IN THEIR OWN WORDS:

How to Make Funding and Partnerships Work for Women's Organizations Delivering Gender-Based Violence Services in Yemen

Extended Policy Briefing

May 2025

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List of Acronyms

AoR	Area of Responsibility
AWG	Advocacy Working Group
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CMR	Clinical Management of Rape
CSSF	Conflict, Stability and Security Fund
DFA	De-Facto Authority
DRA	Dutch Relief Alliance
ECHO	European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
EU	European Union
FCDO	Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team
IAHE	Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICCG	Inter-Cluster Coordination Group
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
IRC	International Rescue Committee
KII	Key Informant Interview
L/NNGO	Local and National Non-Governmental Organization
MOSAL	Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor
NEAR	Network for Empowered Aid Response
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NNGO	National Non-Governmental Organization
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PEERS	Partnership Excellence for Equality and Results System
WGSS	Women and Girls Safe Spaces
WLO	Women-Led Organization
WRO	Women's Rights Organization
YHF	Yemen Humanitarian Fund
YJR	Yemen Joint Response
YWLN	Yemeni Women Leaders Network

Acknowledgments

Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) continues to be one of the most pressing and widespread protection concerns in Yemen. In 2025, an estimated 6.2 million women and girls across the country are at risk of GBV,[1] with girls under 17, internally displaced women and girls,[2] members of the Muhamasheen community,[3] and female heads of households being disproportionately vulnerable to violence.[4]

Women and girls experience multiple, intersecting forms of GBV, including physical and verbal abuse, child marriage, and deprivation of resources.[5] A decade of war,[6] displacement, and economic collapse has intensified violence against women and girls that remains condoned by the lack of legal protection. The ongoing conflict in particular,[7] has deepened gender inequalities and reinforced harmful cultural and gender norms.[8] In November 2017, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that incidents of GBV had increased by over 63% since before the conflict.[9] The normalization of GBV within Yemeni society also continues to fuel the crisis with many women tolerating and men justifying GBV. A study across four governorates of the country found that 71% of community members justified a husband's violence against his wife, with many women themselves agreeing that a man has the right to punish his wife for violating social norms.[10]

Despite ongoing needs, access to GBV services is limited, especially in rural and conflict-affected areas.[11] Less than 5% of Yemen's health facilities provide Clinical Management of Rape (CMR) interventions [12] and 90% of rural areas lack GBV services.[13] The country's fragile healthcare system has been further weakened by ongoing crises, leaving medical care for GBV survivors and adequately trained professionals in short supply.[14] Barriers to accessing services are further compounded by lack of awareness of available support,[15] movement restrictions,such as the Mahram requirement,[16] and the cultural and social stigma surrounding GBV.[17]

These challenges were compounded in 2025 following unprecedented funding cuts by the US and a shrinking of humanitarian aid globally[18]. Humanitarian operations across Yemen have been affected, particularly given that 50% of all funding was contributed by the US in 2024[19].

This deteriorating funding landscape exemplifies the importance of maintaining a focus on the critical role of Yemeni Women-Led Organizations (WLOS) and Women's Rights Organizations (WROs) in preventing and responding to GBV.

With difficult decisions being made by both donors and humanitarian organisations on how to do more with less, it is the work of local women›s organizations which are often most at risk of being under-prioritized. The 2025 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan Addendum,[20] released in May 2025 to respond to the reduction in funding, illustrates this challenge clearly, with the GBV Area of Responsibility seeing the largest single drop of any sector - a 90% reduction in the targeted number of people to be reached.

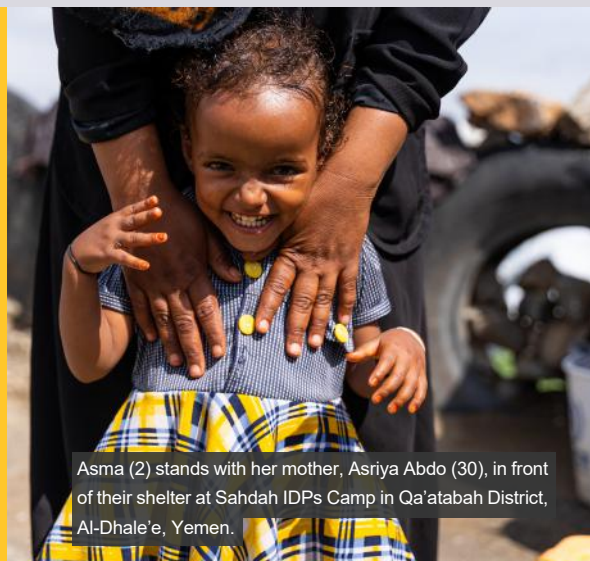Asriya Abdo (30), stands with her daughter Asma (2), at Sahdah IDPs Camp.

Box 1: Sexual Violence Against Boys and Men in Yemen

While this policy briefing focuses on GBV against women and girls, there is documented evidence of men and boys being subjected to sexual violence, exploitation, and abuse. **One of the most concerning trends is the use of sexual violence as a method of torture against captured and detained men and boys**—both Yemeni civilians and migrants from the Horn of Africa.[21] Boys from marginalized communities, particularly the Muhamasheen, are increasingly vulnerable to sexual violence due to social exclusion, lack of legal protections, and economic hardships.[22]

However sexual violence, is often perceived solely as a "women's issue,"[23] further marginalizing male survivors. The stigma surrounding male GBV survivors contributes to the near-total absence of dedicated services for them. While some child protection services exist,[24] adult male survivors are left with virtually no support mechanisms. Some organizations delivering GBV services - though rare - provide case management and psychosocial support to male survivors, particularly those who have experienced sexual violence in detention centers or conflict-affected areas.

Asma (2) stands with her mother, Asriya Abdo (30), in front of their shelter at Sahdah IDPs Camp in Qa'atabah District, Al-Dhale'e, Yemen.

Within this context, this policy briefing examines the critical role of Yemeni women-led organizations (WLOs) and women's rights organizations (WROs) in preventing and responding to GBV, highlighting the key barriers and challenges they face in supporting and providing critical services to women and girls at risk or survivors of GBV.

Drawing directly from the perspectives and experiences shared by women's organizations, this briefing highlights the priority areas they have identified as the most significant challenges to their work. While recognizing socio-cultural barriers, interviewees disclosed that they see the primary barriers to their delivery of GBV services in the current modalities of humanitarian action - which we, as a sector, have the power to fix.

Alongside a detailed examination of these gaps, the policy briefing highlights promising initiatives and practices from selected stakeholders. Lastly, it presents an advocacy agenda framed around key action areas to enhance support, strengthen collaboration with WLOs/WROs in GBV interventions, and increase their leadership and participation in Yemen's broader humanitarian response.

Methodology

The briefing draws on evidence and findings from an in-depth desk-based review, and key informant interviews (KIIs), and online questionnaires for WLO/WROs and national and international organisations, circulated through the INGO-led Advocacy Working Group (AWG) and the National NGO Forum (NNGO Forum). The qualitative data collection took place remotely between December 2024 and March 2025.

26 organizations contributed to the KIIs. They included 10 WLOs, 2 WROs, 1 NGO, 3 INGOs, 2 NGO groups, 2 INGO groups, 2 UN agencies, 2 UN humanitarian coordination structures, a Ministry from the Government of Yemen, and one think tank. In total 31 KIIs were held with one or more members of one organization. In addition, 14 national and local organizations and 4 INGOs filled out the online questionnaires.

