



International Organization for Migration (IOM)

The UN Migration Agency

STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN PEACE-BUILDING THROUGH  
NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL IN THE  
RURAL AREAS OF THE GOVERNORATES OF SANA'A AND LAHJ IN YEMEN

**SURVEY WITH BENEFICIARIES**

**ADEN, YEMEN — AUGUST 2019**

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## Project Profile

<b>Title</b>	Strengthening the role of women in peace building through natural resources management at the community level in the rural areas of the governorates of Sana'a and Lahj
<b>Symbol / code</b>	UNJP/YEM/038/PBF
<b>Funding Agency</b>	United Nations Peacebuilding Fund
<b>Start date</b>	01 Jan 2018
<b>End date</b>	30 June 2019
<b>Implementing partner(s):</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Water User Associations;</li><li>- Ministry of Water and Irrigation</li></ul>
<b>Governorate(s)</b>	Lahj and Sana'a



# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Project overview

Water scarcity and its deadly consequences have long been a part of Yemen's history. Even before the current conflict, public water was accessible to only half of the overall urban population and to about 40 per cent of those in rural areas. Years of fighting have caused massive destruction to Yemen's water infrastructure and hindered already poor access. Lack of regulation, increase in demand, and consequent competition over water have all led to clashes over this precious resource.

With much of Yemen facing severe food insecurity, Yemen is facing the largest food crisis in the world. Restricted water supply for irrigation is one of the factors affecting shrinking food production. Before the conflict, about 25 % of all food was produced domestically. By 2017, that figure had decreased to less than 20 %, with it being estimated to have dropped even further in 2018 (WFP, March 2019). Desperate to produce enough food for their families, the food crisis further intensifies competition over water.

Limited access to water can particularly negatively affect rural women. In Yemen's countryside, many women not only depend on agriculture, as their main source of livelihood, but are left in charge of the farm and household, with their husbands away from home. Additionally, women are the main fetchers of water for household needs, which leaves them open to harassment, if the water source is far from their home. With the extreme competition over and monopoly of water sources taking place in some rural areas, women can be denied access to water, affecting their agricultural endeavors and consequently their livelihoods.

To address shortages and the resulting conflict over shared water sites, IOM partnered with FAO, on the project titled: *Strengthening the Role of Women in Peace Building through Natural Resources Management at the Community Level in the Rural Areas of the Governorates of Sana'a and Lahj in Yemen*. The project was implemented by IOM and FAO in Lahj and Sana'a respectively.

**Lahj** is one of the 22 governorates in Yemen and the focus of IOM's work under this project. In 2015, the governorate experienced insurgency as part of Yemen's conflict. Ground fighting and aerial bombing have caused massive destruction to essential public infrastructure. Suffering the consequences of war, many people have lost their livelihoods while governmental departments have lost key functional resources.

Agriculture is an important source of income for the people of Lahj. The governorate is fortunate to have soil conducive to the growth of an ample variety of fruits and vegetables. However, due to the lack of resources and public services, much of the water infrastructure in Lahj is damaged, having not been maintained for years. The decreased water supply has resulted in exacerbated tensions within and between communities. This project supported seven Water User Associations (WUAs) in Lahj in partnership with local communities to help resolve local conflicts and rehabilitate shared water sources.

The project **objective** was to reduce conflict over land and water and enhance social cohesion through improving livelihoods and increasing the role of women and youth in natural resource management and conflict resolution mechanisms. The project outcomes were as follows:

**Outcome 1:** Reducing conflict over water resources, should lead to the increase of water for irrigation, improving the communal livelihoods, that promote peace building among the communities;

**Outcome 2:** Support gender-responsive community reform efforts to empower gender equality and equity;

**Outcome 3:** Enhance the community confidence building/social cohesion, and increase economic returns and employment opportunities reducing the number of young men from joining the militia, and or terrorist groups.

