Education of Yemen’s children: Future under Threat

**INTRODUCTION**

Education is key to a better future for millions of Yemen’s children. Education—Girls’ education in particular—is one of the most powerful tools for promoting economic growth, reducing the likelihood of conflict outbreaks and increasing resilience to crises.

We are currently at the beginning of a new school year amid enormous challenges, mainly the salary crisis that has left 72% of the total number of teachers—working in 13 governorates—without monthly salaries since almost a year ago(1). Thus, 4.4 million children in Yemen may not be able to resume their education and hundreds of thousands of school-age children have been forcibly displaced. Of the 15,826 schools nationwide, 2,531 sustained physical damages(2), were used to shelter IDPs or occupied by armed groups, in addition to the deteriorating living conditions and lack of a unified leadership.

Education is a priority that can’t be postponed even during wars and conflicts. When children are in school, they are less vulnerable to risks such as child labor, early marriage and recruitment to armed groups. However, nothing has been provided out of the $36.5 million funding required for education in the 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan(3), making more children vulnerable to risks such as child labor, early marriage and recruitment to armed groups. However, girls who were of school age and lived in conflict-affected regions were 13% less likely to complete mandatory schooling compared to those who had the opportunity to complete their schooling before the conflict(4).

Without urgent remedies for these challenges and mobilizing the required funding for education, particularly teachers’ monthly salaries, the future of a whole generation of Yemeni children will be at risk.

**Facts and Indicators**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Over YER 385 / USD</strong></th>
<th>11.9% **</th>
<th>The Inflation rate (end of period) in 2016</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>20.7 million</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>people in need of humanitarian assistance in 2017.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2.9 million</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>people displaced (IDPs &amp; returnees) as of June 2017.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6 in 10</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>people are food insecure in March 2017.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>173,419 teachers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>have not received salary since October 2016.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sources:**
* UN Agencies.
** CSO, 2016.
*** WB, June 2016.

**First: Human Development and Conflict Trap**

Several studies have revealed that low human development is correlated with the outbreak of conflict (Figure 1). Conflict destroys the physical capital in basic social services’ facilities; reduces the human capital as a result of injuries, deaths, displacement and migration and decreases the opportunities to invest in the health and education of younger generations. These factors result in low levels of human development. An international study asserted that conflict has a significant negative effect on girls’ enrollment in high schools. Furthermore, girls who were of school age and lived in conflict-affected regions were 13% less likely to complete mandatory schooling compared to those who had the opportunity to complete their schooling before the conflict(4).

![Figure(1): Low Human Development - Conflict Trap](image)

Source: Adapted from: Kim and Conceição, 2010

A country with low levels of human development and education attainment has more difficulties improving institutions, increasing productivity and potential growth, thus increasing the likelihood of armed conflict outbreaks.

![Figure(2): Political Stability and Absence of Violence, and HDI for All countries in 2016](image)

Source: The Index of Political Stability and Absence of Violence is taken from the World Bank database and Human Development Index from Human Development Report 2016. The number of countries is 188.
When young people are denied access to a good quality education, the resulting poverty, unemployment and hopelessness can act as recruiting agents for armed conflict. An analysis of 120 countries over 30 years found that countries with large numbers of young men were less likely to experience violent conflict if their populations had higher levels of education\(^5\).

Figure (2) above further shows that a low Human Development Index (HDI) (under 0.5) is clearly associated with political instability and violence (under zero) although it is true that high HDI (say, above 0.5) does not necessarily guarantee high political stability and absence of violence.

**Second: Consequences of the War on the Education of Yemen’s Children:**

The ongoing war in Yemen has resulted in severe and unprecedented consequences for basic and secondary education (child education), mainly in the form of non-payment of teachers’ salaries, physical damages and occupation of educational facilities, forced displacement and deteriorating living conditions highlighted below:

**1. Salary crisis:**

Pre-war public budget gave priority to spending on education as a basis for improving productivity and income and increasing opportunities for populations’ wellbeing. Spending on the education sector accounted for 15% of total government expenditures with approximately 81% of total education expenditures allocated to basic and secondary education (child education, still low compared to other countries when looking at government expenditure per student. For example, in 2014, Yemeni government expenditure on primary and secondary education per student in constant 2013 purchasing power parity ($PPP) accounted for 41% and 33% of the Jordanian government expenditure per student on primary and secondary education, respectively\(^5\).