Limitation of the research

Interviews took place between Dec - March 2025, amidst a period of significant upheaval in the humanitarian sector.[1] The scope of the research was limited due to the difficulty in reaching smaller and emerging women's organizations, such as local associations and community-based organizations, and the short timeline to conduct the key informant interviews. We however tried to mitigate this constraint by ensuring that the role and situation of those organizations were included in the scope of the key informant interviews.

Terminology

In the context of this paper, and for the sake of brevity, we have used "women's organizations" to encompass both women-led, and women's rights organizations, as well as formal or informal local women-led groups such as associations and networks. We however recognize their diversity and distinctions. Where relevant the difference between the types of organizations is made.

We are also using the term "national" NGOs and national WLOs/WROs for organizations operating at a national level, covering many regions beyond a certain governorate or local area in Yemen, and "local" for organizations that operate at the lower level in a small number of areas. It is however noted that in some cases international actors use "local" organizations and partners to refer to national Yemeni organizations.

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[1] In early 2025, the humanitarian sector faced an unprecedented cut to funding with the termination of at least 10,000 grants disbursed by the US Department of State, disrupting vital services, including lifesaving health care, nutrition and other emergency relief. As of Feb 28th 2025, it was estimated that at least 2 million IRC clients would lose access to critical services across multiple crisis zones as a result of these terminations.

A lifeline for women and girls: The role of women's organizations in delivering GBV services

Yemeni women's organizations play a leading role[25] in preventing and addressing GBV, offering vital support to survivors including access to information. They provide access to safe spaces that act as protective and empowerment hubs offering a range of essential services, including psychosocial counselling, legal aid, emergency shelter for those escaping violence, and skills development programs. Beyond direct service provision, these organizations help survivors navigate reporting processes, access medical care, and access livelihoods opportunities and resources to help healing and recovery. They also advocate for systemic change, challenge harmful social norms, and actively engage men in protection efforts.

Box 2: Key socio-cultural barriers to preventing and responding to GBV

WLOs/WROs operate in a highly challenging environment, where deep-rooted gender and cultural norms, a highly patriarchal society, and a setback in Yemeni women's rights create barriers to women's organizations' work. This is even more so in the context of GBV prevention and response. Specifically, key informant WLOs/WROs highlighted the main socio-cultural barriers they face in delivering GBV services, especially those operating in De-Facto Authority (DFA) controlled areas, with **the cultural sensitivities around protection issues, especially GBV, being the main socio-cultural challenge shared by women's organizations.**

Other challenges highlighted by some of the key WLO/WRO informants include:

• **Risks of threats and violence** due to their GBV work and their active engagement in challenging social and gender norms. This is especially the case for organizations advocating for women's rights, with one WRO representative sharing her experience of being arrested and physically attacked due to her work.

• **Delays in approvals** for projects due to mistrust or a lack of understanding of GBV issues by the authorities.

• **Movement restrictions,** especially the Mahram requirement that may complicate the delivery of the work.

Dr. Shahirah Faried, and Dr. Shahirah while arriving and then leaving the camp.

However, WLOs/WROs demonstrate remarkable agility and creativity in overcoming or successfully mitigating the deeply entrenched socio-cultural barriers that hinder the delivery of GBV services. In contrast with widely held assumptions by donors, women's organizations continue to successfully serve women and girls. Their long-standing presence in communities and deep understanding of local contexts fosters a level of trust and acceptance with authorities with community leaders and influencers that INGOs and national organizations often struggle to achieve,[26] especially in hard-to-reach and conservative areas.[27] A WLO representative remarked that,

> "International organizations struggle to operate in conservative areas where discussions on GBV and women's rights are restricted. Women's organizations can navigate these spaces, gain trust, and provide services in ways that INGOs cannot."[28]

Another WLO key informant further highlighted that "women-led organizations are embedded within the local communities themselves, which makes it easier for them to create trust with communities."

One of their key mitigation strategies used by women's organizations consists of using alternative – and culturally acceptable - terminology or embedding GBV within broader projects such as literacy, shelter, or income-generation programs.[29] Some organizations also integrate GBV awareness into religious discussions to encourage male acceptance of their work, while others work through informal negotiation channels and relationship building with the national and local authorities to secure approval for the delivery of GBV services without legal repercussions.[30] It was noted by several WLOs/WROs that international organizations and donors have yet to follow this approach.

Women's organizations have also found ways of addressing movement restrictions, for example by involving local staff or representatives who can work within their communities without crossing district lines.[31] A WRO reported that after negotiations and relationship building, at beginning and end of phrase we work with all the authorities across the country.

The experiences of **women's organizations challenge donors' assumptions that socio-cultural contexts are the primary barriers to implementing GBV projects.** Instead, WLOs/WROs face their most pressing challenges due to gaps in humanitarian action.

Key Finding 1 Out of reach: Women's organizations lack access to quality and flexible funding to deliver GBV services

Funding is one of the most pressing challenges impacting women's organizations' ability to operate and provide GBV services. As noted by a WLO representative, "in many cases, international organizations rely on women's organizations to implement their projects because they have better access and community acceptance. But when it comes to funding, women's organizations are side-lined."

The research reveals several significant structural and financial barriers that prevent women's organizations from effectively delivering GBV services in Yemen.

A. **Funding to WLOs/WROs remains severely insufficient and mostly channelled through international organizations or UN agencies.**[32]

A 2022 Baseline report on localization in Yemen found that only 32% of local and national partners are able to secure funding without an intermediary, compared to 63% of international actors.[33] This has major consequences for the effectiveness of humanitarian responses, as local and national actors lack the necessary resources to fully implement their projects; it also perpetuates power inequalities within the system.[34]

Local and national partners %32	**International actors** %63

Limited disaggregated data on funding for WLOs/WROs in Yemen, combined with challenges in defining and tracking these organizations, makes it difficult to accurately assess the funding they receive and, consequently, the scale of the issue that needs to be addressed. However, global data shows that funding for women's organizations remains incredibly low.[35] Evidence from the research and inter-agency statements point to a similar situation in Yemen. For example, in a joint statement published in September 2023, several Yemeni and international NGOs, along with UN agencies, reaffirmed concerns about the funding gap between local and national NGOs and their international counterparts. The statement emphasized that this disparity negatively affects the vitality of civil society and its ability to function. It also called for increased funding for Yemeni civil society organizations (CSOs), particularly women-led organizations, as a crucial step toward effective localization.[36]

When available, limited funding for WLOs primarily benefits a small number of well-established national organizations, typically based in Yemen's major cities.[37] A positive example, however, is the Yemen Humanitarian Fund (YHF), one of the largest sources of direct funding for Yemeni local and national NGOs. In 2022, 46% of the Fund's funding was allocated to national organizations - both directly and indirectly, including 17 national WLOs across 39 projects. In 2023, the YHF committed to increasing funding for L/NNGOs to 50%, with a focus on WLOs. In 2024, a total of 11 Yemeni WLOs received US 12.4 million, representing 34% of the total YHF allocations.[38] However, funding from the YHF (US$36.9 million in 2024) [39] only represents a small percentage of the overall humanitarian funding for Yemen. By December 2024, funding for Yemen had reached US$1.3 billion (against a US$2.7 billion appeal),[40] and in 2024, only 3% of all humanitarian funds went directly to Yemeni L/NNGOs.[41]