## 1.2 Methodology

This survey was undertaken by IOM with members of water user associations (WUAs) and cash for work (CfW) beneficiaries in Lahj to gather perceptions and attitudes towards the program's main objective and outcomes. The findings of this survey were cross-referenced with the findings of the baseline survey, undertaken at the start of the project, to understand whether the project contributed to positive improvements.

The respondents represented seven WUAs that IOM partnered with in Lahj as outlined in the below table. The survey incorporated respondents that had diverse roles in the project, including WUA leaders, members of Conflict Resolution Committees, and CfW beneficiaries from the local communities.

The survey, undertaken from 28-31 July 2019, was conducted through a qualitative methodology, using open-ended questions (Annex A) to spur discussions. This approach was used to allow respondents to share their various perceptions towards the project, which may not be captured through a closed-ended questionnaire. The responses were recorded and categorized. A focus group discussion (FGD) was held with members and cash for work beneficiaries from each WUA. Seven FGDs were undertaken with 21 respondents in total (10 female; 11 male).

**Table 1. Respondents**

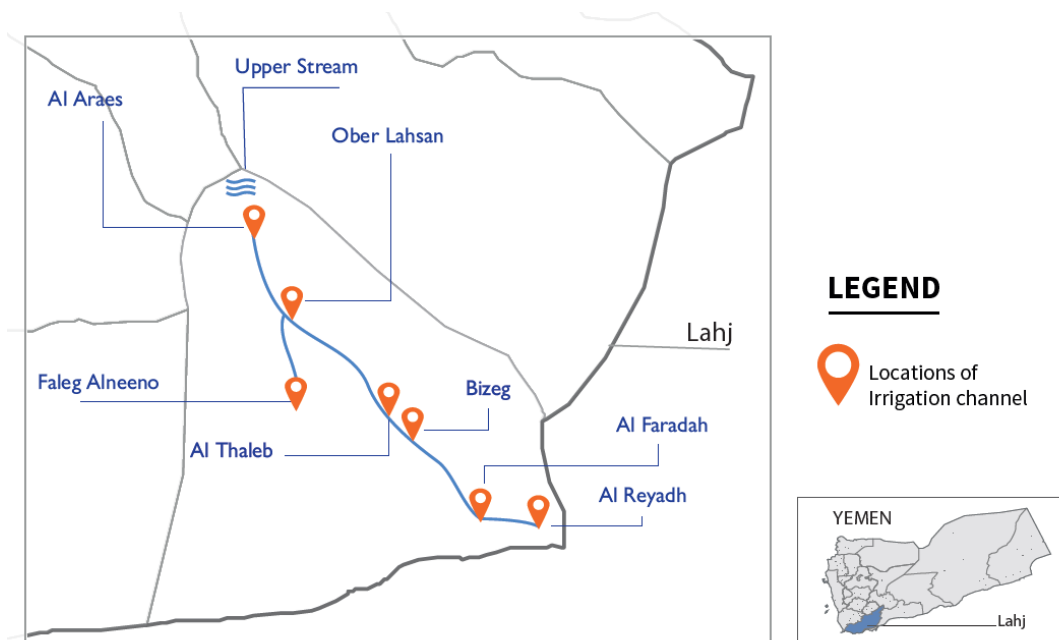
Name of respondent	Position	Name of WUA
Sami Saleh Mahdi	General Secretary of the Association	Al-Faradah
Sakinah Al Lozi	Member of Conflict Resolution Committee	A-Faradah
Eishah Ali Saleh	Cash for Work Beneficiary	Al-Faradah
Sayna Mohammed Ahmed	Cash for Work Beneficiary	Al Baizeg
Muna Alwan	Member of Conflict Resolution Committee	Al Baizeg
Rudwan Alwan Ahmed	Cash for Work Beneficiary	Al Baizeg
Ahmed Fadhl Ahmed	Member of Conflict Resolution Committee	Obar Al Hassan
Abdurrahman Muqbil Mohsen	Cash for Work Beneficiary	Obar Al Hassan
Alttaf Awadh Adnan	Cash for Work Beneficiary	Obar Al Hassan
Obaid Morjan	Cash for Work Beneficiary	Al-Thalab
Najat Saleh Naser	Cash for Work Beneficiary	Al-Thalab
Hamidah Ahmed Ahmed	Member of Conflict Resolution Committee	Al-Thalab
Sameh Saleh Abdullah	Cash for Work Beneficiary	Aqamat Al Riyadh
Najwa Yaslim Abdullah	Cash for Work Beneficiary	Aqamat Al Riyadh
Badriyah Mohammed Said	Cash for Work Beneficiary	Aqamat Al Riyadh
Entisar Said Ali	Member of Conflict Resolution Committee	Al-Araes
Hanan Saleh Ali	Cash for Work Beneficiary	Al-Araes

