



## **YEMEN RED CRESCENT SOCIETY**

### **A unified National Society “Everywhere for all”**

Long-term National Society Development investments that strengthened the positioning, sustainability and impact of Yemen Red Crescent society in a fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected environment





# 1. Background

In 2016 the World Humanitarian Summit's **Grand Bargain Commitments set out the goal of "localising" humanitarian action.**

As its own contribution to localisation, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) defines National Society Development (NSD) as "the continuous effort of each National Society to achieve and maintain an accountable and sustainable organisation that delivers – through volunteers and staff – relevant services to address needs, reduce vulnerabilities and build resilience in a changing environment." NSD encompasses all aspects of the life of a National Society, including both what is referred to as Organisational Development and Capacity Strengthening / Enhancement. The policy defines these two interrelated areas as follows:

- **Organisational Development** is the part of NSD work that focuses on fundamental issues within the National Society: its mandate, legal base, identity, long-term strategic direction, basic organisational model, leadership drive, capacity to anticipate and adapt, and the relationships between different parts of the organisation or between the National Society and its environment, including the auxiliary role. Organisational Development recognises the interconnectedness of a National Society's different functions and levels, and their influence on performance and impact.
- **Capacity Strengthening / Enhancement** is the part of NSD work that focuses on improving existing services and capacities by making them more impactful, effective, widespread and better related to the National Society mandate and mission. This includes both strengthening areas of work that focus on community resilience and empowerment, and strengthening underpinning systems, procedures and tools." (IFRC NSD Policy, 2022)

However, little is documented about how Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies' local NSD investments strengthen their impact in line with the Movement's seven Fundamental Principles – in particular those of Neutrality, Impartiality and Independence – which exist to help staff and volunteers gain access, acceptance and trust in all communities and parties in highly conflict-sensitive contexts. This case study was commissioned by a task force of Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (Movement) members<sup>2</sup> as part of a study of long-term National Society Development investments in fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected contexts,<sup>3</sup> to record the impact of these and how they will inform future work. It shows how the Yemen Red Crescent Society's successful NSD investments over 10 years strengthened its unique positioning as a strong, principled, trusted and local humanitarian actor through:

- Better services
- A more effective structure
- A more sustainable organisation
- A stronger capacity for both response and community resilience building.



1 Local humanitarian actors are often first to respond when disaster strikes and are often able to get to areas international staff and volunteers can't. Because they're within the affected communities before, during and after crises, they're better placed to both understand people's needs, and connect them to the right ongoing support. In 2016 the Grand Bargain Commitments established a "Localisation Workstream" to "learn from successful localisation practices around the world" and introduce humanitarian processes that:

- strengthen locally-led, accountable and principled humanitarian action
- reset power balances between local and international actors so local humanitarian actors can lead and deliver relevant, sustainable services
- use a more strategic blend of local to international resources to create more efficient, collaborative, speedy responses.

2 The study taskforce was convened and led by the British Red Cross and comprised of the American Red Cross, Australian Red Cross, Canadian Red Cross, Danish Red Cross, German Red Cross, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

3 The term 'investments' refers all activities undertaken by a National Society to strengthen itself, and any support given by partners to help achieve this, including money, time, expertise and other resources.





*"The humanitarian crisis caused by ongoing conflict has not only put more responsibility on our shoulders, but has also provided us yet another opportunity to demonstrate how the International Red Cross [and] Red Crescent Movement's Fundamental Principles are actually put into action.*

*"This means YRCS has become, and will continue to become, more relevant than before. But we need to demonstrate our continued relevance by rendering humanitarian services to vulnerable people and building strategic capabilities to deliver more, more and more. These services will not be effectively delivered unless we invest in developing and maintaining YRCS as a dynamic and strong organisation capable of providing unmet humanitarian services in the country."*

YRCS Strategic Plan 2016-2020

YRCS's NSD investments and strengthened capacities have enabled it to reach more vulnerable people and achieve greater humanitarian impact over time. The following statistics from 2016, 2019 and 2022 show how the growth of its youth members, volunteers and staff numbers enabled the YRCS to support greater numbers of people in each of its key programme sectors.

Year	2016	2019	2022
YRCS volunteers	1,320	2,380	4,514
YRCS youth	NA	NA	240
YRCS staff	60	60	476
People reached by disaster response, food security and livelihoods programmes	255,066	760,769	1,591,636
People reached by disaster preparedness programmes for community volunteers	161	316	583
People reached by health programmes	253,515	397,236	1,099,949
People reached by WASH programmes	22,362	266,064	1,215,835

*"YRCS does NSD differently in its own context."*

Dr Mohammed Al Fakih, YRCS director of programmes

This case study describes customised NSD investments YRCS and its partners have made in response to key moments in the external environment. By outlining the organisation's journey to define itself while working in a humanitarian context that other organisations cannot access, it offers a strong example for others in the Movement. The YRCS's story shows how it:

- maintained principled leadership to sustain its neutrality, impartiality and independence amidst a wide range of complex external influences
- retained coherence and respect within a fractured country by remaining a unified organisation.
- made the right organisational changes at 'turning point' moments, to consistently deliver humanitarian services in situations where other organisations could not
- achieved ongoing acceptance and humanitarian access through its auxiliary role, implemented by consistently communicating its Fundamental Principles and undertaking humanitarian advocacy with public authorities, parties to the conflict and affected communities
- focused on a few core services which it regularly reassessed and updated, coupled with integrated capacity enhancement strategies, to meet humanitarian needs and help the most vulnerable communities build longer-term resilience
- achieved 'localisation' in keeping with the Grand Bargain commitments,<sup>3</sup> that built strong, principled, locally-led humanitarian action through sustained investments in branches and community-based volunteers, with a sensitivity to gender and diversity
- used an increasingly strategic partnership coordination framework to more assertively manage partnerships that scaled up community-based services and collective impact
- committed to diversifying income streams to drive a vision of a long-term, accountable, self-sustaining and resilient organisation.





### 3. Humanitarian context

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The Republic of Yemen is home to an estimated 30.4 million people. Covering an area of 527,970km<sup>2</sup> it is the second largest state in the Arabian Peninsula, which comprises Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Iraq, Jordan and Oman. Yemen's 1,906km-long coastline touches the Gulf of Aden, the Arabian Sea and the Red Sea, where the narrow Bab-el-Mandeb Strait separates it from Eritrea and Djibouti in the Horn of Africa.

Yemen is categorised as one of the world's least developed countries.<sup>4</sup> It is one of the poorest countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, ranks top of the Fragile State Index, is second on the Global Hunger Index and has the second youngest population in the world. The country's location and geography make it highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, including heavy rainfall, floods, landslides, droughts and desertification, as well as outbreaks of cholera, polio, malaria and dengue fever.

In terms of administration, Yemen is made up of 333 districts across 22 governorates. For years, it has been mired in a humanitarian crisis as a result of civil unrest in the north and south, inter-tribal conflict, heightened security issues in relation to both civil unrest and conflict, and complex governance structures. This has been made worse by social and economic challenges, the rising cost of living and the critical health needs of a large part of the population amidst a shattered health system.

At least 56,000 people have been killed in armed violence since conflict escalated in March 2015. Airstrikes, military operations and natural disasters have displaced 4.5 million people and left 17 million facing famine. Yemen's water infrastructure has also been destroyed, leading to worsened food insecurity, unsafe water supplies and the fastest-spreading cholera outbreak in modern history, with almost a million suspected cases.

Aid agencies estimate 3.1 million displaced people need urgent support. Among those who have been forced from their homes, three quarters are women and children, and most have been displaced multiple times. The severity of Yemen's crisis is illustrated by the statistics below, from 2023.<sup>5</sup>

- More than 80% of the country's population struggles to access food, safe drinking water and adequate health services.
- An estimated 21.6 million people need humanitarian assistance in relation to food insecurity, malnutrition, health, water, sanitation and protection. Of these:
  - o approximately 17.7 million people need protection services due to continued violations of international humanitarian law
  - o 17.3 million people need food and agriculture assistance
  - o 20.3 million people need critical health services
  - o 15.3 million people need access to clean water and basic sanitation.
- One woman dies in childbirth every two hours from causes that are usually preventable.
- 1.5 million pregnant and breastfeeding women are acutely malnourished.
- 7.1 million women require urgent access to gender-based violence services.
- Nearly 90% of the population have no access to publicly supplied electricity.
- The most vulnerable groups include: internally displaced people, refugees, asylum seekers, migrants, people with disabilities and older people.
- People's purchasing power has fallen as a result of the depreciation of Yemen's currency, macroeconomic instability, the country's reliance on imported food and goods, and extreme vulnerability to international supply chains stemming from the crisis in Ukraine.
- Most public sector employees, including teachers and healthcare workers, have not received a regular salary in years.

4 <https://english.aawsat.com/arab-world/4964376-world-bank-yemen-among-poorest-country-world>

5 UNFPA, 2023, and ReliefWeb. Yemen Humanitarian Needs Overview 2023 (December 2022) [EN/AR]. See: <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-humanitarian-needs-overview-2023-december-2022-enar>



- Landmines continue to endanger lives, hinder people's movement and ability to return to their homes, and prevent people from building livelihoods and accessing basic services.
- Women and girls continue to be disproportionately impacted by the crisis, including by compounded forms of violence. Recent further restrictions have worsened the situation, including the widespread imposition of mahram (male guardian) requirements in areas controlled by Ansar Allah (AA), the de facto Houthi authorities.
- Problems with access continue to impact aid delivery, especially in AA-controlled areas.
- The impacts of climate change, such as recurrent severe seasonal flooding and droughts, continue to disrupt livelihoods and services, displace families and increase existing vulnerabilities.