Final accounts of the public budget for 2013 show that Ministry of Education expenditure amounted to YER 341.3 billion, of which 87.9% goes to wages and salaries and 4.1% expenditures on goods, services and properties (operational costs). The average teacher salary was YER 93,560 per month (equivalent to $253 at the current exchange rate of YER 370/USD), placing teachers families with a per capita income of $1.2 /day below the international poverty line of $1.9 per person / day set by the World Bank.

Figure (3): Teacher Salary Status October 2016 – August 2017*

**Table (1) Ministry of Education’s requirements in public budget**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Billion (YER)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Wages and salaries</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>87.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Operating expenses</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Social benefits</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Acquisition of nonfinancial assets</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>341</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Teachers received December salary in 3 out of 12 districts in Al-Jawf and 17 out of 23 districts in Taiz. Currently, salaries of public employees, including teachers, are paid in Taiz governorate.

**Teachers in paid governorates**

**Teachers in not paid governorates**

**Total Students**

**Total Teachers**

Since the end of 2016, the liquidity crisis in public finance has led to a suspension of both investment and operating expenses. More specifically, figure (3) above shows that 173,419 teachers in 13 governorates, representing 72% of the country’s teaching force have not received a salary since October 2016. That situation affects 79% of the total number of students in Yemen.

The salary crisis is one of the most serious threats undermining the education system in Yemen. Months of unpaid salaries have resulted in irregular teacher attendance – even those who willing to teach have difficulties paying for transportation – and closure of some schools due to the absence of teachers. Inability to study the entire curriculum has consequently affected learning outcomes.

Mohammed Al-Amin, a fifth-grade teacher from Raimah governorate, “appeals to concerned authorities to pay his salaries for the past 12 months to buy flour and cooking oil for his children. His wife has sent her son to the classroom with an empty flour bag and a cooking oil jerry can, asking him not to return home without flour and cooking oil”. What kind of education a teacher is expected to provide if he is unable to feed his family? What future awaits the children of Yemen without education?

Most teachers and public employees used their savings before resorting to borrowing until they lost their creditworthiness. After that, they started selling some of their home furniture and assets. We are at the beginning of a new school year scheduled to start in September 2017 but teachers, who, like many other Ministry of Education employees, have lost their main source of income and ability to withstand further suffering are now looking into new careers, placing the education system on the verge of collapse.

### Investing in Education in Times of Peace and Conflict

Every child, regardless of their circumstances, has a right to education. Education is the key to a better life for millions of Yemen’s children through reduced chances of poverty, improved health and greater ability to build their own future. Education—and in particular girls’ education—is one of the most powerful tools for promoting economic growth, reducing the likelihood of conflict outbreaks and increasing resilience to crises. Education is important in the midst of war. When children are in school during wartimes, they are less vulnerable to protection risks such as child labor, early marriage and recruitment in armed groups. They also learn the skills they need in a hazardous environment, including awareness about landmines and the importance of maintaining good health and hygiene practices. In times of peace, education is key in ensuring recovery, reconstruction and sustainable stability.

There is also strong evidence that education reduces the likelihood of conflict by increasing income opportunities and life choices for young people. Several studies have confirmed that higher levels of education lead to higher wages. 800 surveys in 139 countries have found the average private return of one additional year of education globally to be a 10 per cent increase in income(9). At the national level, the average monthly income of post-secondary education graduates is 58% and 42% respectively higher than that of individuals with only basic and secondary education. Additionally, the average monthly income of secondary education graduates is 11% higher than that of individuals with only basic education.

