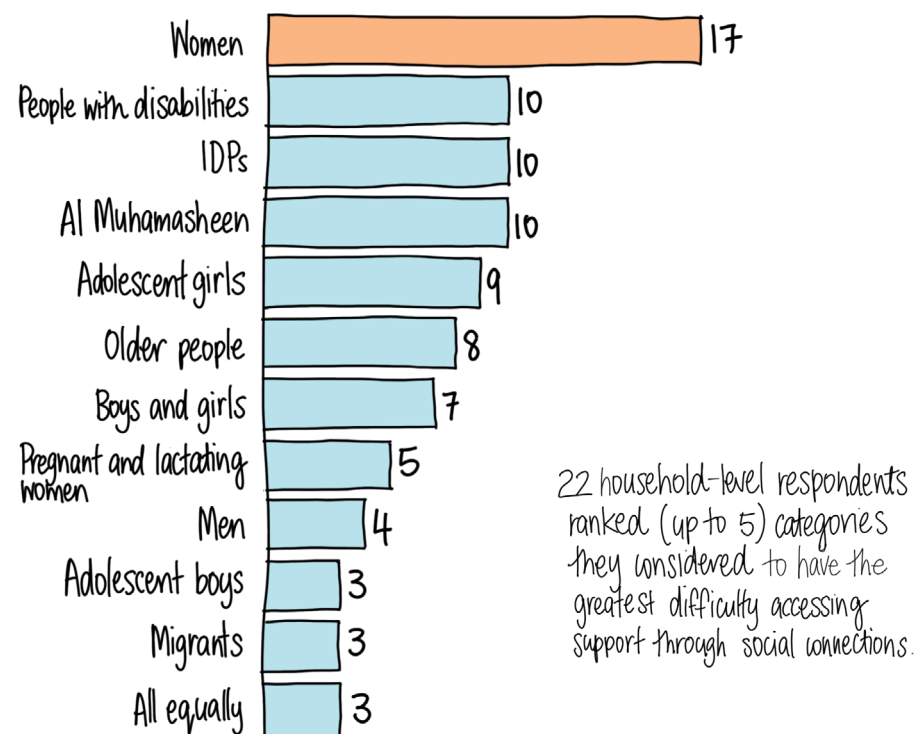
- **climate and environmental risk**
- **freedom of movement and access to transport** (the ranking exercise placed them equally vulnerable to people with disabilities).

FGD respondents saw the requirement for women to have a Mahram to travel outside the home as the critical factor limiting their freedom of movement. The underlying factor driving vulnerability to climate and environmental risk for women in both locations was the perception that women enjoy less access to livelihoods and income-generating opportunities, identified as the most important coping strategy in response to these risks. Findings in relation to these two key dimensions are mirrored by the perception that women were understood to have, by far, the least access to support systems available in the community (such as sharing, borrowing from neighbours, purchasing on credit, and taking out a loan), a further factor contributing to multidimensional vulnerability (Figure 3).

Seeing women as unable to access some of the key support mechanisms available is in line with other research and knowledge of gender roles in Yemen. If a woman cannot move without her Mahram, it makes it challenging for her to engage with most of the options for support that might be available. This means that if anything happens to male household members, such as injury, death, or absence from the family, women's vulnerability increases further.

Interestingly, in male FGDs, many respondents highlighted men as being among the most vulnerable categories of people because of the responsibilities Yemen's gender roles give exclusively to men. They cited monetary concerns and the need for male heads of households to provide financially for their families in times that have become extremely challenging.

Figure 3. Categories of people perceived to have the least access to community-based support structures



Source: ACAPS

The negative impact of reduced economic opportunities on men's wellbeing and women's subsequent security has been observed in the broader Yemen context (ACAPS 23/11/2023, 30/08/2023, and 11/04/2023). This response illustrates that perceptions of vulnerability are difficult to delink from a person's own lived experiences. Personal views contradict the findings of the household interviews but confirm the centrality of financial concerns to vulnerability. Vulnerability to forced recruitment was mentioned only twice in the discussions. In general, joining armed groups was considered more as a livelihood coping strategy than a vulnerability. Overall, adolescent boys and men were generally viewed as less vulnerable than others.

## Older people

In both Al Mukalla and Sayun, household-level respondents and FGDs frequently cited older people as among the most vulnerable categories of people. Multiple interviews noted that older people forego meals or reduce food consumption to prioritise younger family members. The four dimensions of vulnerability where older people were considered particularly vulnerable were:

- **climate and environmental risk**
- **healthcare access**
- **access to sufficient food (both quality and quantity)**
- **freedom of movement and access to transportation.**

FGD respondents were not involved in ranking categories of people but also considered older people to be a particularly vulnerable category. The specific climate factor of **extreme heat** was also mentioned as a key risk for the elderly.