In 2021, Yemen ranked 155 out of 156 countries in the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index. Increasing restrictions on women's movements in some parts of the country are potentially depriving women of services. This is particularly acute for those who need to travel for medical care, given that more than 274 of Yemen's health facilities (over 50%) have been destroyed in the conflict over the last decade.

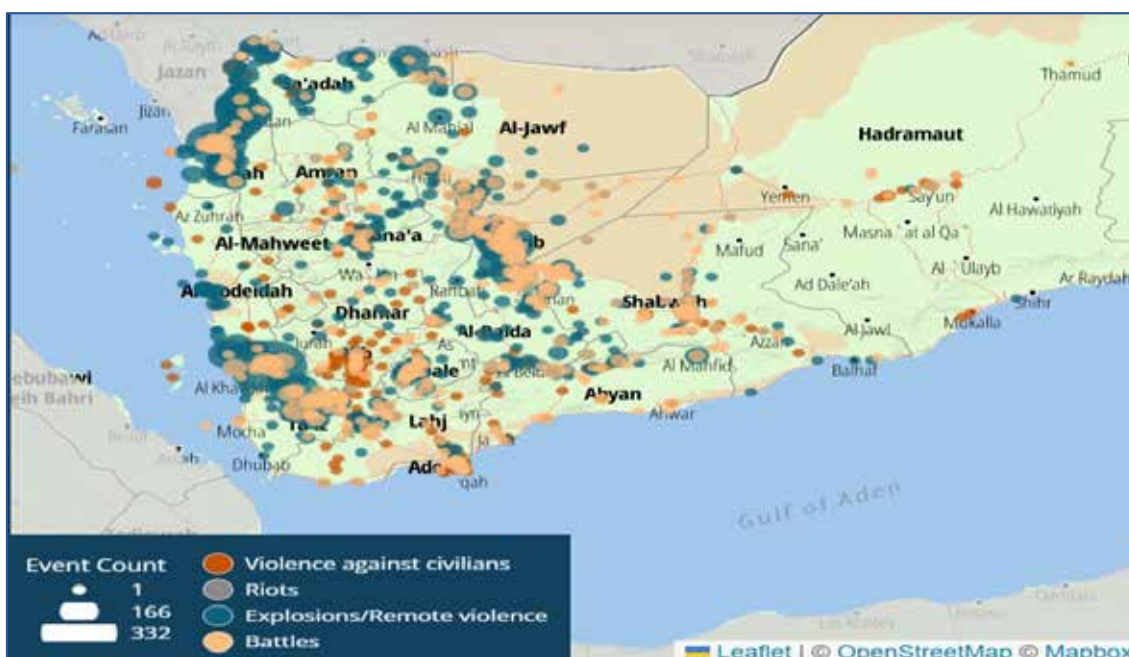
In April 2023, after more than eight years of war, parties to Yemen's conflict cautiously implemented a truce and exchanged prisoners. This has resulted in a risk of humanitarian assistance being diverted to other crises around the world, when it is still much needed in Yemen. What's more, the situation remains fragile, and any increase in tensions or heightened rhetoric between the parties has the potential to spark renewed violence. If this happens, more people are likely to be killed, injured and forced from their homes, and communities will feel the strain of resources being even more stretched.

The Yemen Red Crescent Society is the only strong, principled, neutral, impartial, independent and countrywide humanitarian organisation that can reach everyone who needs help. There has never been a more critical need for this vital National Society to receive international recognition and support.



*After heavy rain and floods in 2021, a Yemen Red Crescent Society team distributes household items to support families with shelter, clean water, sanitation and hygiene. This work was supported by funding from the IFRC's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF).*

## 4. Strengthening ‘proximity’



Faced with multiple ongoing conflict-sensitive contexts,<sup>6</sup> YRCS made NSD investments to regularly refresh and maintain a complex balance of institutional and staff capacities, while remaining neutral, impartial and independent. In doing so, it aimed to expand its programmes and services to reach the most isolated and vulnerable communities across the territory. YRCS focused on the following four strategic priorities, managed over four consecutive three-year strategic plans between 2011 and 2023.

### (i) Localisation

When working in areas held by armed groups and non-state actors where access was restricted and international staff could not be part of operations, a local approach was the only option. This required NSD investments tailored to the context. These included

- ✓ strengthening the humanitarian advocacy skills of staff and volunteers in local branches and sub-branches, resulting in much wider consultation with more stakeholder groups to ensure acceptance and access (e.g. with militia groups, tribal leaders and local authorities)
- ✓ developing local ‘interlocutor’ mechanisms, through which YRCS shared humanitarian information, gathered data about needs and found entry points into communities, gaining acceptance and trust from a wide range of stakeholders (caution was also needed to avoid favouring or discriminating against specific groups)
- ✓ enhancing partnership development skills in branches and sub-branches to help them build relationships with health institutions, local government structures and communities, through which YRCS could build communities’ resilience, support people’s physical and mental wellbeing, and empower them to respond to humanitarian crises
- ✓ delivering localised, conflict-specific services tailored to particular contexts, that built trust and appreciation within communities. (e.g. facilitating landmine awareness activities, as well as work to clear landmines and other explosives, in up to 15 targeted governorates)
- ✓ building local logistics infrastructure, enhancing local assets such as branch buildings and warehouses, fleet management skills and technical capacities (with the support of the Danish Red Cross from 2018 onwards) to strengthen YRCS’s positioning as an independent local organisation among local authorities, armed groups and communities



- ✓ building new diversified partnerships with local offices of the World Food Programme, the International Organization for Migration, the UN Development Programme, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and Oxfam, based on YRCS's privileged access to all parts of Yemen

The key to YRCS's localisation success lies in NSD strategies that continually grew its capacity to involve and empower communities. Being seen as only an emergency first response organisation was not enough. YRCS identified that it needed to move from response work into a focused set of community-based programmes that included resilience building. The early phases of this programming were launched in its 2013-2016 strategic plan, which consolidated YRCS's position as the leading organisation adopting localised approaches across Yemen.

*"Adopting community-based programme approaches: the stark differences in local contexts within Yemen require localised and adapted programme approaches depending on the geographical location, community culture and customs, recognised governance actors and structures, and degree of conflict and existing tensions among different groups. Interventions are shaped differently in the mountainous regions compared to the coastal regions."*

*"YRCS relies on community leaders and members to inform the practical adaptations required from programme interventions. As such, the majority of YRCS programmes strive to adopt community-based approaches which do not solely focus on direct provision of assistance and services, but also promote the active involvement of community members."*

German Red Cross. YRCS: A united National Society navigating within fragmented territories. 2022.

YRCS continued to make NSD investments in volunteering and branch development that strengthened its services and impact, clearly applying the Fundamental Principles in everything it did. For example, investments ensured that volunteers and doctors would travel on planes to accompany prisoner exchanges between warring factions, showing the neutrality of YRCS. Volunteers also repeatedly explained the meaning of the Fundamental Principles to authorities and armed groups in order to gain access:

*"Using the tribal system to help your own people doesn't always mean 'help the other group'. We explained neutrality though local customs without changing the languages."*

YRCS branch leader

## **(ii) Customising vulnerability and risk assessment analysis tools to conflict contexts**

*"The YRCS branches act as the vital connection between communities and the National Society, supporting the organisation to continuously refresh its perspectives and plan accordingly on community issues, challenges, vulnerabilities, and capacities to address the existing and emerging needs and nurture locally-focused volunteerism that builds a permanent humanitarian presence in communities."*

YRCS branch leader

In conflict-affected contexts, carrying out hazard, risk and vulnerability analysis entails extra sensitivities, including suspicions from both government and non-state actors about inappropriate intelligence-gathering being carried out in areas under their control. Because of this, the YRCS made NSD investments to strengthen perceptions of its neutrality, impartiality and independence. These included:

- ✓ using the IFRC's Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (VCA) tool (2017) in 16 locations to assess fragile contexts and tailor disaster risk reduction work to help prepare communities for conflict and violence (including making local adaptations to avoid raising inappropriate expectations from communities about what needs could be addressed)
- ✓ strengthening the merging of two separate disaster management and health vulnerability assessment tools, which evolved into the Enhanced Vulnerability Capacity Assessment tool (this integrated questions on gender, diversity and marginalised communities that could be addressed in neutral, impartial and independent programming approaches).





A Disaster Management Capacity Assessment was undertaken in 2017 supported by the IFRC, and a Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (VCA) report was produced in 2019 by the IFRC, the British Red Cross and the Swedish Red Cross, but neither addressed conflict-sensitive aspects of YRCS's mandate, capacity and approach. Both studies acknowledged that conflict was a prevalent feature and accelerator of humanitarian needs, but they did not frame specific recommendations in a conflict-sensitive manner. The first study only assessed YRCS's capacities in a set of auxiliary roles related to the 'government', and so missed the important relations it needed to have with non-state armed actors. The VCA report went as far as to state that:

*"The assessment of the targeted communities is conducted using VCA. Communities in armed zones, violence, or complex structures have not been selected for lack of safe access."*

These examples underline the danger of using standard assessment tools in conflict-sensitive contexts. If these tools are implemented without any adaptation, they can result in enhancing organisational risk rather than addressing and resolving it.