Children in conflict-affected countries are three times more likely to miss primary school(10). In Yemen, nearly two million children were out of school during the 2016/2017 school year, representing more than one quarter of the school-age population(11). As of late September 2017, UNICEF warned that 4.4 million school students in 13 Yemeni governorates would not be able to resume their education this school year (2017/2018).
2. Student displacement:

The number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and returnees was estimated at 2.9 million people as of 1 June 2017, of whom about 2 million people are still internally displaced\(^{(13)}\). Children account for approximately 55% of total IDPs and returnees\(^{(11)}\). Out of 7.3 million school-age children, some 513,000 children are still internally displaced. The displacement of children, teachers and educational staff exacerbates difficulties ensuring that the right of all children to education is fulfilled, particularly since 84% of IDPs have been displaced for more than one year\(^{(12)}\).

Displaced children are at risk of child labor and school dropout, in particular because their families, which have lost their livelihoods, are no longer able to support their sustenance and education costs. This exacerbates school dropout in a country where already 1.6 million children were out of school prior to the war. According to the Global Education Monitoring Report 2016, refugee children and adolescents are five times more likely to be out of school than their non-refugee peers\(^{(5)}\). A study conducted by Save the Children and Al-Twasul for Human Development in August 2015 on the conflict’s impact on Yemeni internally displaced children in Hodeida and Amran governorates revealed that 12% of children surveyed stated they were responsible for bringing income in their families since being displaced\(^{(14)}\). In addition, some displaced children lacked the required documentation for their school attendance.

Enforced displacement also affects the education of children in areas hosting IDPs. About 834 schools were used to shelter IDPs or vacated from IDPs during March 2015- August 2017\(^{(1)}\). Schools which remain open are often overcrowded, face shortages of qualified teachers and lack basic school equipment including desks, chairs, textbooks and teaching-learning materials, posing enormous challenges on delivery of quality education. Despite strenuous efforts by various NGOs and humanitarian organizations including UNICEF, to vacate schools occupied by IDPs and rehabilitate them, 146 schools are still being used as shelters for IDPs\(^{(1)}\).

3. Physical Damages to Schools:

Conflicts and wars have serious implications on education infrastructure. Schools in conflict-affected countries are often destroyed, occupied by armed groups or used to shelter IDPs, making it difficult to create safe space for learning and hampering children’s access to education.

In Yemen, 2,531 out of 15,826 schools nationwide have sustained physical damages. This has affected 70,900 workers and teachers (43% females), and adversely impacted the education of 1.5 million children (46% girls)\(^{(2)}\). As of August 2017, 254 schools had been totally damaged, 1,409 partially, 146 are currently hosting IDPs and 23 occupied by armed groups. To date, 688 schools have been vacated from IDPs and 11 from armed groups (Figure 4).

![Figure(4): No. of schools affected by governorate as of June 2017](image)
About 53% of damaged schools are in Taiz, Sa‘ada, Amana Al-Asimah, Dhamar and Hajja respectively (Figure 4). The World Bank has estimated reconstruction costs of damaged schools at $ 1.5 billion, of which $928 million for the reconstruction of 232 totally damaged schools(15).

In addition, 65 offices of the Educational Administration and the High Teachers Training Institute have sustained partial or total damage(2). With respect to vocational training, 47% of 59 centers assessed had been totally damaged and 28% partially damaged as of January 2016(16).

Given education’s role to protect children in times of war and improve their wellbeing by restoring a sense of stability and normalcy in their lives while teaching them better ways to cope with their situation, various partners, including UNICEF, have raised funds to support education in emergency response and rehabilitate 754 schools, accounting for 29.8% of all war-affected schools as of August 2017(1).

4. Deteriorating Living Conditions:

There is strong evidence showing a high inverse correlation between poverty and enrollment in education. Prior to the war, findings of the National Social Protection Monitoring Survey 2012-2013 indicated that the main reason for non-enrolment of 37.6% of children (6-11 years) in school was their inability to afford education costs. The gross enrollment ratio in primary education reached 98% among the riches 20% of population compared with 53% among the poorest 20% of population.

Currently, estimates indicate that more than 7 in 10 Yemenis are poor(17) and 1 in 2 children under the age of 5 suffers from chronic malnutrition (stunting)(18). It was also found that 8 in 10 Yemenis were indebted, and 21% of households took a loan to cover education and health expenses(19). To cope with the consequences of these deteriorating living conditions, 26.5% of households have cut down spending on education and health and 2.1% withdrew children from school(19).