Salem Mohammed Hassan	Cash for Work Beneficiary	Al-Araes
Barakah Salem Muhamad Ahmad	Cash for Work Beneficiary	Faleq Al Neeno
Walid Ali Saleh	Cash for Work Beneficiary	Faleq Al Neeno
Ramyah Mohsen Nasir	Member of Conflict Resolution Committee	Faleq Al Neeno

## Limitations

The monitoring team opted to conduct qualitative focus group discussions to enable respondents to elaborate on their various perceptions, opinions and attitudes regarding the project. However, this methodology led to a smaller respondent sample which is not representative of the total number of local community members. In light of this limitation, diverse respondents (including women and men, CfW beneficiaries, conflict resolution committee members and WUA leaders) were selected to represent various groups of project stakeholders and beneficiaries. However, the monitoring team recognizes that these responses pertain to individual views and may not be generalized to represent all project stakeholders.

Figure 1. Project target areas



## 2. BASELINE ASSESSMENT

### 2.1 Baseline Findings

Ahead of project implementation in May 2018, the project team conducted a baseline survey to understand conflict dynamics and the condition of water sites in areas targeted by the project, which informed the final selection of target water infrastructure.

The study surveyed representatives of 20 WUAs in Sana'a, Amanat Alasimah and Lahj governorates to identify the nature and root causes of water conflicts<sup>1</sup>, key parties involved and dynamics among different

<sup>1</sup> Water conflict is a term describing a conflict between two or more parties over access to water resources.

stakeholders. It also stressed on the effects of water resource conflicts on agricultural, food security, health and on the local community. The role of WUAs and women's involvement in the WUAs were also explored through inquiring on the functions and operational capacity of the WUAs before the project, and women's roles and functions within the WUAs.

According to the baseline survey findings, water conflicts in Lahj were between local and surrounding communities. This was due to the fact that water channels in Lahj are shared among many communities, which at times divert water of other villages for own use. Farmers dwelling in the vicinity of canal headworks have the advantage and ability to control the stream of water. Many times, farmers blocked water from reaching other farmers downstream. This had created tensions between upstream and downstream farmers, who perceived such a condition as an exploitation of their rights. All associations stated that the root cause of conflict is the lack of sufficient water supplies and that having sufficient water supplies would resolve most of these conflicts.

Agriculture is one of the main sources of income for individuals within the surveyed locations. The fluctuation of access to water had affected agricultural production and subsequently affected the income of farmers, negatively affecting their access to food supplies and compromising their purchasing power.

The WUAs, which are charged with water resource regulation and management on a local level, were created years ago in Lahj, but were not fully operational during the time of the baseline assessment. As per respondents, such an inactivity mainly was due to a lack of financial resources and governmental support. In Lahj, 30% of associations reported having two or three women in their associations. However, they also stated that these women were not active and did not take part in any association activities. Women's underrepresentation in the WUAs can largely be attributed to traditional roles of women in society (particularly in rural areas of Lahj) that often constrain their public participation.

The survey with WUA members and CfW beneficiaries in Lahj sought to understand the impact of the project in addressing the conflicts and challenges noted in the baseline assessment through gauging perceptions of the project's benefits for local communities.