### **(iii) Adapting disaster risk reduction to help prepare for conflict and violence**

Yemen is ranked seventh out of 191 countries on the INFORM Risk Index,<sup>7</sup> with a vulnerability score of 8.2. This reflects the fact that, as well as being mired in ongoing conflict, Yemen's exposure to climate-induced natural hazards, risks and disasters has intensified. In recent years, recurring droughts, floods and cyclones have displaced hundreds of thousands of people, and had devastating effects on agriculture, food security and water supplies.

YRCS identified that there were few global guidance documents on how to use disaster risk reduction (DRR) to help communities prepare for conflict. From 2011, it started work on an Integrated Conflict Preparedness Project (ICP)<sup>8</sup> to respond to the increasing scale of conflicts in the country, supported by the German Red Cross (GRC). The programme was launched to mitigate the long-term effects of conflict, starting in the governorates of Taiz and Sana'a city.

Over time, this project expanded into YRCS's work on DRR in fragile, conflict and violent contexts. As part of a global steering group – together with GRC, the Climate Centre, IFRC and ICRC – YRCS now helps other National Societies adapt to similar contexts. The main NSD components of its integrated strategy for branch and service expansion included:

- ✓ merging a DRR approach into YRCS's existing school rehabilitation programme, which focused on reconstructing educational institutions that had been damaged by war
- ✓ building the capacity of branches, sub-branches, staff and volunteers to assess local vulnerabilities, trends, and entry points for involving communities, and strengthening their ability to identify and mitigate risks
- ✓ working with partners to establish or renovate community health clinics to target health risks in hard-to-reach areas (for example, supporting five locations with the Danish Red Cross, including busy urban areas)
- ✓ taking over government health centres in places where the government had no resources to renovate them itself (rather than building new ones)
- ✓ strengthening community cohesion by creating school safety committees that developed contingency plans to address the impact of violence and mitigate against hazards
- ✓ ensuring systems for sending volunteers into communities were flexible and conflict-sensitive to avoid tensions and harm
- ✓ modelling appropriate cultural risk assessments and acceptable practices to protect communities (e.g. employing all female staff in one YRCS health centre led to high levels of trust and attendance among local women).

7 <https://drmkc.jrc.ec.europa.eu/inform-index/INFORM-Risk/Results-and-data/moduleId/1782/id/469/controller/Admin/action/Results>

8 See section 6 (iii) for more detailed objectives.



To further deepen and harmonise the many vulnerability and risk assessment processes, and evaluate its conflict and disaster-focused capacities, YRCS adopted IFRC's Preparedness for Response (PER) process.<sup>9</sup> It used the 2017 IFRC-supported Disaster Management Capacity Assessment as a first phase of assessment based on IFRC's Well-Prepared National Society assessment tool. A second assessment followed in 2019.

The resulting scorecard showed that YRCS was strong in some areas, such as auxiliary role, emergency needs assessment, coordination with the Movement and coordination with public authorities. However, the organisation fell short in significant areas, including scenario planning, emergency operations centres, information management, and hazard and context risk analysis and monitoring.

## Component Rating PER Cycles

Index	Component	PER Rating Value Cycle 1	PER Rating Value Cycle 2	PER Rating Value Cycle 3	PER Rating Value Cycle 4
1	1. RC Auxiliary Role, Mandate and Law		4		
2	2. Disaster Risk Management Strategy	1	3		
3	3. Disaster Risk Management Policy	1	3		
4	4. DRM Laws, Advocacy and Dissemination		1		
5	5. Quality and Accountability		1		
6	6. Hazard, Context and Risk Analysis, Monitoring and Early Warning	2	2		
7	7. Scenario Planning		1		
8	8. Risk Management		3		
9	9. Preparedness Plans and Budgets	2	1		
10	10. Business Continuity		2		
11	11. Emergency Response Procedures (SOPs)	2	1		
12	12. Response and Recovery Planning	1	1		
13	13. Pre-disaster Meetings and Agreements	1	2		
14	14.A. COMMUNITY-BASED DP AND DRR		2		
15	14.B. EVACUATION	2	2		
16	14.C. HEALTH IN EMERGENCIES	2	2		
17	14.D. FIRST AID	2	4		
18	14.E. WATER AND SANITATION	2	2		
19	14.F. FOOD SECURITY	2	3		
20	14.G. LIVELIHOOD SECURITY AND SAFETY NETS	2	3		
21	14.H. SEARCH AND RESCUE	2	3		
22	14.I. SHELTER, HOUSEHOLD ITEMS, SETTLEMENTS	2	3		
23	14.J. MANAGEMENT OF DEAD BODIES TO FACILITATE THEIR IDENTIFICATION	3	3		
24	14.K. RESTORING FAMILY LINKS (RFL)	2	3		
25	14.L. TRANSITION TO RECOVERY	2	1		
26	14.M. TECHNOLOGICAL AND BIOLOGICAL (CBRN) HAZARDS PREPAREDNESS	2			
27	14.N. COMMUNITY BASED HEALTH & FIRST AID (CBHFA)		3		
28	15. Mapping of NS Capacities	2	2		
29	16. Early Action Mechanisms		1		
30	17. Cash Based Intervention (CBI)	2	1		
31	18. Emergency Needs Assessment	3	4		
32	19. Affected Population Selection		3		
33	20. Emergency Operations Centre (EOC)	2	2		
34	21. Information Management (IM)	2	3		
35	22. Testing and Learning	2	1		
36	23. Activation of Regional and International Support		4		
37	24. Coordination with Movement	1	4		
38	25. Coordination with Authorities	1	4		
39	26. Coordination with External Agencies and NGOs	1	3		
40	27. Civil Military Relations	1	2		
41	28. Coordination with Local Community Level Responders	1	1		
42	29. Cooperation with Private Sector	1	3		

<sup>9</sup> IFRC's PER is a self-assessment tool that enables National Societies to systematically measure, analyse, prioritise and plan preparedness for response actions to ensure timely and effective humanitarian assistance in line with their auxiliary role and mandate. It considers all hazards (natural, biological, technological, among others) and is flexible enough to be used in different contexts. See: <https://www.ifrc.org/document/national-society-preparedness-effective-response-and-forecast-based-financing>

44	31. Operations Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Learning	3	2
45	32. Finance and Admin Policy and Emergency Procedures		2
46	33. Information and Communication Technology (ICT)	2	1
47	34. Logistics, Procurement and Supply Chain	2	2
48	35. Staff and Volunteer Management	2	3
49	36. Communication in Emergencies	3	3
50	37. Resource Mobilisation	2	1

The results of the PER process were positively received by YRCS's leadership, who made new NSD investments to further build the above capacities into the Disaster Response Management Department's action plan.

*"NSD is not a department – it's an integrated approach where every department is to ensure that 100% of its activities strengthen National Society Development to maximise the long-term benefits to the institution. When we used the PER process, we found that the DM department had been considerably strengthened over recent years through NSD investments, but we also learned that no department is an island on its own. But the humanitarian benefits of NSD investments are also clear.*

*"For example, as a result of risk mapping and management training for our volunteers and branches, in all branches we had prepositioned supplies and volunteers who had prepared communities before the rainy season, before a dam collapsed. No lives were lost and our preparedness as well as response capacities drew attention from a range of partners. We joined forces in our auxiliary role by contributing US\$28,000 to the improvement of the water supply system in Old Sana'a City, with the authorities providing the rest. The ICRC also joined us and supported the training of youth volunteers to reduce community risks in certain affected areas."*

Dr Mohammed Al Fakih, YRCS director of programmes

#### (iv) Branch, sub-branch and 'hub' development

The maps below, which cross-reference the "Total population in need" statistics with the "Severity of needs" summary for 2023, show the challenge YRCS faced in having to manage its organisational development to put the right people and resources in the right places to deliver the customised services that were needed. A key issue was how to ensure countrywide coverage, while maintaining the neutral, impartial, independent position required to secure acceptance and access, and so respond effectively to humanitarian needs among multiple groups and conflicts.



To strengthen its local level presence and ensure communities and organisations across multiple conflicts continued to see it as neutral, impartial and independent, YRCS maintained an ongoing focus on branch and sub-branch development. As a significant element of its overall localisation strategy over 12 years, its NSD investments included:

- ✓ each branch having its own steering committee in charge of planning, implementation, coordination, and collaboration with local actors (e.g. political parties, armed groups and tribes)
- ✓ facilitating and developing a branch network with a single set of standards, but the authority to reflect local profiles – so that each one had an extensive understanding of the diverse historical trajectories and social and political agendas of local actors



- ✓ establishing a 'hub' system through which clusters of four to five branches could support each other, mobilising collective resources to respond to local crises – for example, Branch Disaster Response Teams (BDRTs) in the area
- ✓ ensuring BDRTs were organised, trained, equipped and connected to YRCS emergency operations centres, and establishing warehouses across the country to devolve support and increase effectiveness of local preparedness and response actions
- ✓ undertaking ICRC's Safer Access Framework (SAF) processes,<sup>10</sup> which led to the creation of branch action plans, but recognising their limitations in terms of addressing wider integrated branch vulnerability assessments and sustainability strategies
- ✓ adopting IFRC's Branch Organisational Capacity Assessment (BOCA)<sup>11</sup> tool in 2019, and training nine YRCS staff and volunteers (a mix of men and women from both the north and south) who went on to facilitate BOCA in 18 out of 22 branches by 2022
- ✓ with IFRC support, ensuring that the eight elements of SAF were consistently integrated into all NSD activities, which included an effective merger with BOCA (the YRCS SAF officer was also a trained BOCA facilitator and ensured SAF elements were integrated into BOCA assessments).