Poverty is therefore a major impediment to the education of the most vulnerable groups e.g. now unable to pay for education-related costs such as transportation, uniforms, books and other school materials. In addition to poverty, negative health shocks have been a constraint on children’s education and learning outcomes as the prevalence of malnutrition blunts children intellects. Epidemic outbreaks and cholera in particular has also affected hundreds of thousands of Yemeni children and claimed lives of hundreds within a four month period (May-August 2017)(20).

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Lack of unified leadership and poor quality of education

The lack of a unified leadership for education since the beginning of the last school year (2016-2017) has posed a new challenge to the educational process and translated in non-unified measures in the country. For the first time since 1990, Yemeni school students have found themselves studying on the basis of two different academic calendars, examinations schedules and public holidays. In addition, exam questions for the 9th grade and 12th grade were not the same nationwide and two separate lists of top high school students used.

The ongoing war has undoubtedly affected the quality of education and resulted in adverse consequences, including irregular attendance of teachers, inability to go through the entire curriculum, deteriorating psychological states and living conditions of students and teachers, shortage of textbooks and chairs, displacement, child labor, physical damages to schools, school overcrowding, halt of public spending and lack of donor support.
Third: Peacebuilding through Education:

Schools have the power to shape attitudes and skills of young people toward peaceful relations by teaching them the values of respect and tolerance, and equipping them with the ability to think critically, resolve conflict non-violently, and foster peaceful relations at home, at school and in their communities and beyond. Therefore, education should be better recognized in the peacebuilding agenda.