$1.3 BILLION Yemen Humanitarian Response

$36.9 million YHF

$12.4 million WLO orgs
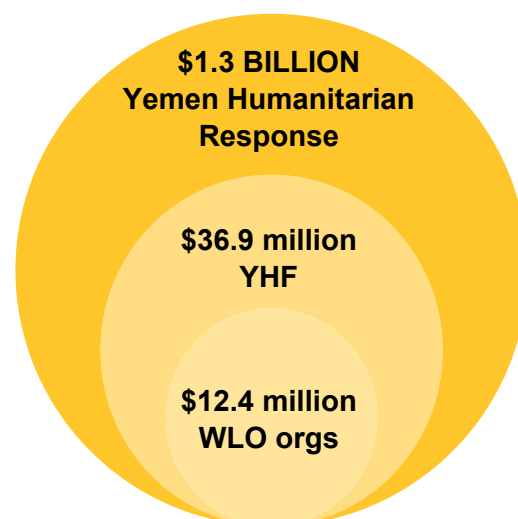
B. <mark>Donors do not meet women's organizations' self-identified funding needs.</mark>

There is disconnect between donor policies and what WLOs/WROs delivering GBV services need and believe should be prioritized.

First, GBV prevention and response in Yemen remains insufficiently funded,[42] reflecting the systemic gap between growing GBV needs and money allocation towards gender-based violence across humanitarian responses.[43] Donors' priorities continue to heavily influence INGOs' programmatic areas and push Yemeni NGOs, including WLOs/WROs, to "follow the money" and divert their focus to other – better funded - sectors. An international WLO emphasized that "most of the funding is going to food distribution or WASH, but GBV and broader protection issues are not on their list priorities."

Several factors contribute to donors' lack of prioritization of GBV, including the perception that it is too sensitive to warrant funding. Donors often assume that WLOs/WROs may struggle to effectively deliver protection services.[44] The representative of a large WLO mentioned being questioned by a donor about how her organization was going to work with the Mahram restrictions and the socio-cultural context. Additionally, some key informants believe that GBV interventions are frequently overlooked because they are not seen as delivering "tangible outcomes" [45] or being "lifesaving." [46] As a result, GBV services are often the first to be affected by funding cuts in the humanitarian response.[47]

Sahdah IDPs Camp, Qa'atabah, Al-Dhale'e, Yemen. Asriya Abdo (30) feeds her twins, Asma and Abdo (2), Plumpy'Sup alongside Dr. Saihaam Al-Junaid.

Spotlight: The cost of underfunding on GBV interventions in Yemen

Funding shortages for GBV lead to severe disruptions in service delivery, leaving thousands of GBV survivors, as well as women and girls at risk, without access to essential protection and support. Many services, such as Women and Girls Safe Spaces (WGSS), operate inconsistently, opening and closing based on fluctuating funding availability: [48]

In 2024, only 51% of women and girls who needed it accessed WGSS.[49]

Only 3% of safe spaces were functional.
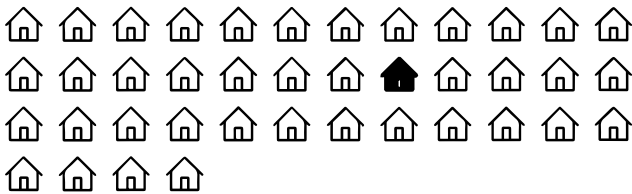
In April 2023, the UN reported that 87 service points were no longer providing GBV services, 240,000 women and girls at risk lost access to

GBV services (Women and Girls Safe Spaces (WGSS), legal aid centers, and mobile outreach programs), and over 500,000 women and girls were at risk of losing access to those services due to prolonged funding cuts and closure.[50]

UNFPA and its implementing partners have had to cut GBV work plans by 25% due to reduced funding, affecting service accessibility, transportation support, mobile teams, and empowerment programs.[51]

In Taiz alone, between 3,000 to 5,000 GBV survivors are on waiting lists for services, some of whom are suicidal and in urgent need of psychosocial support.[52]

> **Women travel for hours to reach a safe space, only to find an abandoned building because the funding ran out."**
> (Key informant, INGO)

Second, funding is often short-term and project-based. As highlighted by a WLO representative, "the funding we receive is for a few months only. This means we can never build long-term services, only temporary interventions that don't solve the root problems." INGOs such as IRC, however, report that they often only receive one-year funding, making it challenging to commit to a long-term partnership.[53] Yet, short-term funding severely impacts capacity-strengthening opportunities for WROs/WLOs, in particular around institutional capacity. This, in turn, reinforces the ongoing challenges women's organizations face in meeting donors' requirements. As noted by a UN representative, institutional training "requires real investment from major donors like USAID and the EU, but unfortunately, such commitments are scarce in Yemen. In contrast, we have seen these efforts in Jordan, Iraq, and even Syria. Yemen's crisis is complex, with political fragmentation and donor fatigue affecting funding availability."

Spotlight: Supporting small and informal women's organizations

While some women's organizations, typically existing partners, occasionally receive longer-term capacity-building support on internal policies and funding management, these efforts remain infrequent and insufficient to address their broader institutional needs.[54]

IRC and CARE have however adopted approaches that aim to support small and informal women's groups and organizations in strengthening their ability and capacity to deliver protection activities.

CARE in Yemen has supported small women's organizations by introducing US$5,000 seed grants for WLOs implementing protection activities. These grants allow local partners to draft their own proposals and budgets while delivering their projects, forming part of a broader capacity enhancement approach for WLOs that lack access to traditional funding.

IRC has established non-monetary collaborative agreements to assist informal women's groups, such as associations, in transitioning into formally registered WLOs. For example, in Abyan governorate, IRC supported an informal women's network in an IDP camp seeking legal registration. The organization facilitated their introduction to the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSAL) to formalize their structure, provided operational assistance, offered in-kind contributions, and connected them with potential funding opportunities.

Third, overhead costs are rarely covered, as most international donors only fund direct project activities, leaving core operational expenses largely unsupported, or allowing only a small percentage of the budget to cover them. As noted by a WLO representative,

"
We are given only 5-10% for overheads, which is completely unrealistic for running an organization. Meanwhile, INGOs get far more to cover their operational costs."
(Key informant, INGO)

Sahdah IDPs Camp, Qa'atabah, Al-Dhale'e, Yemen. Asma and Dr. Saihaam Al-Junaid.

This places an unfair burden on women's organizations, creates an unsustainable funding model and differs from the usual 15-30% operational costs allowed for INGOs. It forces women's organizations to operate on a project-to-project basis, as they are unable to invest in building and strengthening their organizations, including by retaining skilled staff, or keeping their offices running.[55]

Finally, donor funding policies typically exclude security-related expenses, even for L/NGOs sub-granted by INGOs that do not operate in high-risk areas, effectively shifting the burden of risk onto local partners. In the context of GBV work, this restriction[56] has a significant impact on women's organizations that are involved in GBV prevention and response,[57] and which face security risks, including harassment, intimidation physical and online[58] violence, attacks[59] and arrests[60] Some key informants also noted that there are no provisions for the extra costs required to comply with the Mahram requirement,[61] and mental health and well-being support is also rarely included in core operational costs, leaving WLOs/WROs without the necessary resources to safeguard their staff.[62]

C. <mark>Donors and INGOs expect women's organizations to conform to their existing funding models, applying the same policies and requirements to international, national, and local organizations alike.</mark>[63]

An INGO representative acknowledged that "the current funding system forces WLOs to operate under unrealistic requirements—reporting in English, following rigid financial procedures—rather than adapting to local contexts. It makes it nearly impossible for smaller groups to access funding." This sentiment was echoed by another INGO key informant, who noted that "many funding policies are designed with Western contexts in mind, making them ineffective in Yemen."

