

Fostering Social Cohesion locally in Yemen

Safeguarding sustainable development despite the conflict

The violent conflict in Yemen, now in its sixth year, is characterised by the complex interplay of regional, national, separatist, extremist, and more localised tribal, religious, community conflict structures. Further exacerbating competition between different groups of this complex society, the collapse of local currency and serious fuel shortages have driven prices up endangering food security for several million Yemenis; health facilities, water and sanitation systems, and other critical infrastructure have been destroyed or have broken down; and over 70% can be expected to have experienced violence and losses causing severe traumatisation. These negative impacts are often appended with a lack of knowledge of or access to psychosocial support offers.

Particularly in a socially and politically fragmented and fragile context such as Yemen, supporting local populations in working towards a more socially cohesive – and, by extension, more peaceful – society is of relevance to safeguarding development achievements. In respect of Sustainable Development Goal 16 – “Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions” – the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) is giving increased focus to projects that foster peaceful coexistence and social cohesion and has declared “peace and social cohesion” as a core theme of its large-scale reform process ‘BMZ 2030’.



Social cohesion is a descriptive trait of a society; it expresses the quality of co-existence within that society.

A cohesive society has close social relations, a strong feeling of connectedness/focus on the common good dimensions). These can be strengthened directly or by fostering enabling elements, which are positive living conditions for all, equality, and human-rights-oriented values, such as tolerance and non-discrimination.

Social cohesion is a graduated phenomenon, meaning that societies can be more or less cohesive. The peaceful co-existence of social groups is a milestone on the road to a robustly cohesive society.

Supporting change agents and addressing peace needs multi-sectorally

The German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the European Union provide funds for initiatives managed by GIZ in six governorates of Yemen - Aden, Dhamar, Hadhramaut, Ibb, Sana'a, and Taiz - to support peaceful coexistence aiming at preparing the ground for social cohesion in Yemen.

GIZ supports local change agents by partnering with civil society organisations, academia and journalists, and providing them with capacity development, space for networking, and funds for implementing activities that further cohesion in society. Training contents focus on conflict management and methods of conflict resolution, violence prevention, conflict-sensitive communication, human rights, and psychosocial support. GIZ in particular supports women-led organisations to strengthen the participation of women in promoting peaceful coexistence at the local level with the view to leverage their contributions at higher levels.

The role of the media is instrumental in reducing tensions in society and offering perspectives for transforming disputes. GIZ addresses journalists with specific trainings on conflict-sensitive reporting. In our programmes, youth are also understood as key change agents for peaceful coexistence, and are addressed e.g., through digital outreach and “Serious Games”. These sensitise players towards peaceful coexistence and conflict transformation through a gaming approach. The Facebook page already reaches a wide range of people with more than 60.000 followers.



Change agents in civil society are also capacitated in project planning, commercial and administrative management as well as on backstopping, monitoring and evaluation systems in order to implement impactful small-scale community initiatives that strengthen social cohesion, including measures for psychosocial support and building life skills. These initiatives address decision makers at the local community, district and governorate level, and aim to improve the quality of life for disadvantaged groups such as youth, women, people with disabilities, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and the marginalised minority Al Muhamasheen. Only an inclusive approach can lay the base for a peaceful society.

As social fragmentation festers, in particular, were access to basic social services as well as income and food security are at risk, GIZ also supports measures that tackle challenges for vulnerable households in regard to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), agriculture, artisanal fishing, and basic infrastructure.

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Initiatives are designed participatorily with all groups within affected communities and are implemented collaboratively to achieve positive living conditions for all.

This multi-sector approach to strengthen social cohesion across traditional “silos” of international cooperation addresses needs holistically, strengthens community resilience, and hence delivers as a Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) nexus-approach.

Results

Through its programmes, GIZ Yemen has already achieved the following outputs:

- More than 70 small projects implemented by civil society to foster social cohesion were facilitated.
- Utilising social media to spread messages on social cohesion and to connect like-minded youth to each other.
- Designing digital products to mobilise change agents: the Yemeni women’s voices platform) to reach out to women as well as e-learning courses, a peacebuilding quiz, serious game apps, a youth magazine, a movie competition to reach out to youth.
- Training of 162 journalists (47% of the participants were women) on conflict-sensitive journalism.
- Development of a training curriculum and manual on methods of conflict management & resolution, violence prevention (particularly in youth), human rights, and psychosocial support; as well as project planning, organisational steering and management, monitoring and evaluation systems.
- Capacity development trainings with 30 employees from 20 organisations, thereof 47% women.



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