Older people (those aged 60 or above) have experienced a disproportionately acute impact from the food, fuel, and financial crises affecting the country during the war. They are estimated to make up 4.7% of Yemen's population and are particularly vulnerable to unmet basic needs because of reduced income opportunities and access to essential services (HelpAge 27/03/2023). This is particularly salient in the case of health services, including medication, which rising costs have affected.

## FACTORS AFFECTING LOCAL CAPACITIES TO OVERCOME MULTIDIMENSIONAL VULNERABILITIES

Discussions with the households and focus groups showed that the respondents in both locations saw that they and others in their communities had limited capacity to meet their needs across the various dimensions of vulnerability. They often cited the lack of or limited support systems they can turn to as a cause. This is in line with other research that highlights the importance of social networks and social capital in Yemen (ACAPS 09/02/2024). Respondents also identified the lack of job opportunities and challenges to livelihoods as an obstacle and, especially in Al Mukalla, government systems and services as a factor that should be a source of support but was seriously lacking.

Communities, households, and individuals always employ a range of strategies to meet their needs, some of which include relying on various support systems or safety nets within their society. The degree to which people can use these to meet needs and mitigate vulnerability in one or more areas depends on many factors, including the number of safety nets people have at their disposal, their robustness, how they may have changed, the number of other people relying on them, and the depth and type of need being addressed.

### Access to social capital

#### The value of functioning social connections and social capital

Research respondents in both Al Mukalla and Sayun consistently described social networks as the most critical pillar of resilience, providing greater access to in-kind resources, such as food and money, and allowing households to address drivers of multidimensional vulnerability.

Family and neighbours were the two most commonly identified capacity sources in household interview responses.

#### Social connections as ways of coping for those who have them

**Access to a social network is the main way households cope with healthcare access challenges:** 18 of 22 household-level respondents borrowed money from within their social network to cover healthcare costs.

9 of the 22 household-level respondents shared their housing with other families. Up to seven families were living under one roof in a single dwelling to reduce monthly expenses per family by sharing the burden of costs, such as rent or household maintenance, transport, and electricity.

When asked to consider the coping strategies used to meet their household food needs, three household-level respondents described borrowing food from neighbours or family, while two described taking on debt to purchase food. One respondent cited purchasing food on credit from a local grocer, echoing previous findings that local businesses play an important role in communal resilience (ACAPS unpublished). The positive role of neighbours was also mentioned in FGDs, with respondents saying they avoided flood-related damage by storing their belongings with neighbours. One FGD respondent summarised the collective spirit within communities: “Everyone helps the other, no one sits hungry” (FGD 25/12/2023). Community savings pools, known as jammaiyyat, can serve as an important mechanism to ensure household financial liquidity. Still, only 2 of the 22 household-level respondents identified them as a key source of support in their community. This was the same number that said that religious institutions played an important role in supporting vulnerable households.

In Yemen, access to social capital available through social connections is known to be an important coping strategy for many households. When faced with challenges, shocks, and unexpected needs, or even when an additional injection of money or support is needed to cover the cost of a celebration, Yemenis commonly turn to their social network or individuals within it. People find a way to cook food for a neighbour’s wedding or loan money to pay for emergency medical treatment through their social connections.

The availability and utility of these strategies depend on many factors, including their robustness and how they may have changed, the number of other people relying on them, and the depth of the need being addressed. Consequently, **the degree to which social connections can support a household is linked to the capacities and the resilience of others in their social network**. For example, the ability to stay with neighbours might address the need for temporary housing, but this strategy may only be viable in the short term. Similarly, purchasing items on credit or borrowing from friends and neighbours might solve an immediate need for essential food, but in the medium term, credit needs to be repaid or it will cease, and neighbours and friends can only lend and share when they have something to give (ACAPS 22/05/2022 and 09/02/2024).

### Falling outside the safety net: atomisation

Social norms and social cohesion are particularly relevant to being able to use social connections as a safety net. Capacity and support drawn from social connections are not equally available to everyone. For example, IDPs and Al Muhamasheen are likely among the most vulnerable categories of people in general. Household-level respondents ranked them fourth and fifth most vulnerable in this research. These populations are less able to rely on social connections as a way of addressing their multidimensional vulnerability. People who are displaced may have been previously part of a strong social group, but being displaced indicates that this is likely no longer available. Even if many members of a socially connected

group move together, the costs and challenges associated with displacement most likely significantly reduce the support their group could provide. Al Muhamasheen live together in settlements distinct from other Yemenis, and discrimination against them permeates Yemeni society (MRG accessed 15/03/2024). While they may be ready to help each other, their overarching pre-existing economic vulnerability likely means they have limited support to give.