YRCS's earlier phases between 2011-2017 saw a fractured approach to branch development. Some Partner National Societies (PNS) and the ICRC wanted to channel support directly to branches, but YRCS headquarters disagreed. YRCS departments were operating in silos, which challenged partners to deliver integrated cross-cutting programmes with integrated NSD support. For example, the Danish Red Cross (with funding from the European Union, European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) aimed to support programmes across health, mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) through branch development approaches, with YRCS selecting appropriate branches using its own vulnerability and capacity criteria. IFRC's earlier difficulty in providing coordination and leadership arose out of access issues to the country, which were rectified by 2017 with an intensified approach to NSD provided through an in-country NSD delegate.

A key outcome of YRCS's Organisational Capacity Assessment and Certification (OCAC) process was to invite nine branches to undertake the BOCA self-assessment exercise from 2019 onwards. However, although 18 out of 22 branches had completed extensive BOCA assessments by 2022, YRCS perceived a lack of support from partners to implement specific plans of action. Some partners, such as the Swedish Red Cross, did follow up with support to the post-BOCA branch plans of action. However, given that all Movement partners on the NSD Technical Working Group had committed to support BOCA in all branches, a branch mapping exercise was conducted to ensure gaps were addressed with coordinated support from Movement partners, linked to their specific areas of operational interest. There is now a concern that, because of rapidly changing external environments, most of the original BOCA need to be updated, and refreshed plans of action must then be urgently resourced to increase proximity to the most vulnerable populations.

To log and track the BOCA data, the IFRC's NSD delegate (supporting YRCS from December 2018 until August 2020) introduced the organisation to the Resource Management System (RMS),<sup>12</sup> a GIS-based software. Volunteer stipends of US\$100 per month were given to ensure data from each branch was uploaded, which included its assets, project profiles, staff and classification of volunteers by trainings undertaken. By August 2020, seven of the 11 BOCA reports completed had been uploaded, and by 2023, reports from 18 branches had been completed and logged. From 2022, stipends were no longer available, and instead volunteers received an hourly rate for RMS work.

*"The outcomes of our BOCA exercise have led to strengthened localised structures, greater sustainability and more focused use of our resources. We have added a GIS link to our RMS, as well as connected it to a YRCS Disaster Management Information System (DMIS) that connects to IFRC's global DMIS. This enabled us to use data such as the uploaded volunteer details and locations of our warehouses to improve decision making, and deploy volunteers and resources much more quickly in disasters and crises. In conflict-sensitive environments*

10 ICRC's SAF enables National Societies (NS) to further their understanding of what it takes to increase and/or maintain their acceptance among and access to people in need by understanding their operational context, taking stock of lessons learned, and assessing their strengths and challenges in relation to the application of the SAF elements and the Fundamental Principles. Safer Access: A Guide for All National Societies. International Committee of the Red Cross. <https://saferaccess.icrc.org/overview/>

11 IFRC's BOCA is a self-assessment tool developed for National Society branches to identify and assess their strengths, limitations and challenges in relation to a wide range of organisational capacities. It is used as a first step in a branch development process.

12 The RMS is a free web-based open source application. Customisation can be delivered by a consultant at cost if needed.





*where we need a stable presence, the BOCA results helped us to work with partners to purchase a number of branch buildings which we had previously only rented. We were considered more reliable by communities and parties to the conflict, and we now know we have five final branch buildings which we need to purchase to be more locally sustainable and reliable first responders.”*

Dr Mohammed Al Fakih, YRCS director of programmes

There have been persistent differences of opinion between YRCS and its partners on the vision for branch development. While partners continued to press for a more assertive approach to branch development, YRCS encouraged branches to present their own local ideas and have flexible resources without always having to follow and implement partners' wishes.

*“We seek partnerships and cross-sector collaborations to increase impact, and respectfully accommodate diversity of views. We need genuine partnerships that help us realise our vision, and to respectfully withdraw where they do not.”*

YRCS Strategic Plan 2016-2020

As a result of these tensions, from 2012 onwards YRCS pursued a local resource mobilisation strategy that enabled branches to respond to local issues and needs raised by communities that fell outside of partner support plans. This was articulated strongly in YRCS's Strategic Plan 2016-2020, which included the goal of “achieving long-term financial sustainability” linked to more independent humanitarian initiatives to support the Yemeni population.

The issue was also connected to the need to fulfil expectations raised by YRCS's enhanced approaches to community engagement and accountability mechanisms, which sought to respond better to local people's needs. This is illustrated by YRCS's struggle to resource the work of a volunteer who had been awarded the global Florence Nightingale Award for their efforts in providing emergency medical services over the years, and ran workshops on livelihood skill-building for women coming out of prison. This work was seen as a critically important local initiative, but fell outside of partners' interests.

*“The greatest challenge for us in the future is to support and sustain our humanitarian activities financially. We need strategies for long-term survival which will be possible only when we achieve decreased donor funding and increase internal resources. We understand that a balance between externally and internally generated resources is necessary to allow us to meet our operating and administrative expenses while maintaining the freedom to determine our program priorities and projects, irrespective of donor preferences.*

*“Most of the international funds from the Movement Partners and other donors are often earmarked for particular projects or for limited project cycles and limitations are attached on how money can be spent, designating particular issues or themes, or specifying support only for program expenses. This has made it difficult for us to raise adequate funds for our ongoing operational expenses. The current donor enthusiasm for project-based funding puts the emphasis on our humanitarian activities rather than on sustaining the organisation. In practice, institutional or organisational development remains a lower priority except for a few Movement partners.*

*“The discretionary income of the general population in Yemen is not enough to support YRCS's humanitarian work, therefore raising money from public is not an option. However, we see a significant opportunity to increase support from the government, from the growing mining and oil sectors, and from local and multi-national companies in Yemen.”*

YRCS Strategic Plan 2016-2020

From 2011, **financial sustainability** was a significant concern for YRCS, and it intensified efforts to improve the situation. This included a strategic focus on strengthening local resources, sustainability and acceptance, but very few partners responded with support. The only support YRCS received was an attempt by the Danish Red Cross to initiate a small grants scheme giving selected branches US\$5,000 to support people to set up micro-businesses. The power of YRCS's potential to work with local partners is yet to be fully explored. Previous inspiring partnerships on highly relevant local initiatives included a collaboration with local mobile phone companies to provide free phones and SIM cards to women in prison.



In 2022, YRCS received a grant from the National Society Investment Alliance (NSIA),<sup>13</sup> which helped it conduct a feasibility study for establishing a medical oxygen manufacturing plant. Using a locally contextualised resource mobilisation and income generation model, YRCS hopes to address a critical humanitarian health service gap by producing and selling desperately needed oxygen to key medical facilities across the country.

Looking ahead, the NSD investments supported by the NSIA will focus on income generation and resource mobilisation assessments, as articulated again in its Strategic Plan 2023-2027, to overcome continued reliance on partners for support at multiple levels.

*“The NSIA grant has, however, spurred YRCS to make a further investment to strengthen our positioning as a trusted local actor. We need to strengthen our internal legal base on fundraising. In April 2023, we held a workshop supported by IFRC on developing a clear fundraising policy to guide YRCS stakeholders on transparency, accountability, and responsibilities at all local and national levels. Once we have a working policy supporting a working model of sustainable local income that we expect from the oxygen supply project, we will apply for the NSIA’s Accelerator Funding to scale it up across the territory. We also expect such income to help to pay for our own salaries instead of having to rely on Movement partners for 100% of our salary costs at present.”*

Dr Mohammed Al Fakh, YRCS director of programmes



*YRCS volunteer Majed teaches children living in a slum about ways to protect themselves from cholera, including how to wash their hands with soap before and after eating.*

<sup>13</sup> The NSIA is jointly managed by the IFRC and the ICRC and provides tailored investment to develop the capacity of National Societies to undertake sustainable humanitarian services through two types of funding: 1) accelerator funding, up to a maximum of CHF 1 million for three to five years; and 2) bridge funding of up to CHF 50,000 over one year.

## 5. Strengthening 'visibility'

### (i) Investments in volunteers and youth

*"We are careful in the selection of volunteers, who need to be perceived as trusted local people. They need to be either from a tribe, close to a tribe, or neutral to a tribe. Screening is not always possible versus the need to select volunteers who have access. One example was: when ICRC struggled with access to hospitals in Taiz, YRCS mobilised volunteers from their local 'reliable network' who had credibility to bring medicines through the checkpoints."*

Partner National Society

Because YRCS is seen to be 'doing everything' in many communities, it automatically attracts volunteers without having to run public recruitment campaigns. This has both positive and negative implications. For example, fearing the risks that could come with new volunteers, YRCS has never proactively pushed to expand its volunteer base, focusing instead on ensuring adherence to the Fundamental Principles.