The application of a "one funding model fits all" has several impacts on women's organizations' ability and capacity to apply for, and even more so, secure funding. For example, WLOs/WROs' weaker institutional capacity [64] often do not meet unrealistic donor requirements. Restrictive eligibility criteria can also systematically exclude smaller and emerging women's organizations from accessing funding.[65] As raised by a WLO representative, **"whenever there is a call for proposals and for funding, they stipulate for the local NGOs to have capacity and demonstrate financial capacity for managing a budget, minimum US$1 million budget. We cannot compete."** Smaller organizations can also often struggle to write high-quality project proposals, manage funds in a way that meets donors' expectations, and complete over-demanding reporting requirements.[66]

Limited access to technology and administrative capacity further constrains their ability to implement sustainable and impactful projects. Additionally, WLOs/WROs face challenges in hiring and retaining qualified female staff, partly due to INGOs recruiting from their talent pool.[67] As one WLO representative noted, "donors are risk-averse and go for the 'usual suspects'—the larger NGOs—rather than smaller organizations that are doing incredible work."

D. <mark>Limited access to information about available opportunities and awareness of donors' processes.</mark>[68]

WLOs/WROs lack access to information about funding opportunities.[69]

Donors often release calls for proposals exclusively to their existing database of partners or through channels that may be inaccessible to smaller or emerging organizations. An INGO representative reported that **"women's organizations don't have access to funding opportunities.** They are not aware of the calls for proposals announced by donors. If they find out, it is often at the last stage when decisions have already been made." Lack of transparency around selection process and the absence of feedback about the unsuccessful outcome of funding applications[70] also perpetuate women's organizations' lack of understanding about processes and clarity about areas to be improved or strengthened. A WLO representative shared that in their experience international organizations "do not announce their funding opportunities publicly. We don't even know how they choose their local partners." When accessible,

calls for proposals are often not available in Arabic, further reducing smaller women's organizations' ability to apply. Additionally, information is not always effectively shared by national NGOs, collective platforms, or WLOs with better donor connections and participation in humanitarian coordination structures, which compounds donors' funding of a small pool of established national partners.[71] This is evidenced in available data on WLO partnerships, including consortia.[72] An INGO staff noted that "many INGOs and UN agencies claim to support WLOs, but in practice, they don't. They keep working with the same large, well-established NGOs and ignore the smaller, community-based women's groups that need support the most".

Finally, WLOs/WROs also often have limited awareness and understanding of donor processes and funding mechanisms, making it more difficult for them to apply for and diversify their funding sources. Limited knowledge about donors' systems is compounded by women's organizations' lack of direct access to donors who are frequently based outside Yemen[73] or those who primarily engage with WLOs involved in humanitarian coordination structures, therefore excluding smaller and emerging organizations.

E. <u>Women's organizations have limited opportunities to share their impact and make themselves known.</u>

Lack of access to donors (including INGOs), including through decision-making coordination structures, affects WROs/WLOs' ability to effectively communicate their impact,[74] and results in missed funding opportunities. As noted by an INGO representative, "unless you are part of the Humanitarian Country Team, it is incredibly difficult for those organisations to access donors, to plead their case." A WLO representative also shared challenges in connecting with donors, highlighting that "we are not provided the platforms to share [our] successes, especially the smaller ones." Some national and international organizations and WLOs also shared that women's organizations sometimes struggle to "communicate about their successes and impact, making it harder to get international support".[75]

There have been positive developments in WLOs/WROs' participation and leadership within humanitarian coordination structures, including in the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) where half of the seats allocated to NGOs are reserved for WLOs. Yemeni WLOs are also represented in the INGO-led Advocacy Working Group and the Yemen GBV Area of Responsibility (AoR) also has had a national WLO—the Yemeni Women's Union—as co-coordinator since 2019, a model now being replicated in other humanitarian responses.

However, overall, the participation and leadership of diverse women's organizations in other coordination and decision-making mechanisms remains tokenistic, or limited and confined to a small group of WLOs. One WLO representative shared that

> **Local voices are often stifled in coordination meetings. You can only raise your voice if your views align with the mandates of international organizations."**
> (Key informant, INGO)

Box 3: The lack of a clear and widely accepted and socialized definition of "WLOs" limits funding opportunities for smaller women's organizations

One of the lesser-discussed challenges highlighted by the research is the ambiguity surrounding the definition of a WLO in Yemen. Some organizations self-identify as WLOs based on their own criteria—often defining it as having a woman as the Board Chair or Executive Director—which may not align with definitions recognized by international agencies.

As one WLO representative explained, "anyone who leads an organization as a woman is a women-led organization, but in many cases, less than 50% of the main staff are women." Similarly, an INGO representative noted that,

"Having one woman in a leadership position doesn't necessarily mean an organization is women-led."[76]

A UN agency representative also pointed out that "there is often a misconception that organizations working with women are automatically 'women-led'." In reality, many WLOs have male-dominated leadership structures, with men making up more than 50% of their staff.[77]

This lack of clarity can put smaller, community-based WLOs—often led and operated by women with lived experience of GBV [78]—at a disadvantage, particularly in accessing donor funding. Several national and international stakeholders have raised concerns that larger organizations sometimes classify themselves as WLOs to secure funding and resources specifically intended for women-led initiatives. This trend is largely driven by the limited availability of donor funding for NGOs, particularly those led by women, alongside certain international donors' commitments to supporting WLOs.[79]

The Inter-Agency Steering Committee (IASC) issued guidance in 2024 providing a clear definition of WLOs[80] which is aligned with the definition set out by the Grand Bargain and GBV AoR Strategy (2021-2025). A local WLO means: **"An organization with a humanitarian mandate and/or mission that is (1) governed or directed by women; or 2) whose leadership is principally made up of women, demonstrated by 50 per cent or more occupying senior leadership positions."** However, the document has yet to be widely disseminated and socialized.

INGOs face challenges in identifying organizations that meet this definition, as Yemen's cultural and political landscape makes it difficult for women to lead organizations, for WLOs to meet the required 50% quota for women in senior roles, and more broadly, to recruit and retain female staff. As one INGO representative noted, "if I'm looking for women-established organizations, there are far fewer options compared to other types of organizations."

Several stakeholders, including INGOs and WLOs, however emphasized the importance of establishing and consistently applying a clear and widely understood definition of women's organizations that can be used as part of the selection process of WLO/WRO partners.

Key Finding 2 Out of reach: Women's organizations lack access to quality and flexible funding to deliver GBV services

The shortage of funding for women's organizations providing GBV services is further exacerbated by the slow and inconsistent implementation of localization commitments in Yemen.

While INGOs and donors have pledged to advance localization through initiatives such as the Grand Bargain and the Charter for Change—and some have taken steps toward implementation[81] [82]—progress has been slow and has largely excluded WROs/ WLOs.[83] This reflects a broader failure to address the entrenched power imbalances that localization efforts are meant to challenge.