In recent decades, Yemen has witnessed successive cycles of conflicts and wars. Globally, a study conducted in 2009 indicates that 40% of all conflicts broke out again in the first decade of peace agreement\(^{5}\). This requires focusing future efforts not only on security issues and conflict resolution but also on post-conflict peacebuilding. There is growing evidence that education has a crucial role of education in peacebuilding. However, of the 37 full peace agreements signed between 1989 and 2005, 11 make no mention of education at all\(^{5}\). Even in those that do address education, there is great variation in the way it is addressed. Education’s potential in peacebuilding is realized best when it is part of wider social, economic and political efforts in peacebuilding. The following are examples of peacebuilding programs through education in conflict-affected countries:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of program</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Country</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Back To school campaigns</td>
<td>“Back to school” campaigns can offer a great peace dividend. UNICEF encourages community-level engagement, distributes essential school materials and provides temporary learning spaces when necessary to keep children in school during and after conflict. These campaigns have recourse to intense advocacy, communication and social mobilization efforts.</td>
<td>Southern Sudan, Somalia, Gaza, Afghanistan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Psychosocial Training (Teachers)</td>
<td>Equips teachers with key psychosocial skills to manage trauma and equip children themselves with skills including: roles identification and self-potential, aspects, stages and influencing factors of/on children's development, impact of conflict on children, teachers' role in helping children's development, psychosocial support overview and cooperation building with parents and society members.</td>
<td>Indonesia, Iraq</td>
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<tr>
<td>Schools as zones of peace (SZOP)</td>
<td>Approach being used by UNICEF to protect children's right to access school in conflict-affected areas in order to foster a culture of peace and human rights. Schools are used as a key entry point for peace advocacy and development of “codes of conduct” promoting access to school.</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace and Conflict Resolution Education</td>
<td>Peace education is “the process of promoting the knowledge, attitudes and values needed to bring about behavioral change that will enable children, youth and adults to prevent conflict; to resolve conflict peacefully; and to create the conditions conducive to peace.</td>
<td>Bosnia and Herzegovina, Guinea, DRC, Liberia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum Reform</td>
<td>The revision of school texts on religion, history and national identity is done by making use of post-conflict experiences, integrating the fundamental principles of human rights, social justice and social cohesion. For example, in Rwanda, the teaching of history was postponed for 10 years after the genocide. In Peru and South Africa, while history education teaches about recent conflicts, it does not engage substantively with the causes of conflict and past injustices.</td>
<td>Kosovo, Nepal, Rwanda, Peru, South Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accelerated Learning Programmes (ALPs)</td>
<td>ALPs offer children and adolescents who have missed periods of their education a second chance to complete primary school, mostly by compressing the curriculum. These programmes can offer a valuable platform to address violence and conflict risk, particularly for children and adolescents who have lost educational opportunities due to conflict.</td>
<td>Angola, Liberia, Nepal, Sierra Leone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of program</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Country</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-Formal, Complementary and Alternative Education</td>
<td>These programmes promote access to basic and vocational education and, less frequently, secondary education for disadvantaged groups, including internally displaced young people, ex-combatants, including children and girls. Non-formal “Education for Peace” programmes straddle both the conflict and immediate post-conflict phases. Bringing together different segments of the community, they provide a space for reconciliation and a vision for an alternative future, developing a generation of peace education activists.</td>
<td>Kenya, Tanzania, Lebanon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Skills</td>
<td>Life Skills-Based Education (LSBE) is being adopted as a means to empower young people in conflict situations and help them acquire required knowledge and skills related to the adoption of healthy behaviors. Life Skills can integrate problem solving, negotiation, working in groups, and conflict resolution.</td>
<td>Croatia, Tajikistan, Sudan, and Macedonia</td>
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### Fourth: Challenges and priorities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risks and challenges</th>
<th>Priorities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Lack of funding for educational programs, including: | - Including teachers in target groups of monthly food baskets provided by World Food Program (WFP).  
- Imposing monthly fees on children from affluent families, taking into account fee variation on basis of number of students per household.  
- Launching an awareness-raising campaign at the local level to collect textbooks from students who have finished the school year and give them to new students, along with the distribution of soft copies of textbooks.  
- Mobilizing required support ($36.5 million) for emergency education programs in 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan.  
- Reaching a sustainable agreement for the resolution of the non-payment of teachers’ salaries. |
| Displacement of children and using schools to shelter IDPs | - Vacating schools used to shelter IDPs and host them in alternative places.  
- Implementing psychosocial support programs and creating a culture of dialogue and peacebuilding. |
| Physical damages to schools and occupation of schools by armed groups | - Respecting international humanitarian law in terms of protecting schools from attacks and vacating schools occupied by armed groups.  
- Finalizing rehabilitation of schools through provision of small grants to repair limited physical damages and provide school furniture.  
- Renting temporary buildings or providing alternative camps instead of damaged schools (temporarily) and equipping them with chairs and whiteboards.  
- Reconstructing and rehabilitating the damaged schools. |
| Deteriorating living conditions, prevalence of malnutrition and cholera outbreak | - Expanding school feeding programs to include teachers and implement conditional cash transfer programs.  
- Conducting cholera awareness campaigns for school children.  
- Providing school uniform and other school materials to poor school children. |
**Challenges and priorities (Cont.):**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risks and challenges</th>
<th>Priorities</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
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</table>
| Lack of unified leadership | - Benefiting from best practices worldwide on management of education in emergencies.  
- Decentralizing power to local levels such as districts, including the powers of teachers’ redistribution, registration and examination management, and activation of school-based management.  
- Integrating peace-building interventions education programs or sectoral plans, and mobilizing support for increased education role in peacebuilding.  
- Training teachers to be able to manage special needs of war-affected children.  
- Educating children and young people as the agents of positive social change. | Immediate | Mid-term |

**Key References:**

19. WFP et al., Emergency Food Security and Nutrition Assessment (EFSNA), December, 2016.
Annex:

Teachers’ Salaries Payment Status (October 2016 - August 2017)

# of Affected Schools: 12,240
# of Affected Teachers and school staff: 173,419
# of Affected Students: 4,382,551

* This data covers public schools only.
** Teachers received December salary in 3 out of 12 districts in Al-Jawf and 17 out of 23 districts in Taiz. Currently, salaries of public employees, including teachers, are paid in Taiz governorate.
*** Teachers received half salary as cash and the other half as purchase vouchers in Amanat Al-Asimah and Sana’a.

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