*"During the last part of 2020 and in early 2021, the main hostilities focused on the city of Marib. The city was totally divided and contested by both sides in the conflict. It was under two governments, but had only one unified branch – with YRCS being the only actor that was accepted to provide first aid, medical assistance and rescue for 10-15,000 people."*

IFRC

When the conflict escalated in 2015, YRCS suspended the recruitment of all volunteers and youth. It feared that personal politics could undermine its position as a neutral, impartial and independent organisation, at a time when these qualities needed to be widely publicly accepted for YRCS to be able to deliver humanitarian services.

Tragically, YRCS lost 11 volunteers and 2 staff between 2015 and 2018. Recognising that IFRC and Movement tools for ensuring volunteer and staff safety were often used separately from programme and service guidelines, YRCS worked on several initiatives to address such gaps, including:

- ✓ integrating tools to ensure minimum protection standards to complement DRR programming
- ✓ striving to make sure each village or community had one male and one female volunteer to address gender gaps and 'mahram' obligations, to help women and girls feel comfortable
- ✓ mobilising women volunteers in communities that specifically needed them rather than men (e.g. to contact and support women-headed families in communities of internally displaced people)
- ✓ appointing a YRCS gender officer in 2016, who also brought back learning from other National Societies in the region (e.g. the Lebanese Red Cross's gender-based violence training)
- ✓ adapting IFRC and Movement-wide volunteer mobilisation guidelines to local contexts to foster and sustain acceptance, starting with YRCS's 2013 Volunteer Management Guidelines, which were further strengthened after undertaking the SAF self-assessment in 2015/16
- ✓ developing YRCS systems to better match specific volunteer profiles with the communities they were part of, or were asked to visit (including considerations around political, tribal and cultural affiliations where necessary)
- ✓ appointing youth in 2019, and a youth focal point in the Organisational Development Department in 2021, who initiated a youth policy development process
- ✓ introducing several Youth as Agents of Behavioural Change (YABC) sessions in branches from 2021 onwards to encourage youth activities, led by the youth focal point
- ✓ acknowledging the need for more focus on youth roles and capacities, even though most volunteers fell within the IFRC's definition of youth (being aged between 18 and 35)



- ✓ asking the Italian Red Cross to help strengthen youth policy, adapt IFRC's Youth Engagement Strategy (YES), and further implement YABC training to train more branches to help make contributing to social inclusion and peace a focus of YRCS's youth wing
- ✓ using the COVID-19 response to better strengthen YRCS's relationships with communities, with a focus on vulnerable groups, by: introducing community engagement and accountability (CEA) mechanisms that built community trust; recruiting more women volunteers to expand health programmes; and expanding traditional 'single sectoral' programmes (e.g. community-based health and first aid (CBHFA)), to lead into wider community-based programming that addressed at-risk groups, such as pregnant mothers and others needing nutrition.

YRCS launched its Psychosocial Support (PSS) Programme in 2015, with significant NSD inputs tailored to the context. The programme targeted local communities, focusing on women and children because they are disproportionately impacted by violence and conflict, and Yemen has a high child population. An escalation in the conflict had caused tragic civilian losses and increasing fear, so the programme was launched to communities with the title: *Psychosocial Support Reduces Fear and Raises Smiles in the Faces of Children and Women in Particular, and Communities in General*. Supported by IFRC and the German Red Cross, YRCS targeted the most affected governorates and partnered with UNHCR to reach internally displaced people. As a YRCS head of branch remarked, the organisation was considered *"the best actor in the field"*. The programme's objectives included:

- building the capacity of volunteers in YRCS branches and establishing psychosocial support teams to respond quickly when needed
- building the capacity of social workers in schools to benefit the largest number of children through psychosocial support activities
- alleviating the suffering of the most vulnerable by assisting them to adapt quickly to the conflict affected situation
- inspiring smiles and joy in children to counteract the psychological pressure for children and parents, especially women
- raising the self-confidence of people with special needs
- providing psychosocial support to displaced people and others
- disseminating the principles and concepts of child protection
- raising awareness of safety guidelines before, during and after shelling
- running first aid courses for parents and children as part of the programme activities.

## (ii) 'Duty of care' considerations

Before the conflict escalated in 2015, YRCS had not focused on the safety and security of its volunteers, despite encouragement to do so through its SAF assessments. However, prompted by intensifying violence and increasing casualties, YRCS invested in a range of NSD investments to enhance its ability to meet its duty of care to volunteers and staff in dangerous settings. This resulted in a reduction in harm to volunteers from 11 deaths and six injuries in 2015/16 to zero since then. Activities included:

- ✓ strengthening YRCS's Volunteer Management Guidelines of 2013 with new elements resulting from the 2015/16 SAF self-assessment
- ✓ customising and adopting IFRC's Code of Conduct to guide and protect volunteers from risks, in line with local and national laws
- ✓ establishing YRCS's own Trust Fund for Volunteers in 2020, supported by all its partners (IFRC, ICRC, Danish Red Cross, German Red Cross and Norwegian Red Cross) contributing up to US\$10,000 per year to support volunteers and their families in the case of fatality, serious casualty, or serious sickness (the IFRC's Global Volunteer Insurance Fund was found to be too cumbersome and slow, and required pre-payment to volunteers in any case)
- ✓ using learning from COVID-19 operations to further strengthen YRCS's internal volunteer safety and security guidelines.





### (iii) Dissemination and communications

YRCS established its Media and Publicity Department in the early 1990s, led by a central management team at the headquarters, with publication and media officers in all of Yemen's governorates. The department was set up with the aim of reaching a wide range of groups across Yemen, including influential figures, members of armed groups, local councils, civilians, IDPs, vulnerable communities, local NGOs, volunteers and the media. Initially, it focused on promoting awareness of:

- the origins of the international Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement
- the different components of the Movement and their roles in peace and wartime
- the Movement's seven Fundamental Principles
- international humanitarian law.

The Media and Publicity Department worked to ensure YRCS's positioning was clearly understood among a wide variety of external stakeholders. With the appointment of a new communications director in 2019, who had previously been at the ICRC, its priorities and NSD investments expanded to include:

- ✓ strengthening internal and external communications capacities to promote awareness about the magnitude of the suffering Yemen
- ✓ training communications officers in 20 branches
- ✓ familiarising local communities with the work, structure and Fundamental Principles of the international Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement to facilitate access for field teams (in 2021 alone this work reached 175 school health workers, 113 members of civil society, 252 local authority staff and 31 arms carriers)
- ✓ helping promote equitable access to support for women, girls, boys and men
- ✓ conducting field surveys to inform the final selection of the beneficiary districts and communities in target governorates
- ✓ carrying out awareness campaigns on specific topics (e.g. hygiene, diseases, epidemics, first aid, psychosocial support) across a range of channels, such as TV, radio, posters, short electronic clips, brochures, signs and interactive theatre
- ✓ developing innovative content in Arabic and English for YRCS's website and social media, and building a presence on key online channels.

YRCS has sometimes deliberately downplayed its media presence to avoid misunderstandings and misinformation about its work. But where the media has been used to profile the organisation's neutral, impartial and independent position, it has increased community acceptance and access. When community members were asked to give an example of a service provided by YRCS that no one else could deliver, answers included:

*"The exchange that we saw on television and on the ground for the exchange of prisoners between the warring parties... the efforts of the YRCS showed us their full commitment to neutrality and providing service to all parties without looking at anything else."*

*"Recovering dead bodies during conflicts and transporting the wounded during wars and providing assistance without any discrimination in society."*

*"Expanding its field of work and branches, increasing its volunteers in all regions, providing assistance to the community of different types (displaced, host community), and being close to citizens in that Red Crescent volunteers are many and from most segments and classes of society; you find in YRCS most of the services needed by the citizens."*

Community members



## 6. Strengthening 'legacy'

### (i) Building on past perceptions and access

*"YRCS's legacy of commitments to dynamic change and adaptation to meet evolving circumstances have been the basis of its long-term credibility. Whether responding to severe floods in 2008, or addressing allegations of financial misappropriation in 2011 (which fuelled a leadership change in response to the wider Arab Spring movement in 2012), it has not shied away from organisational transformations that have replaced governance in 2012 and since then strengthened branches over time to meet the changing needs of local populations."*

Partner National Society

YRCS has consistently recognised that access and acceptance are an outcome of localisation. They are gained through decades of local investments and interaction with tribal leaders and local authorities. Time and again, YRCS has launched strong community-based responses to disasters – including floods, droughts, conflicts and health-based crises – where volunteers come from their own villages, and most activities are carried out jointly with local stakeholders, opening doors by mobilising local resources.

YRCS has often been challenged by public authorities in areas where it works to justify new projects or programmes, or made to apply for a No Objection Certificate (NOC) in order to proceed. It can only succeed in these negotiations and navigate into new areas of work because of the credibility it has gained through decades of humanitarian work, supported by multiple NSD investments.

*"It's the outcomes of long-term NSD investments that led to a legacy that no other local organisations enjoy. Continuity of governance and management, persistent humanitarian diplomacy to navigate external politics and pressures, strong community relations through the clinic network, and volunteers who have often given more than 20-40 years of service have enabled the National Society to "keep it all together."*

IFRC

To resist pressures from local authorities and governments, YRCS's legacy therefore depends on NSD investments that can:

- ✓ show that investments in local branches, sub-branches, volunteers and staff have delivered valued long-term services in communities that 'new' programmes are simply building on (it is harder to get NOCs where there are no past YRCS programmes or services). For example, it took 12 months of negotiation to get approval for an 18-month ECHO-supported mother and child health (MCH) programme, until authorities saw the benefits of YRCS's longer-term work in this area
- ✓ sustain principled volunteers who can give examples of neutrality and impartiality to gain access and acceptance (e.g. "We're the people who can help your brother and sister when something similar happens to them")
- ✓ build on long-term partnerships that enhanced local credibility (e.g. YRCS community health teams of 30 volunteers in each branch who are trained in local assessments, set up in 2012).