Within the scope of this research, WLOs/WROs continue to face significant barriers in securing equitable partnerships, a fundamental component of the localization agenda. Despite repeated commitments, concrete action remains limited, preventing women's organizations from accessing the resources necessary
to effectively lead GBV response efforts.

Box 4: Yemen's localization agenda and women's organizations

Following the Yemeni localization baseline and the IAHE report, deliberate efforts have been made by the UN, INGOs, and NGOs to implement some of the recommendations outlined in these documents. One key development is the Yemeni **NGOs-led HCT Localization Strategy and**

Action Plan (2024-2026),[84] which emphasizes a "gender-responsive approach" as central to its localization strategy. It commits to ensuring the representation of WLOs in humanitarian working groups and platforms while also promoting gender equity to include the needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in humanitarian response planning and delivery. However, despite these commitments, the Action Plan lacks specific objectives, baseline indicators, or target indicators related to women's organizations, even though WLOs are members of the localization task force. Additionally, progress in implementing the Action Plan remains slow.[85] It is however worth noting that the 2025 Yemen HRP emphasizes the HCT's commitment to strengthening partnerships with women's organizations by continuing "its investment in women-led organizations (WLOs), including by further supporting their full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership in humanitarian response, coordination and decision-making processes." [86]

Recognizing the need for a greater impetus on women-led localization, the **GBV AoR has developed its own localization strategy** to strengthen and accelerate the localization approach within GBV protection, humanitarian response, and coordination. This strategy aims to align with and address the shortcomings of the HCT's localization strategy, particularly regarding funding and capacity challenges for WROs and WLOs. However, due to the sensitive operating environment, the review and approval of the GBV AoR localization strategy have been put on hold.[87]

Separately, the **CSOs' Initiative for the Localization and Optimization of Response in Yemen**, launched in August 2021 by nine NGOs and led by the Tamdeen Youth Foundation, seeks to empower local organizations to effectively contribute to Yemen's humanitarian response. With a growing membership of over 40 organizations, the initiative has drafted a localization strategy in collaboration with the government. The strategy includes a cross cutting theme that focuses on women's organizations - specifically: "Engage Women-led Organizations and increase funding for gender-focused interventions to ensure gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls." The ambitions of the strategy include the establishment of partnerships with WLOs, and increased funding and capacity building initiatives targeted at WLOs. The delivery of the strategy is now being supported by the Network for Empowered Aid Response (NEAR) and a "Localization Lab launched in February 2025 in Yemen", which includes the Yemen Women Leaders Network as a member.

Finally, the YHF developed a localization strategy (2022) that set out the main steps required to achieve identified localization objectives within the Fund, including strengthening the capacity of national partners.[88]

Although demonstrating strong momentum for advancing the localization agenda in Yemen, it is critical that these different initiatives link up, align, and provide tangible action towards delivering a women-centred localization agenda.

Asriya Abdo (30), stands with her son Abdo (2), in front of a mudhole at Sahdah IDPs Camp.

A. Donads and INGOs treat women's organizations as service providers rather than strategic partners.

WLOs/WROs are often relegated to the role of project implementers rather than being meaningfully engaged in the entire project cycle. While international actors rely on these organizations to deliver GBV services, they frequently treat them as sub-contractors rather than equal collaborators, excluding them from decision-making, project design, and funding allocations.[89] Additionally, donor and INGO engagement with women's organizations often prioritizes the "quantity" of partnerships over their "quality", reducing localization efforts to a box-ticking exercise rather than fostering genuine, long-term collaboration.

For WLOs/WROs, shifting towards equitable partner-ships is a discourse led by international actors and those with a seat at decision-making and influencing tables.[90] In practice, these partnerships often fall short of fostering genuine inclusion and collaboration. As a result, women's organizations remain without meaningful influence over funding, strategy, or program design and implementation.

Women's organizations are often brought in when the project's design has been decided, with some international organizations citing short turnaround times for proposal submissions and the prioritization of compliance with donor requirements[91] as key barriers to involving local and national partners from the onset of the project. Yet, as noted by a WLO representative,

"

We are often brought in as implementing partners after the project is approved. By then, there is little room to adjust the design to fit local realities."
(Key informant, INGO)
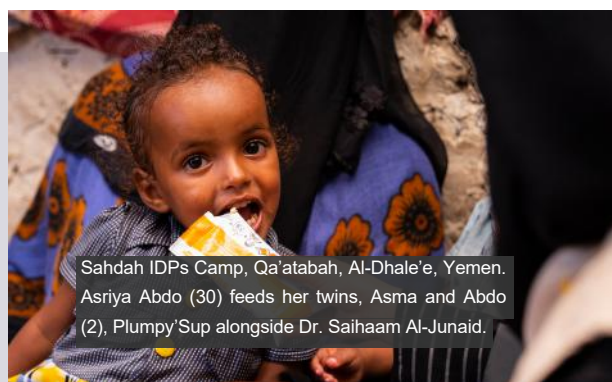
Sahdah IDPs Camp, Qa'atabah, Al-Dhale'e, Yemen. Asriya Abdo (30) feeds her twins, Asma and Abdo (2), Plumpy'Sup alongside Dr. Saihaam Al-Junaid.

Some WLOs also report instances where their ideas or project concepts were replicated by international organizations without acknowledgement or credit,[92] a practice recognized by INGO staff.[93] Furthermore, women's organizations are rarely involved in project evaluations, resulting in their insights on effectiveness and sustainability being overlooked.[94]

Tellingly, WLOs/WROs[95] and more generally L/NGOs refer to the INGOs they have agreements with as "donors" rather than partners, reflecting a deep-rooted perception of power dynamics. INGOs themselves admit to the power imbalance, with one of their key informants acknowledging that "**local organizations, especially women-led ones, are treated as subordinates, not as partners. They are brought into projects at the last minute, only to implement pre-determined activities rather than shape the response**".

There are efforts from very few INGOs to support equitable partnerships by involving partners from the initial stage of the project development.[96] One WLO representative shared that "they collaborated with the donor [INGO] during the proposal-writing phase, contributing to the design of activities and the project framework." However, this approach remains infrequent and may not necessarily guarantee shared decision making in the delivery of projects. The Yemen localization baseline found that just one third (34.1%) of L/NNGOs "often" or "always" contribute to the development of projects, and decisions about their implementation.[97]

Box 5: IRC's Partnership Excellence for Equality and Results System (PEERS)

The IRC is committed to being a feminist and anti-racist organization that upholds diversity, equality, and inclusion as part of its IRC Strategy100 ambition.[98] **The Strategy100 recognizes, 'meaningful partnerships with leaders and organizations based in the communities we serve' are central to our mission to address global inequalities.** IRC's partnership commitment is built on two key pillars: (1) Partnering First – Defining IRC's role in each context based on its value-added contribution to local actors and systems; (2) Partnering as Equals – Engaging in principled, collaborative partnerships that equitably share power, expertise, and resources to achieve the best outcomes for crisis-affected communities.

To advance this commitment, IRC has established a definition of strategic partnerships and set country-specific targets, with at least half of these partnerships dedicated to WLOs. PEERS guides IRC's approach to strategic partnerships, providing a framework of policies, strategies, tools, and processes to enhance partnerships and expand impact at scale. Developed through a comprehensive organizational process, PEERS is a product of global learning and collaboration among IRC and its partners. The system is also open-source, making it accessible to the broader sector and interested stakeholders.