## 2.2 Impact of Water Conflicts Resolution

Based on feedback from 100% of the respondents, the objective of alleviating water conflicts in the targeted areas was achieved. The conflicts were largely alleviated through improved infrastructure and improvement of access to water resources. Respondents noted that due to sufficiency of water as well as conflict resolution efforts by the WUAs, upstream water users for the most part have not diverted water and blocked access for downstream water users—as was the practice in the past. Moreover, the water channel gates were rehabilitated, allowing them to be opened and closed in order to control water flow. In the past, farmers in many sites would create makeshift blockages of the channels that could not be opened to allow water to flow onwards to other farmers. The rehabilitated gates, which are now under the control of the WUA members, can be opened and closed to allow for the control of the water flow in a planned and coordinated manner.

Other benefits of the project mentioned by the respondents included increased income of farmers and increased local agricultural production. However, the project team could not assess in quantitative terms the increase in income for farmers, as the crops planted by the farmers have not yet been harvested and sold in the markets. The feedback on the increase in income largely referred to the increased quantity of crops that could be planted, and in some cases reduced cost of agricultural inputs.

Impact	Number of respondents	% of total respondents
Conflict over water alleviated	21	100%
Increased access to water	21	100%
Increased income of farmers	18	86%
Increased local agricultural production	9	43%
Improved livestock production	3	14%
Reduced costs of agricultural inputs for farmers	3	14%

### 2.3 Training in Conflict Resolution

The members of WUAs were asked in the baseline study whether they had received any training on conflict-resolution. In Lahj, the majority of associations (67%) responded negative. During the survey, all WUA respondents confirmed receiving this training from IOM in February 2019. The training was perceived positively by the WUAs, with respondents affirming that it increased their capacity to resolve local conflicts. At the same time, all respondents stated that they would like to have additional training on conflict resolution.

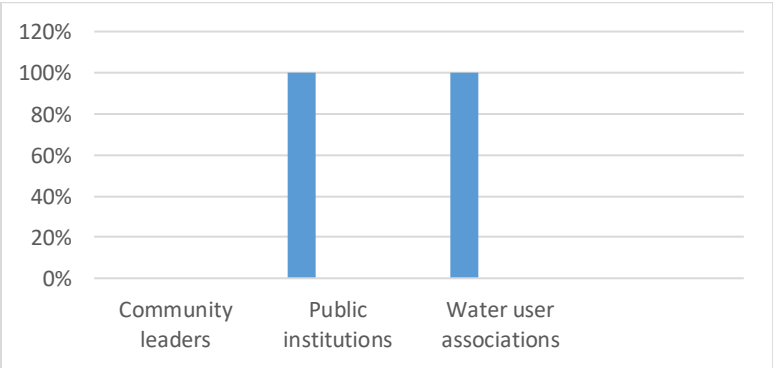
### 2.4 Management of Water Resources

The survey confirmed that the WUAs in Lahj have been successfully reactivated through the project and have resumed the role of water resource management and regulation. In the course of the project, the WUAs met regularly, elected Boards of Directors and coordinated water infrastructure rehabilitation activities. To support their ongoing operations, the project procured welding generators for each WUA to enable them to perform routine maintenance on the channel gates following the end of the project. The project team supported the WUAs in developing an agreement with the Lahj Office of Agriculture and Irrigation on the storage of the generators with the Office of Agriculture, and the coordination of water site maintenance with the Office, so as to avoid one WUA blocking the water access of another.

The WUA representatives agreed that this will enable them to continue water channel maintenance after the end of the project, as damaged gates were one of the key challenges pertaining to the water infrastructure. At the same time, the respondents expressed concerns that they may not have resources to do full water channel rehabilitation in subsequent years without additional support.

The WUAs also confirmed that the management of the water resources is performed by the WUAs in coordination with the Lahj Office of Agriculture and Irrigation.