### (ii) Maintaining a Movement footprint

From 2016 onwards, YRCS accelerated its work to build key capacities, auditing volunteers' availability to find out how many were active, on hold and on standby. As a result of the credibility built by its NSD investments, the organisation was invited to be part of the civil protection mechanisms of government, mobilising volunteers to support actions as needed.

In such a politicised environment, this expanded capacity and role also came with risks. When the Ministry of Health challenged YRCS's integrity and tried to take it over, YRCS, ICRC and IFRC helped the minister to understand how doing this would tear apart the National Society in both the north and south of Yemen, threatening the organisation's existence.



Their success relied on being able to show the authorities that with over 60 years of humanitarian activity and trusted local volunteers in every part of the territory, plus ICRC's significant humanitarian budget and IFRC's ability to raise financial support from other members globally, YRCS's neutral, impartial and independent positioning meant it was best placed to meet the needs of the most vulnerable in every part of the territory, but only if it remained one institution with the same Fundamental Principles everywhere.

*"The National Society, with its NSD investments in its strong national legal base, local volunteers, and enduring trust, supported by the whole Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement globally, was the main message that led the authorities to respect its independence."*

IFRC

### **(iii) A new form of organisational development resulting from conflict**

*"We see organisational development as an enabling function to effectively carry out humanitarian mandates of alleviating human suffering and working with vulnerable people."*

YRCS Strategic Plan 2016-2020

The escalation of Yemen's conflict from 2015 onwards pushed YRCS to deliver scaled-up humanitarian services through minimum structures, systems and standards due to pressure from governments, partners and other actors. This led to NSD investments in areas such as overall governance, organisational development, transparency and accountability, clarity over decision-making powers and decentralisation.

*"NSD for the sake of NSD doesn't work. It needs programme entry points with a focus on deepening localisation, preparedness for response capacities, and long-term strategic processes – often achieved through a conscious set of more 'short-term' partner-funded programmes"*

Partner National Society

It became clear that NSD in conflict contexts meant building organisational delivery capacity through programmes and services, while recognising both the distinction and the connections between organisational development (changing culture, behaviour and competencies) and capacity strengthening (improving operational support).

YRCS acceptance in communities across Yemen is largely as a legacy of its work providing life-saving care to mothers and children at health clinics across the country. But it has also made long-term investments in its capacity and preparedness for emergency response, supported by the British Red Cross and the Swedish Red Cross. Although the British Red Cross's support ended in 2018, the outcomes of this were significant, and included:

- ✓ establishing a clear disaster management (DM) structure and developing DM manuals with consultancy support
- ✓ implementing a strong disaster risk reduction (DDR) approach at community level that involved practical work to build infrastructure to prevent landslides, and pave roads to enable access for emergency teams after cyclones
- ✓ providing small community funds to support locally identified risk reduction priorities
- ✓ providing DM kits and BDRT training
- ✓ completing community-led EVCA with rapid assessment skill building in highly vulnerable communities, with support for the resulting plans of action
- ✓ linking NSD with humanitarian outcomes: as stated by Dr Mohammed Al Fakih, YRCS director of programmes, *"NSD doesn't happen overnight – we're trying to develop NSD in parallel with emergency response"*.



YRCS's unified structure, solid organisational base and position as a countrywide humanitarian institution make it an attractive and strategic partner. This led several Partner National Societies to significantly scale up their funding for disaster response, resulting in a huge increase in capacity: between 2017 and 2019, YRCS responded to 4,000 emergency incidents; by 2023, it had responded to over 35,000 incidents in a single year through local capacities.

This increase in funding from the Movement also meant greater coordination was needed between partners, as different organisations were supporting multiple elements of the same programme. For example, to support YRCS's health centre network and primary care clinics, the Norwegian Red Cross helped with medical costs and finance development (in partnership with the ICRC), the Danish Red Cross with logistics development, and the German Red Cross with protection, gender and inclusion.

Although welcome, these partnerships also brought transactional costs and risks in terms of the dangers of dependence on foreign funds and longer-term lack of sustainability. ICRC and other partners paid for YRCS staff to deliver their short-term humanitarian targets. With the salaries all of its 515 staff, including the 273 positions supported by ICRC, being paid by partners, YRCS's long-term existence is at risk. If any form of partner funding were to reduce or be withdrawn, YRCS's salary structures would be at stake.

In March 2020, YRCS carried out the IFRC's Organisational Capacity Assessment and Certification (OCAC) process, which helped it to identify key gaps in organisational capacities as part of its longer-term transformation process. This has played an important role in building consensus within a National Society that exists in a divided territory. In an environment where access to southern and northern parts of the territory were not feasible for all staff, the OCAC process enabled representatives from selected branches to meet and share achievements in strengthening systems and procedures. It also enabled Movement partners to take further steps to coordinate their support plans to avoid duplication – for example, the Norwegian Red Cross supported finance development with a two-year delegate deployment.

To address the gaps identified in the OCAC process in a way that effectively coordinated support from across the Movement, YRCS linked the resulting plan of action to a National Society Development Initiative (NSDI) (see section 8 (ii) below.)

The 2023 truce between the parties to Yemen's conflict opens up the fragile prospect of a lasting peace. With this in mind, both YRCS and its Movement partners will need to develop a plan to secure the organisation's sustainability once funds related to conflict response stop flowing.



*The Yemen Red Crescent Society supports families affected by heavy rain and the floods, delivering household items related to shelter, water, sanitation and hygiene. This response was supported by IFRC's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF).*





## 7. Strengthening ‘reputation’

### (i) Legal base foundations

YRCS was founded as a unitary National Society in October 1993. This followed the establishment of the Republic of Yemen on 22 May 1990, when the Yemen Arab Republic (North Yemen), and the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen) merged. Previously, the first Society had been founded in Aden on 18th January 1968, and the second in Sana’a on 16th July 1970 by Presidential Decree No. 15 of 1970. Under a unified status, recognition by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in April 1982 was followed by admission to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) in October 1982.

For over 50 years, the Yemen Red Crescent Society (YRCS) has operated in all 22 governorates of the country, striving to help communities build their resilience to prepare for and respond to disasters of all kinds. YRCS enjoys broad acceptance from communities, government agencies and all non-state armed actors as parties to the long-running conflicts in country. Its credibility comes from its nationwide presence of 8,159 community-based volunteers, 515 staff, 22 branches (each with between one and 15 staff) and 17 sub-branches, through which YRCS can access areas no other national or international humanitarian organisation has been able to reach.

To preserve this position, YRCS has made sensitive NSD investments, including:

- ✓ maintaining a stable north-south representation at its national governance board which *“fosters unity within its structure and soothes interpersonal dynamics emanating from the country’s fragmentation”*
- ✓ empowering branches to manage power and conflict dynamics as they affect and influence YRCS programming, to help the National Society navigate contextual intricacies and sensitivities
- ✓ recognising that maintaining diverse governance at local and national levels involves highly transactional costs when seeking agreement – particularly when using traditional tribal approaches to finding consensus – and takes more time
- ✓ from 2012 onwards, transferring a lot of management power from the national governance board to the secretary general, to enable quick, effective and responsive operational decision-making
- ✓ temporarily transferring governance responsibilities to senior management while YRCS’s president role remained vacant for some years, which delivered continuity but led to some confusion over distinctions between governance and management
- ✓ in May 2023, appointing a new YRCS executive director to more clearly separate governance and management.

Despite these NSD investments, the external environment greatly restricts YRCS’s ability to ensure a consistent presence in all parts of the country. Some YRCS staff have been temporarily imprisoned for defending their beliefs, pride and honour, and staff from YRCS headquarters cannot visit southern branches due to security restrictions. Amidst a complex interplay between internal and external factors, YRCS has managed its internal tensions, but *“a matter of survival means you have to be flexible with the authorities”*.

### (ii) Auxiliary role, statutes and their interpretation

In YRCS’s auxiliary role, areas such as health and disaster management are normally part of shared responsibilities with state authorities. The crisis has created a very complex relationship between and YRCS and Yemen’s public authorities, which has tested the concept of an auxiliary role to its limits. Since the government’s resources are limited, YRCS is often the first organisation with the capacity to prevent and respond to disasters and crises. However, the space for humanitarian actors is often controlled and narrow.

YRCS has consistently found ways of demonstrating its allegiance to all seven Fundamental Principles, emphasising Humanity, Neutrality and Impartiality to achieve acceptance and access. However, upholding the principle of Independence has often proven challenging.



*"Although it is hardly ever at 100%, YRCS's central and branch leadership are really trying to be independent and argue for their auxiliary role. The government doesn't 'instrumentalise' the National Society too much..."*

*"When the conflict escalated, even the government in Sana'a tried to impose their 'own people' but YRCS's leadership managed to avoid this."*

*"In a very fine balance with local authorities, YRCS could perhaps have been more proactive in proposing other activities beyond being allowed by the local authorities to do what they do."*

ICRC Cooperation Team

YRCS has found ways of maintaining 'balanced operations'. For example, when rehabilitating schools in the most remote and war damaged areas, it has agreed to requests from the Ministry of Education to support other schools in non-conflict areas too.