While IRC continues to face challenges and constraints in implementing PEERS—particularly due to entrenched approaches that prioritize direct service delivery—it is actively working towards more effective partnerships. This includes refining PEERS based on feedback from partners and staff, as well as recommendations from an external equality review using NEAR as a guiding framework.[99] In addition in 2023, IRC established a Partnership Steering Committee to provide governance to PEERS, followed by a 2024 partnership roadmap workplan which prioritizes key interdepartmental actions to remove barriers and accelerate progress. This organization-wide effort underscores IRC's commitment to local partnerships as a cornerstone of its strategy to expand sustainable impact at scale.

Asriya Abdo (30) , a beneficiary, receives medical assistance from the IRC mobile team at Sahdah IDPs Camp in Qa'atabah District, Al-Dhale'e.District, Al Dhale Governorate.

B. **There can be a disconnect between INGOs priorities and the local norms and cultures that WLOs/WROs live and work in.**

While some INGOs acknowledge this issue, little is being done to change the status quo. As a result, partnership parameters and requirements can neglect the local context. For example, an Oxfam-initiated evaluation of their NASEEJ project,[100] which aims at contributing to more gender-equitable societies in Iraq, Yemen, and the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), found that Oxfam's feminist guided tools did not always align with local sensitivities. Noting that in some countries, including Yemen,[101] "feminism is a sensitive issue"; that the term is variably understood amongst the local population, and in some cases viewed suspiciously as as "the product of a Western agenda".[102] [103]

C. **Partnership roles and responsibilities remain unequally distributed and not mutually shared.**

While some INGOs are making progress toward fulfilling their equitable partnership commitments, significant gaps persist in roles and responsibilities in the implementation of projects. Financial management, in particular, remains a primary concern for INGOs and donors, and the lack of efforts to adapt requirements and expectations reinforces distrust and negative perceptions of partners' capacity.[104] As a result, local partners often receive insufficient funding for the activities they are subcontracted to deliver, and budgets for overhead costs remain small and highly restricted.[105]

INGOs also often approach equitable partnerships as a gradual, evolving process, which means that even when projects are co-designed, international organizations still retain control over funding.[106] Additionally, although there are exceptions, financial management requirements and INGOs' internal policies often take precedence over those of national and local partners who are expected to conform to international organizations' procedures rather than operate based on their own systems and ways of working.[107] As noted by a WLO representative, "even if we have our own code of conduct, the international partner will impose its policy. For salaries, we are requested to have a strong policy in place but the international partner will not allow us to adopt our rate in the proposal; we have to adopt their rates as donors."

D. **Risk sharing remains a major gap in many partnerships between donors/INGOs and L/NGOs, including WLOs.**

International actors continue to place disproportionate financial and operational risks on local partners responsible for delivering projects,[108] including GBV interventions. Despite this imbalance, there have been virtually no efforts to shift current practices.

One notable exception is the Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA), which has begun piloting a risk-sharing framework in Yemen through its Yemen Joint Response (YJR), starting with a workshop to unpacks the various types of risks faced by the consortium's members. As explained by an INGO partner representative of the consortium, "we had a design workshop for the framework which included a training on risk management, to have everyone on the same page. We talked about the risks that we have and what we would need from each other to manage those risks. We then developed an action plan." While these initial efforts primarily focus on risk management rather than equitable risk distribution, they represent an important step toward fostering a conversation on better understanding and addressing the risks faced by local partners within a consortium approach.

E. **Capacity-related components of partnerships are still largely framed as "capacity-building" or "capacity-strengthening."**

International partners tend to determine partners' capacity needs —typically organizational capacity and their ability to meet donor requirements. This approach excludes national and local partners from jointly identifying their own capacity needs and priorities. It also reinforces a partnership model that replicates INGOs' ways of working, policies, and strategic vision,[109] rather than supporting the long-term development and autonomy of local organizations.

While capacity-strengthening acknowledges the existing skills and expertise of partners, truly equitable partnerships should also emphasize capacity-sharing. INGOs should recognize and learn from the experiences, knowledge, and skills of their partners, shifting the focus away from a perceived "lack of capacity" toward a model of mutual learning and collaboration.

Box 6: The Gender Network

The Gender Network was led by UN Women in partnership with OCHA and provided national and local women's organizations with a platform to connect with international actors, receive capacity-building support and build synergies. The Network was designed to be inclusive and support under-represented organizations through capacity-building and strengthening initiatives, such as:

Gender analysis training (In partnership with ACAPS)	**YHF orientation sessions**	**Safeguarding training**	**Application support for funding opportunities**

The Network also facilitated women's organizations in the formulation of the Humanitarian Needs and Response Plans.

The Gender Network was deactivated in 2024 due to security risks, following detentions of UN, INGO, and embassy staff by the DFA in North Yemen.

Case study: Resourcing Change: Supporting women's organisations in fragile and conflict-affected settings[110]

The Resourcing Change project is a collaboration led by Saferworld, Women for Women International, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, and WILPF Nigeria, with funding from the UK Government's Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF). The initiative builds on insights from the 2020 research project The Key to Change, which recommended more flexible and context-specific funding models for WROs. The project aims to strengthen Yemeni, Nigerian and South-Sudanese's WROs' capacity, sustainability, and leadership in the Women, Peace, and Security agenda – including its protection pillar - by enabling them to define and implement their own priorities instead of adhering to donor-driven agendas.

Between November 2021 and March 2023, the project provided core, flexible, and accessible funding to 21 WROs, including 6 in Yemen, each receiving an average of £30,000. Two of the Yemeni WLOs activities primarily focused on women's protection. The ToBe Foundation for Rights and Freedoms worked on access to justice for women prisoners and GBV survivors, providing legal aid and psychological support while also training security personnel on human rights. The Marib Girls Foundation worked on gender equality advocacy.

The Resourcing Change project embraced key localisation principles to shift power to local WROs and promote sustainable, locally-led interventions:

- **Core and Flexible Funding:** Unlike traditional donor-driven models, the project provides unrestricted funding to WROs, allowing them to define their own priorities rather than conforming to externally set agendas.

- **Capacity Strengthening:** The initiative includes training, mentorship, and peer-to-peer learning to help WROs improve financial management, leadership, advocacy, and monitoring and evaluation.

- **Movement-Building and Networking:** The project supports WROs in building alliances and strengthening their feminist networks, enabling them to influence policy and advocate for women's rights in peace and security processes.

- **Adaptive and Context-Specific Approaches:** The initiative allows WROs to adapt strategies in response to changing conditions, such as evolving security threats or new advocacy opportunities.

The Resourcing Change project underscores the need for INGOs to fundamentally change how they engage with WLOs. This means moving from controlling partnerships to equitable collaborations, ensuring direct funding, and amplifying WLO voices.

F. WLOs/WROs can sometimes be overlooked for partnerships due to structural gender biases within the humanitarian system.

Some WLO and INGO respondents highlighted the challenges smaller **women's organizations face in being seen** as worthy of partnership opportunities and funding,[111] compared to other L/NGOs, which are often male-led.[112]

One WLO representative noted that "localization efforts have not prioritized gender equity. Even within local partnerships, **male-led organizations get the big contracts, while WLOs are given small roles."** This reflects an inherent bias[113] which some WLOs/WROs believe includes a gender bias[114]- towards local and national organizations, which are seen as lacking capacity and expertise to deliver projects.