Figure 2. Entities in charge of managing water resources





## 2.5 Roles of women in the project implementation

Respondents reported diverse roles of women in the project, in many cases in leading positions. Women were highly involved in leading the conflict resolution processes through active participation in the Conflict Resolution Committees. Women were also involved in the election of or direct participation in the WUAs' Boards of Directors, in awareness raising efforts on project interventions to gain buy-in from local communities, as well as selection and registration of cash for work beneficiaries. In some cases, women were directly in charge of project administration and supervision.

While at the start of the project there was a lot of resistance to women's participation in cash for work activities, in the survey all respondents noted women's participation and contribution through cash for work activities to the rehabilitation of the water channels.

Women's role in the project	Number of respondents	% of total respondents
Decision-making	21	100%
Conflict resolution	21	100%
Water channel rehabilitation	21	100%
Community awareness-raising	15	71%
Beneficiary selection and registration	9	43%
Project administration and supervision	6	29%

## 2.7 Interventions by Other Institutions

The baseline survey inquired whether there were interventions to resolve water conflicts by any organization/agency in the targeted areas. The results of the baseline survey revealed that there were no interventions by any agency to resolve local disputes over water. During the survey, all WUA respondents reported that IOM and FAO were the only organizations to intervene to resolve conflicts over water in their areas.

## 3. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, the survey revealed positive project achievements in accordance to the project objectives and outcomes.

All respondents noted the impact of the project in alleviating conflicts over water resources and improving access to water. However, while Outcome 1 envisaged the reduction of water conflict leading to increase of water for irrigation (by improving access to water), the survey revealed reversed order of the outcome, whereby increase of water for irrigation led to the reduction of water conflicts. The respondents affirmed that the project led to an improvement of communal livelihoods (i.e. increase in the income of local farmers) and improved relations among community members.

The survey also revealed strong roles of women in project implementation and in the WUA decision-making processes, which is a positive improvement from the baseline, which showed that women were largely inactive in the WUAs. Thus, the project contributed to gender-responsive community reform efforts to empower gender equality and equity (Outcome 2).

The survey also showed that the project contributed positively to social cohesion among community members through alleviating resource competition among water users and reestablishing coordinated water regulation mechanisms through the WUAs. However, the survey could not establish whether the project reduced the number of young men from joining militia, and or terrorist groups, as envisaged under Outcome 3. There are currently no local systems or actors that measure or observe the rate of youth joining militia or terrorist groups. Most of the respondents also did not have enough information on this subject or were reluctant to respond.

## Respondent recommendations

The respondents were asked whether they had any recommendations for future interventions. Key recommendations included:

- Additional support to the WUAs in the form of capacity building (e.g. on good agricultural practices), and further improvement of water infrastructure such as through installation of solar panels. They also mentioned that the WUAs will need additional resources to maintain the water channels in subsequent years;
- Need for additional income generating activities for youth, as the cash for work intervention was temporary;
- Scaling up the project activities to target more WUAs and water infrastructure.

## 4. ANNEXES

### Annex A. Questionnaire

Question	Answer
<b>What was the overall impact of the project on the community?</b>  <input type="radio"/> Did the project help reduce conflict over land and water? If yes, how?	
<b>What was the role of women in project activities?</b>  <input type="radio"/> How was the role of women in the community changed during the project period?	
<b>Please describe the rehabilitation work implemented by this project. What was the benefit of this work?</b>	
<b>Have you received any training during the period of the project?</b>  <input type="radio"/> If yes, could you please describe this training? <input type="radio"/> What was the benefit of this training? <input type="radio"/> Have you used the training received through this project in your work or daily life? If yes, how?	
<b>How were the CfW activities implemented? What was the benefit of these activities on beneficiaries?</b>	
<b>How are the target water channels managed now?</b>  <input type="radio"/> Who manages the water channels?	
<b>How do you foresee the sustainability of the WUA operations?</b>	