Although some Movement partners have questioned the lack of rotation in governance, YRCS needed to maintain the appropriate existing balance of profiles that gives them connections to many diverse interests across the territory. In addition, it has also been a challenge for YRCS to organise elections according to its statutes. The last full elections were held in 1997, although Governing Council elections were held in 2020 in response to pressure from public authorities. However, a higher priority for YRCS has been the need to maintain a strategic balance that comprises a stable north-south representation at its national governance board. This fosters unity within its structure and soothes interpersonal dynamics resulting from the country's fragmentation.

*"In Yemen you're powerful not because of your position, but because of your connections."*

YRCS branch leader

*"Since YRCS's president left 12 years ago, his role is in still in place, but he is no longer actively involved in the National Society's affairs and decision-making. YRCS has had to make pragmatic changes to adapt to new realities. These have been taken at a 'human cost', with the secretary general assuming the role of a main leader, and branches being acutely aware of the risk of interference from the southern and northern authorities. YRCS cannot hold transparent and democratic elections as they'll lose space and reputation. The NSD agenda has had to focus on the 'humanitarian imperative'. It means sacrifices, and in some contexts local leadership having to show 'bias' in life or death situations when facing fierce actors."*

IFRC

To remain neutral, YRCS has to balance beliefs, intuition and longer-term stability, while always siding with the victims through its frontline responsibilities.

*"When something severe happens, people suspend disputes and focus on immediate humanitarian priorities. With our NSD investments that guaranteed a consistent national presence, if a partner or donor offers support, such as the refurbishment or building of four health facilities, we say, 'yes, but two in the north and two in the south'."*

YRCS headquarters director

In the strategic context, despite acknowledging YRCS's frontline humanitarian capacities, neither the Ministry of Health nor other ministries have allocated funds to support its services as an auxiliary to the government. Ironically, the government has often asked for funds from YRCS, misunderstanding its status as an international NGO.

Operationally, the authorities have often imposed strict bureaucratic procedures, not allowing field visits in some locations, even for national staff. Examples of bureaucratic challenges and strong interference from the authorities include having to get a No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the Supreme Council for Management and Coordination of Humanitarian and International Cooperation (SCMCHA). To work in these areas, organisations must maintain an extremely low profile and sometimes use different terminology that is more accepted by local authorities.



YRCS adjusts to this reality by coordinating at different levels, importantly at the national level with SCMCHA, and presenting its humanitarian innovations in a way that builds on previous projects. By making NSD investments in developing its national and local 'interlocutor' system, YRCS navigates these obstacles through formal and informal ways of coordinating with ministries, non-state armed actors, and armed groups. The interlocutor network has brought significant benefits, encouraging greater sympathy, cultural understanding and respect from some counterparts in the authorities. One Ministry of Education official commented: *"Building a school or health centres is the same as going to Haj"*.

### (iii) Building social inclusion and peace

*"The project of strengthening social ties and reunifying people and families, as well as our participation in prisoner exchanges and facilitating awareness activities at local and national level, has improved our community acceptance. Whether it is awareness about peace, mines or international humanitarian law, we strengthen community acceptance and goodwill. We deliver the Fundamental Principles through practical actions, whether by providing food and shelter to the poor, providing free health care services, or recovering bodies and providing ambulance services."*

Branch disaster management manager

From 2011 onwards, YRCS consistently used programme and service planning to contribute to social inclusion and peace. Building up youth and 'youth corners' for organised youth activities in different governorates with German Red Cross support were a way of strengthening its social inclusion and peace work. School children who returned to class after the 2011 conflict didn't know much about first aid, which gave YRCS an easy entry point to begin working with them. This led into clearer psychosocial support, which was also integrated into YRCS's health services.

But the situation changed from 2013/14 onwards as access and security issues for international organisations became more challenging, resulting in increasing kidnappings of volunteers. While responding to growing long-term humanitarian needs across the country, YRCS realised it needed to change its positioning and focus. Its vision was to move from a purely response-focused set of services to one that strengthened communities' resilience by improving local awareness and mitigation of risks, as well as their ability to manage local responses using local sustainable resources and volunteers. This led YRCS to develop a second innovative approach during this period.

#### **YRCS's Integrated Conflict Preparedness Project (ICP), supported by the German Red Cross (GRC) from December 2012 – January 2015**

This programme was launched to address and mitigate the long-term effects of conflict. It targeted the governorates of Taiz and Sana'a city and lasted for two years, ending in December 2014. The original objective was to overcome the impact of conflict on schools, many of which had been occupied by military forces as a result of the Arab Spring demonstrations. The ICP:

- targeted schools for reconstruction, refurbishment and revitalisation through humanitarian advocacy with the Ministry of Education
- encouraged students to return to schools, particularly encouraging girls' and young women's education by focusing on gender-sensitive aspects of rehabilitation to offer protection
- involved volunteers in building the capacities of 'fathers and mothers councils' to encourage participation and ownership among local communities
- facilitated public education campaigns to discourage young people from joining armed groups
- distributed first aid kits, materials and training to communities affected by ongoing violence and conflict
- developed a psychosocial support (PSS) programme to help young people recover from violence and promote social harmony (including applying for ECHO funding to expand the programme to other governorates and develop a PSS manual supported through a contractual agreement with the Palestine Red Crescent Society, which had acknowledged excellence in this area)
- continued the PSS programme after the official end in 2016 with continued support from ECHO and the Danish Red Cross.



While always conscious of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, YRCS aimed to also learn from the Lebanese Red Cross and other National Societies that had a similar focus on ambulance, first aid and first responder services, strengthened through a range of integrated NSD investments within their programmes, as the examples below illustrate.

- ✓ From 2013, YRCS used DRR programming to build local staff and volunteer capacity to take three steps to more effective locally-led action.
  - o Step 1: strengthen capacities to analyse the 'connectors and dividers' between actors, including those who are party to conflicts, through stakeholder mapping.
  - o Step 2: assist communities to form core groups to plan risk reduction measures (e.g. community-based committees for search and rescue, first aid, etc).
  - o Step 3: support small-scale mitigation projects in schools (e.g. early warning mechanisms, strengthening infrastructure, etc, in areas with armed groups nearby).
- ✓ YRCS trained volunteers to negotiate with armed groups through patient negotiation over time. This included: announcing proposed activities in villages, preparing local sheikhs and tribal leaders, giving communities time before exploring next steps, being opportunistic in seeking access, focusing on local authority structures where they could achieve the most, and looking to cooperate with other organisations to have collective impact, for example on malnutrition.
- ✓ Launching campaigns to counter armed groups' efforts to recruit child soldiers in schools.

YRCS's NSD investments have ensured that its trained and locally present volunteers promote social inclusion and peace wherever possible in their daily actions.

*"We provide a minimum level of livelihood to those affected by conflict, such as providing camps for displaced persons, providing them with some assistance, and integrating them into local communities. Impartiality, humanity, non-discrimination, and the involvement of women in many matters play a big role in reducing conflict and strengthening family ties, such as helping detainees come together with their families."*

YRCS branch leader



*One and-a-half-year-old Ahmad attends the cholera clinic at al-Sabeen hospital in Sana'a. He and his family are originally from Sa'ida, but are now displaced. The clinic is run by WHO, but YRCS volunteers deliver daily hygiene and cholera awareness with patients and their families. Photo: Maria Korkunc/Norwegian Red Cross*



*The Yemen Red Crescent Society intensifies its relief efforts during the pause in conflict, and mobilises its staff and volunteers to deliver relief and aid services to people across the country.*



*A Yemen Red Crescent Society team sterilises schools during the final exams period in 12 governorates.*





## 8. Strengthening ‘integrity’

### (i) The role of YRCS’s statutes

YRCS’s statutes were last updated in 2003, with the approval of the IFRC/ICRC Joint Statutes Commission (JSC) in Geneva. It has not been possible to update them since because of sensitivities resulting from the armed conflict. However, YRCS has strengthened several internal procedures, such as the ongoing separation of governance and management, and the role and function of branches and ‘hubs’. These need to be formalised when the statutes are next revised.

*“Whereas our existing statutes serve as a broad base to regulate relations between the headquarters and branches, we need to ensure that the next updated version achieves greater clarification in a number of areas that will further strengthen our operational capacities. These include, for example, a harmonisation of the language and roles related to volunteers and staff, the options around reinstating membership, the formalisation of codes of conduct, the formalisation of policymaking processes and management systems to implement them, and the setting out of processes for capacity strengthening of governance at all levels. This updating process will be prioritised in the near future to enhance our operational capacities and impact”*

Dr Mohammed Al Fakih, YRCS director of programmes

While waiting for an appropriate time to modernise its statutes, YRCS made NSD investments to strengthen the organisation’s structure and impact. It established branch ‘hubs’, whose purpose was to:

- foster and improve community resilience
- build a strong National Society and strengthen influence and partnerships.

The hubs aimed to provide:

- 1) improved immediate support and assistance to families and communities affected by disasters and crises
- 2) a disaster preparedness platform covering national and governorate levels, with capacities and resources to respond effectively to disasters and crises
- 3) implementation of YRCS’s regularly reviewed and updated coordination, cooperation and resource mobilisation plans, covering key stakeholders and partners at all levels
- 4) strengthened internal YRCS mechanisms for coordination, cooperation and ongoing support to disaster management.