In the words of an INGO key informant, "there are **wrong biases and myths** around working with local actors related to **fraud, limited capacity or no capacity in many areas**."

Women's organizations are often overlooked for partnerships

Capacity   Experience

The most common gender biases faced by WLOs/WROs are related to limited skills and expertise

Male-led organizations are given the big contracts, while WLOs are given small roles

BIAS

Contract

Case Study: Advancing Equitable Partnerships in Yemen – The Yemen Joint Response (YJR) Model
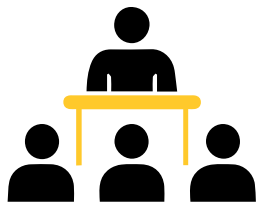
> **Instead of INGOs deciding what training national NGOs need, they now control their own capacity-strengthening budgets."**
> (Key informant, INGO)

The Yemen Joint Response under the DRA stands out as a progressive model of equitable partnerships between international and national organizations, including WLOs delivering GBV services.

With 13 Yemeni partners and 7 INGOs, the YJR ensures that national and local organizations play a leading role in humanitarian response efforts, rather than being relegated to sub-contractors. **44% of the total budget is directly managed by Yemeni organizations, an approach that actively promotes local ownership, decision-making power, and financial control.** The model also incorporates multi-year funding (2024-2026), risk-managing mechanisms, and direct representation of national partners in strategic decision-making at the DRA level. National NGOs participate in key coordination bodies, including the Local Advisory Group and the Response Task Force, ensuring their voices shape policies and funding decisions.

44 %
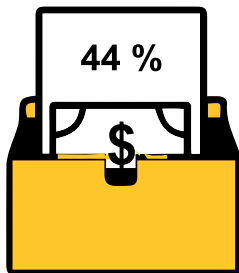
The YJR consortium also prioritizes capacity strengthening through locally led approaches. Unlike traditional models where INGOs dictate training priorities, **the YJR partnership model enables national partners to control their own capacity-building** funds, allowing them to invest in critical assets like vehicles, office equipment, and staff training. Additionally, the initiative has introduced a Crisis Modifier Fund, which was recently activated to support two Yemeni NGOs whose funds were frozen due to banking restrictions. By ensuring financial flexibility and rapid response capabilities, the YJR demonstrates a practical commitment to risk-managing and sustainability.

The YJR model provides an important shift towards an enhanced and equitable consortium model. In particular, **by embedding inclusive decision-making mechanisms, and fostering long-term, trust-based partnerships with national partners including WLOs,** YJR provides a tangible example of how localization can move beyond rhetoric to reality.

Current approaches to equitable partnerships and funding remain largely rigid and fail to recognize the benefits and opportunities that could arise from collaborating with informal groups, such as women's networks and small community-based organizations. These groups play a crucial role in local advocacy and service delivery, yet they are often overlooked due to inflexible funding models and partnership frameworks.[115]

Key Finding 3   Gender out of focus: A cohesive perspective is missing in nationally-led localization efforts

While Yemeni NGOs have taken a lead role in shaping the localization agenda in Yemen, efforts to include a gender perspective, and WLOs/WROs' issues in accessing funding and strategic partnerships remain largely unaddressed.

A.   Smaller and informal WROs/WLOs are insufficiently included in Yemeni-led localization efforts.

Although national and well-established WROs/WLOs are included – and some take an important role in NGO-led localization initiatives, the different levels of exclusion within the Yemeni civil society landscape itself are not acknowledged and highlighted in localization efforts. The voices of local women's organizations in their diversity are mostly unheard, and their specific needs and challenges invisible. A WRO leader shared she had "no idea about localization initiatives."

This gap is further exacerbated by the broad categorization of civil society organizations as simply "local" or "national," along with the fluid interpretation of what constitutes a WLO. For instance, the Yemen localization baseline groups all Yemeni civil society organizations under "local and national NGOs," providing no specific data on how many national and local WROs/WLOs contributed to the baseline or what the findings were for these groups specifically.

Additionally, while some national NGOs (including a small number of well-established WLOs) have access to and actively engage in the localization agenda within the humanitarian coordination response, they are not leveraging their position to advocate for greater prioritization of women's organizations in all their diversity. This limitation has been acknowledged by some national actors themselves. As shared by an NGO representative involved in localization efforts, **"We have to reach those at the local level and advocate also for them, not only for those who are strong or at the national level."** [116]

B.   Well-established NGOs are reluctant to support smaller and local women's organizations due to limited funding and influencing opportunities.

There is recognition amongst both international and national organizations that "localizing localization" is a critical step towards ensuring the delivery of essential services to the most in need, including women and girls at risk or survivors of GBV in hard-to-reach areas. However, **an increasingly competitive funding environment hinders efforts to strengthen small and informal women's organizations' capacity and facilitate their access to decision-making and influencing platforms.**

There are some positive examples of national organizations actively working to support and empower local women's organizations by helping them build capacity, grow, and access funding opportunities. **The Localization and Optimization of Humanitarian and Development Response in Yemen Initiative's** strategy includes a specific component on WLOs that can pave the way towards tangible and Yemeni-led progress - in particular due to the engagement of WLOs and WLO-networks such as Yemeni Women Leaders Network (YWLN). **The YWLN is making important contributions in shifting the current status quo including through its engagement in the establishment of a NEAR Network supported Localization Lab in Yemen.** The National NGO Forum also plays a key role in enhancing WLOs' engagement by supporting membership mechanisms, advocacy efforts, and participation in humanitarian response plans. Additionally, it provides tailored capacity-building programs designed specifically to strengthen the skills and operational capacity of WLOs.[117]

However, efforts must be inclusive, cater to explicit needs and adapt to the capacity of smaller WLO-led networks and less established organizations such as associations, which often do not have access to national platforms,[118] but know and understand the needs and priorities of the hardest-to-reach and often most marginalized women and girls.

As noted by several key informants, **the lack of coordination, collaboration, peer-to-peer support, and knowledge exchange**—along with competition among L/NGOs, including WLOs and WROs, as well as between networks—is **widening the gap between well-established, experienced organizations and smaller, newer ones.** This fragmentation not only limits capacity-building opportunities for emerging organizations but also weakens the collective ability of Yemeni civil society actors to advocate for a meaningful shift in power.[119]

Conclusion

Women's organizations are at the forefront of responding to the GBV crisis in Yemen. They serve communities, women and girls, that only they can reach through their unique relationships with authorities and understanding of the local contexts.

However, despite their critical role, these organizations face disproportionate challenges, particularly in accessing funding. This directly impacts their operational capacity, making it difficult to sustain long-term services and forcing them to rely on short-term, project-based funding, with some even being forced to shut down. These challenges are further exacerbated by inequitable partnerships within the humanitarian system. Women's organizations are often relegated to sub-contractor roles, responsible for implementation rather than being involved in project design and decision-making. This exclusion from strategic planning severely limits their ability to shape GBV responses in ways that truly align with the context they work in, thus effectively addressing the needs of the women and girls they serve. Additionally, the lack of an inclusive and gender-responsive approach to nationally-led localization efforts further marginalizes small and informal women's organizations, preventing them from benefiting from initiatives designed to support local actors.