Household respondents were asked if people living in the same area came together to jointly solve problems, address issues, and meet needs. Respondents indicated that this was not the case and most frequently gave a lack of social cohesion as the reason for this lack of collective action. Almost half of the 22 household-level respondents provided this as a reason. Respondents also spoke of a fear of IDPs and a lack of trust in people from other parts of Yemen. Respondents mentioned the difficulties in integrating people they described as outsiders, implying not only IDPs but others considered different in terms of social group or class. One respondent stated that racism prevents collective problem-solving.

Three household-level respondents discussed competition among groups in the face of limited resources. They also expressed a lack of awareness related to bringing about positive change in the community that would benefit everyone and not just their immediate social group. Both the household interviews and FGDs demonstrated a strong sense that it was up to the individual household to solve its own problems and address its own needs. In the words of one household-level respondent who self-identified as facing economic challenges before the war: “If there is a problem, solve it yourself; [this is] the nature of the region. Don’t interfere in the affairs of others” (Household interview 13/12/2023).

### Access to livelihoods and labour markets

Household-level respondents identified income generation as one of the most important drivers of resilience in Al Mukalla and Sayun. Finding work or additional income was the main strategy people involved in the study considered to address multidimensional vulnerability.

The impact of additional income generation depends on the activities and the individuals involved. Additional finances help the household meet needs, but dangerous labour can create new vulnerabilities, so overall, multidimensional vulnerability persists and may even increase. FGD respondents described searching for supplemental work during off-hours and holidays and a lack of household income as factors in the decision to withdraw children from school, compounding vulnerability to child marriage and child labour. People who leave school and begin work early may also be confined to unskilled, low-wage jobs for life.

Several FGD respondents saw the provision of job creation and career training as an important way of boosting resilience. They noted that when such opportunities have been provided,

they predominantly targeted IDPs, suggesting that needs are general and non-displaced people also have significant financial needs. One FGD respondent said: “Communities can enhance their resilience against these [wartime] pressures by providing work opportunities and improving livelihoods.” (Household interview 13/12/2023)

Two FGD respondents said that family members had travelled abroad to find work and provide remittances. Two others said they considered voluntary military recruitment as a means of securing a stable livelihood despite the risk to personal security, indicating the extent to which circumstantial and contextual factors affect coping strategies. Household-level respondents commonly cited income generation and taking on debt as their way of coping with the risks or impact of climate and environmental hazards, indicating the extent to which the impacts of multidimensional vulnerability are viewed and addressed in financial terms.

Importantly, social norms likely mean that certain categories of people, including women, people with disabilities, older people, IDPs, and Al Muhamasheen, experience less access to the labour market, diminishing their ability to enhance capacity in this way.

### Access to government systems and services

Several FGD respondents associated capacity and resilience with government systems. While they did not necessarily connect their own capacity with government functions per se, responses suggest that individuals see economic factors as key to reducing their multidimensional vulnerability. This includes their own capacity to earn a sufficient income. They also connect it directly to broader economic stabilisation – a government function and a durable political settlement to the conflict. Along with the Government’s role in creating economic stability, respondents saw government functions as key to their wellbeing and its shortcomings to their vulnerability.

While respondents expressed the expectation that the State should be able to provide key services to support them, they also saw the reality that this government support is unlikely. More than two-thirds of household-level respondents said that steps are not being taken to address the most important problems in their community, blaming self-interest on the part of responsible parties for the inaction. One respondent referenced the prevalence of corruption in Hadramawt, and another said local problems are not being addressed because of conflict with the “personal interests of the region’s [powerful] individuals, who prefer to resolve issues in ways that serve their personal goals and impede cooperation in solving shared problems”. The collective result of such factors is an apparent individualism, as one FGD participant noted: “We don’t know to whom to turn; everyone makes it seem that he’s not responsible” (FGD 26/12/2023).

### Humanitarian assistance: extremely important and insufficient

Humanitarian assistance does not automatically contribute to resilience, and receiving it is outside of household control, but household-level and FGD respondents discussed it as a coping strategy they relied on.

Respondents at the household level and in the FGDs indicated a high degree of reliance on humanitarian assistance and frequently referred to aid as an important source of support. Household-level respondents scored it an average of 8.5 out of 10 in terms of importance, despite them also saying it did not meet all of their needs.

FGD respondents also mentioned an array of NGO-based initiatives they deemed beneficial towards strengthening their capacity to mitigate vulnerability, ranging from career and livelihood training to feminist discussions and psychological support.

Evidence also indicates that humanitarian aid can play a positive role in terms of cultivating social capital within a community because of the tendency people have to share with others in need, regardless of whether it is something they have grown, purchased, or received as humanitarian aid (ACAPS 22/05/2022).