

Humanitarian – Development Nexus: Protecting the Development Space in Yemen Is a Life Line for Peace

Are there trade-offs between short-term humanitarian objectives and longer term development goals in conflict affected states? How does moving up the humanitarian – development line to realizing early recovery contribute to stability? This policy brief draws on the experience of the Small and Micro Enterprise Promotion Service (SMEPS) in helping small holder farmers in Yemen improve food security, and their incomes whilst making strong contributions towards achieving SDGs.

Key Messages

- Yemen cited over two years as the world’s worst humanitarian disaster where more than \$1.8 billion in emergency aid fails to achieve human dignity. However, smaller amounts of development assistance bridging sustainable efforts to humanitarian needs is creating tens of thousands of short term work opportunities and several thousand long term jobs.
- Labour intensive agricultural projects are offering alternative forms of employment for combatants potentially making fighting in Yemen’s protracted civil war a less attractive option.
- Supporting farmers with cash grants and technical assistance to invest in modernizing farm practices is significantly improving productivity (SDG 2.3.1) and incomes (SDG 2.3.2).
- Empowering farmers to make the procurement themselves as opposed to a project tender supports crowding-in where businesses compete to serve farmers.
- Strong development communication facilitates wide scale replication of the interventions on a sustainable bases and sends powerful messages of hope.



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Yemen is cited as the world’s worst humanitarian disaster engulfed in a protracted conflict. Continuous flows of humanitarian aid struggles to meet the challenges suggesting a shift in emphasis towards longer term developmental approaches will better serve communities achieve resilience and progress. SMEPS projects targeting some of the poorest regions in Yemen is helping rural communities grow incomes through improving food production leading to a stabilization in market prices of locally grown vegetables.

Investments of just \$1500 helping 3200 small farmers and fishers improve production has created over 37,822 jobs. As much as 12.5% of farmers in some of the targeted districts are combatants that have stopped fighting to enroll on the project. How many of 37,822 farm labourers are ex-combatants we do not know. Importantly, creating jobs in such a volatile context is a strong driver for stability impacting on the pool of labour available for military recruiters contributing to making Yemen’s protracted civil war the less attractive option.

A focus on modernizing farm practices is helping farmers understand how to make their lands much more productive contributing to sustainable development while tackling food insecurity. In access of 200 young agronomist employed by the project support farmers over an entire growing season understand how to utilize new technologies such as drip irrigation systems, hybrid seeds and seedlings in advancing productivity and increasing incomes. Zero hunger is the SDG 2 target to be achieved by 2030. This is measured in part by the improvement in performance of small holder farmers seeking to achieve a doubling in productivity (SDG 2.3.1) and incomes (SDG 2.3.2). World Bank support to farmers through SMEPS is achieving a massive 78% increase in productivity and 44% increase in incomes proving that even during conflict space for sustainable develop exists.

How durable are these gains and can they perpetuate scale?

Development should empower people is a guiding principle of SMEPS work. Teaching farmers how to undertake simple shopping procedures is empowering. It means farmers instead of the project undertake the procurement. In this way power of money transfers from SMEPS to the farmers. As a direct result input supply businesses are competing to serve farmers. These businesses are expanding moving away from their central locations in the urban areas of Sana'a and Aden and opening branches in rural Yemen to serve farmers. The spin offs resulting from businesses crowding-in are multifold, here are just a few:

- 50% of farmers supported have expanded into new farm land, a large source of their financing is credit facilities provided by input supply firms and remittance from abroad. **Getting money transfers from abroad working for development in Yemen is a massive success and an opportunity for leverage by the astute donor.**
- Increased competition amongst commercial input suppliers and the opening of over 30 new branches has aided farmers not supported by the project to replicate farmers supported. The replication factor for Abyan in south Yemen is 11 farmers taking potential scalability to 35,200 farmers (3200 farmers x 11 replicators).
- Businesses seeking a competitive advantage race to develop new products and services, and in doing so they are employing fresh graduates to actively sell their services to farmers. These support functions are helping to perpetuate the progressive change happening in rural Yemen.

Lastly, well thought out communication can facilitate social and economic change. Farmers have been given a platform to talk about the transformation of their farms. They are a credible voice and a great power of persuasion amongst their communities. In part the strong farmer replication of the project is driving perpetual scale powered by farmer word of mouth. Listening to the farmers of Yemen they are actually calling for protecting the development space. They are throwing Yemen a life line for peace, are we ready to catch it?

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