The findings from the research are released at a time when cuts in humanitarian funding are causing a tsunami effect on the delivery of lifesaving interventions across crises, including in Yemen[120] where 22 safe spaces have already had to close, leaving over 11,000 women and girls in high-risk areas without access to vital support.[121] As emphasized by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, the current and unprecedented crisis must serve as a catalyst for strengthening local leadership through "funding for local and national organizations, ensuring that those closest to the crises have more control over resources." It is paramount that WLOs/WROs prioritized, and provided with funding and leadership opportunities they need and deserve.

A decisive agenda for action driven by national and international humanitarian actors to address those challenges and bring about meaningful change for women's organizations is needed more than ever. The following recommendations have been grouped by theme to emphasize the importance of collective and multi-stakeholder action.

Recommendations

1. Shifting power to WLOs/WROs

<u>What that looks like:</u>

- **A clear and jointly developed definition of "localization"** that includes a focus on WLOs/WROs' leadership and meaningful participation in humanitarian coordination structures, their access to quality funding and partnerships, and their increased positioning and visibility in high level and influential fora.

- **Quantitative and "box ticking" partnerships that rely on the number of partnerships,** shifts to strategic partnerships that enable WLOs/WROs to lead, manage, and define project interventions:

  - Invest and work with networks and like-minded INGOs to conduct an in-depth mapping of all WLOs/WROs including formal and informal networks and associations.

  - Diversify partnerships with smaller and newer WLOs/WROs instead of clustering around the same organizations.

  - Include WLOs/WROs in the entire project cycle—from planning through implementation and evaluation, ensuring that they contribute to the development of required tools and processes (e.g. joint evaluation process).

  - Define budgets on actual and mutually agreed activities and outcomes to delivered and not pre-decided budgets formulated based on gaps identified by INGOs. Share funding costs equally, and manage budgets equally between international and national partners in consortia.

  - Include indirect costs such as management, security, and mental health support costs in WLOs/WROs' budgets.

  - Redefine what collaborative risk management means, according to local actors inputs, based on objective criteria and develop a joint risk management framework that covers both security and financial risks, such as sudden project terminations due to funding cuts.

  - Earmark funding for WROs/WLOs (meeting the women's organizations' definition) delivering GBV services, ensuring a balance in geographic representation and size.

- **Trust and local expertise are fostered** by ensuring that WLOs/WROs can define their own priorities, approaches, and solutions.

- **Localization efforts consider intersectionality,** supporting and ensuring the representation and participation of diverse groups of women, including those from marginalized communities.

- **International organizations' roles shift from "gatekeepers" of decision-making and funding to facilitators,** supporting WLOs' direct engagement with donors at all levels, and leadership in humanitarian coordination structures:
  - Support local and national WLOs/WROs that are willing and have the legitimacy to co-lead humanitarian coordination structures (ensuring that sufficient resourcing is available to engage in coordination).

- **International organizations cede space to WLOs/WROs on influencing platforms,** prioritising diversity of WLO/WRO voices and experiences over INGOs' visibility and control of the narrative.

- **Affirmative action policies for WLOs/WROs are implemented by requiring localization efforts to actively prioritize women's organizations' leadership,** ensuring that these organizations are not just participants but decision-makers.

2. Adapting existing funding structure mechanisms and processes to fit WLOs/WROs' needs and capacity

What that looks like:

- **Greater transparency and inclusion in funding calls and allocations:**

  ◦ Ensure calls for proposals are disseminated publicly through a variety of online and offline channels and available in Arabic.

  ◦ Share calls for proposals with members of networks and coalitions, ensuring that the information is cascaded down.

  ◦ Introducing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track progress and impact of localization efforts using disaggregated data on the type, size and location of organizations.

  ◦ Introduce targets and tracking mechanisms that allows for funding allocations going to WROs/WLOs, disaggregated by geographical scope and sector (with a clear distinction between GBV specific project) – at a minimum "national" and "local" and for holding international actors accountable for funding WLOs/WROs.

  ◦ Recognize the diversity of women's organizations in funding allocations and ensure funding supports a range of women-led groups, including associations and networks and small and local women's organizations.

- **Grant application processes and eligibility criteria for funding are adapted and respond to the needs of diverse groups of WLOs/WROs:**

  ◦ Lower the minimum annual budget ceiling and allow WLOs/WROs with a smaller track record to apply, based on their demonstrated local impact, community trust, and GBV technical expertise.

  ◦ Establish small grant mechanisms that provide seed funding and mentorship support to smaller WLOs/WROs, allowing them to grow gradually and meet more complex compliance requirements over time.

  ◦ Hold workshops to guide smaller organizations through funding application processes, increasing their chances of securing funding.

  ◦ Provide constructive feedback for proposal rejections.

  ◦ Develop targeted funding streams for women-led organisations to support long-term capacity-building efforts.

- **WLOs/WROs are allowed to determine their own funding priorities,** including movement-building, institutional capacity strengthening, operational costs, and advocacy.

- **Security expenses, mental health and well-being and essential core costs such as rent and utilities are included.**

- **WLOs/WROs can shift resources within their existing budgets based on real-time needs.**

- **Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are introduced to track progress and impact of localization efforts** using disaggregated data on the type, size and location of organizations.

3. Prioritize capacity strengthening based on WLOs/WROs self-identified needs and priorities

What that looks like:

- **Capacity-building and strengthening efforts are co-created, demand-driven and needs-based.**

  - Should include systems management, staff training and development, leadership, advocacy and negotiation, and network strengthening.

  - The content of training should be designed with the objective of strengthening the organizational development of WLOs/WROs to fit their context, rather than their ability to better report to donors and INGOs.

- **Feedback mechanisms to gather inputs from WLOs/WROs and other stakeholders are accessible** and used to refine and improve localization strategies over time.

- **Well-established national WLOs/WROs delivering GBV services are funded to support and mentor smaller and informal women's organizations,** ensuring that they gain visibility and influence in decision-making spaces.

- **WLOs/WROs led networks are strengthened through financial and technical support,** and increased opportunities are made available for learning and building relationships.

4. Increasing peer-to-peer coordination, collaboration and exchange

What that looks like:

- **Peer-to-peer learning and collaboration mechanisms/fora are established between women's organizations (including WLO-led networks) and INGOs** delivering/looking to implement equitable partnerships with WLOs/WROs.

- **National and well-established WLO/WROs support local and emerging women's organizations access to funding opportunities** by including them in GBV and protection funding (including consortium) proposals, and strengthening their advocacy skills.

- **A safe space is created for shared learning and networking between WLOs/WROs, INGOs and UN partners delivering GBV services,** to meet regularly and discuss learnings and experiences. This could include setting up a community of practice.

5. Strengthening advocacy on women-led localization

What that looks like:

- **National organizations advocate for funding mechanisms** that allow smaller WLOs/WROs to access flexible, multi-year grants, reducing dependence on short-term projects.

- **WLOs/WROs form alliances to push for policy changes and stronger representation in humanitarian leadership structures.**

- **The funding needs of WLOs/WROs delivering GBV services are explicitly included as a key ask in high level advocacy engagement** (e.g. donors' meetings in country and globally), in advocacy statements/positions released by international and/or national organizations, and in the work of civil-society led and international localization initiatives.

Bodor preparing lunch for her children, District, Al Dhale Governorate.

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