### (ii) Maintaining centralised governance overseeing a decentralised branch network

YRCS has managed development and revision of its legal base with extreme care to avoid the possibility of being overtaken by factional and political interests. Its last governance board elections were held in 1997. Some Movement members have criticised how slow YRCS has been to update its legal base (in particular its decree and statutes). However, to maintain perceptions of its overall neutrality, impartiality and independence amidst a fractured external environment, YRCS has been cautious to maintain a fragile and sensitive balance, both within its national leadership, and in terms of the relationship between its national governance board and branch network.

Having a decentralised branch network within a unitary structure ensures that each branch has its own steering committee in charge of planning, implementation, coordination and collaboration with local actors (e.g. political parties, armed groups, tribes). The wider implications and successes of this NSD strategy are covered in section 9 of this case study.



### (iii) Strengthening transparency and accountability

In operational contexts where it was impossible for international personnel to access and review, monitor or evaluate programme progress, YRCS made NSD investments to build local capacities. These aimed to ensure transparent and accountable reporting of its services, performance and use of resources, both to the communities it serves and to stakeholders supporting its work.

Key NSD investments to strengthen this area included:

- ✓ building the capacity of local branch and sub-branch staff and volunteers to undertake data collection – both manually and, more recently, using online systems – with extreme sensitivity to and awareness of ‘connectors and dividers’ in conflict-sensitive communities that do no harm
- ✓ adopting its Financial and Procurement Regulations in 2016, with the technical and financial support of the Norwegian Red Cross and IFRC respectively (and ongoing updates since then)
- ✓ adopting its Fraud and Corruption Prevention Policy in 2022, in conjunction with IFRC and the Norwegian Red Cross, and completing training in eight branches out of 22 by 2023
- ✓ adopting a CASH policy, with other policies close to completion in the areas of branch development, communications, and finance regulations and policy
- ✓ accepting Danish Red Cross support, with EU funds, for a five-year integrated programme across community engagement and accountability (CEA), protection, gender and inclusion (PGI), and MHPSS, focused on strengthening the capacity of women volunteers, staff and community members
- ✓ establishing a CEA unit and appointing a compliance officer within the Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting (PMER) Department, with wider CEA training planned for 2023
- ✓ putting in place stronger feedback and complaint mechanisms (including a better level of follow-up engagement with local authorities and external partners) to strengthen trust, credibility, acceptance and access
- ✓ achieving noticeable improvements in PMER since the unit was established in mid-2022.

Two recent achievements are indicators of how much YRCS has improved itself as an institution. The first is an agreement with ADRA that has channelled US\$300,000 through YRCS for emergency response. The second is a UN micro-finance capacity assessment that put YRCS in the ‘low risk’ category, compared to its previous status of ‘medium risk’ in 2016.

As a result of NSD investments that have strengthened YRCS’s institutional capacities, several other non-Movement partners have chosen it as a partner to reach communities that no other organisation can. These include the World Food Programme (WFP), International Labour Organization (ILO), International Organization for Migration (IOM), and a significant investment from UNHRC in YRCS’s ability to build the capacities and resilience of IDPs. This trusted status, as well as NSD investments YRCS has made in building its communications and humanitarian diplomacy skills, have led to the organisation being an active participant in a number of humanitarian cluster groups,

including those on returnees and migrants (with IOM), shelter, CASH, community camp management, food security, protection, WASH, livelihoods and education.

In recognition of its trusted status as the key local humanitarian actor, YRCS has also been a leading member of the National Yemen Humanitarian Forum and trained 12 local NGOs annually since 2016



*Local branches of Yemen Red Crescent Society distribute aid including blankets, mattresses, kitchen sets and hygiene kits to families who lost their homes to floods in August 2021. The response was supported by CHF 205,332 in funding from the IFRC.*



## 9. Strengthening Movement cooperation and coordination – building complementarity and collective impact

YRCS has enjoyed long-term partnerships with a range of Partner National Societies, with partner activity intensifying when the conflict escalated in 2015. By 2018, ten PNS were in country supporting programmes in multiple sectors – YRCS's NSD investments included establishing and strengthening departments in health, logistics, finance, human resources and SAF. Recognising that partners had different NSD agendas driven by their specific international strategies and approach to NSD, YRCS realised it needed a complementary support strategy and a platform for dialogue. It had three key objectives under its agenda to strengthen movement cooperation and coordination, as outlined below.

### (i) Using and adapting existing Movement mechanisms to enhance overall cooperation and coordination in country

Since 2011, YRCS has maintained several mechanisms and platforms to improve cooperation and coordination between its partners, and ensure NSD was not seen as separate from service delivery. The most prominent of these are:

- ✓ annual partnership meetings to facilitate coordinated Movement support for YRCS's overall development, with NSD for sustainable service delivery as a permanent priority topic
- ✓ exploring innovative partnership approaches, such as an early 'Operational Alliance' (OA) model, focused on coordinating tools and resources for a community-based health and first aid (CBHFA) programme with IFRC, the Danish Red Cross and Norwegian Red Cross. The OA model enabled resources to be pooled, with periodic visits from technical support specialists rather than heavy expatriate staff structures
- ✓ brokering human, technical and financial support from several sources, including peer National Societies from the region (CBHFA from Syrian Arab Red Crescent; strengthening of the National Disaster Management Team from Lebanese Red Cross)
- ✓ Yemen being a priority pilot country (together with Ukraine and Sudan) for the Strengthening Movement Coordination and Cooperation (SMCC) tool, before it was approved by the IFRC's General Assembly as a Movement-wide tool. This supported openness between the IFRC and ICRC, and helped improve mutual understanding, positive personal communication and relationship dynamics at both regional and country levels
- ✓ agreements between ICRC and IFRC to join forces to scale up their contribution to YRCS's development in a coordinated and complementary way. This began with ICRC supporting IFRC with NSD costs of approximately CHF 10 million between 2017 and 2023 – formalised in a trilateral agreement between YRCS, IFRC and ICRC in August 2021
- ✓ the development of a YRCS NSD Initiative, from November 2018 onwards, that became an important milestone in the unfolding of YRCS's vision and strong desire to pursue a comprehensive NSD strategy, with harmonised Movement support
- ✓ a YRCS's 2019 NSD concept note outlined its purpose, strategy and priorities in NSD, with a framework for developing plans of action and key steps. The annual partnership meetings reaffirmed an 'Enhancing Movement Response in Yemen' initiative which created the enabling environment for NSD in the short and long term, as a result of which IFRC deployed an NSD delegate
  - o This new model aimed to deliver a "complimentary coordinated humanitarian response" for the benefit of all affected populations, and to be better understood and trusted by all authorities, parties to conflicts across the territory and donors.
  - o Through this new initiative YRCS's Movement partners pledged collective support to three workstreams to achieve a greater operational impact: Project to programme approach; Movement logistics; and Movement picture/operational planning.



Despite these very positive achievements on Movement cooperation and coordination, challenges remain, including:

- the current lack of roadmaps setting out clear targets, expected outcomes and deliverables within specific timeframes. These would help implement the Enhancing Movement Response in Yemen workstreams to ensure coordinated contributions to operational priority areas under health, disaster management, WASH and NSD, as identified in YRCS's strategic plans
- the continued instability and risks of Movement funding for YRCS's NSD priorities – for example, IFRC's dependence on ICRC funds, which was undermined as a result of an ICRC decision to reduce the IFRC NSD contribution in 2019 in order to pay to procure a YRCS branch building in Al-Dhale instead.

Nevertheless, the key strategic 'enablers' to a cooperative environment have been:

- a Movement Cooperation Agreement (MCA) which takes on a YRCS-centric approach, and steers the Movement's strategic direction in Yemen. The framework:
  - o ensures a common understanding of the internal and external context, and the capacities and vulnerabilities to be addressed
  - o allows for flexibility and adaption – for example, additional taskforce and steering group coordination during the Covid-19 response
  - o maintains the 'positive spirit' of Movement coordination – and allows YRCS to orientate new partners
- the completion of IFRC's Unified Country Plan in 2023 with strengthened indicators: *"No one will fight for themselves and their objectives, and all partners will be guided solely by YRCS's priorities"*.

The MCA includes three layers to ensure strategic, operational and technical coordination.

- The Movement Strategic Platform (MSP) oversees strategic decisions and meets once a month, comprising the YRCS, IFRC and ICRC. A significant outcome from the MSP was the agreement of common Movement messaging with all local authorities when pressure grew on YRCS to be partial in late 2021 and early 2022.
- The Movement Operational Cooperation Group (MOCG), which also meets at least once a month, is made up of YRCS's executive director, its national programme coordinator, and representatives of all the Movement partners and organisational development roles.
- The Movement technical working groups (MTWG) cover health, DM, logistics, PMER and NSD and each meet at least once a month.

## **(ii) Harmonising Movement support for YRCS's NSD priorities**

From the outset, YRCS's readiness to make changes emerged from its programme delivery objectives in health, DM and WASH. The organisation saw the benefits of moving from siloed projects into multi-sectoral programmes that addressed inter-related community needs, as identified by vulnerability and capacity assessments (VCAs). As a result, YRCS consistently linked its humanitarian visions to the broader framework of NSD.

Although early versions of the Safer Access Framework (SAF) were a way in, YRCS and its partners recognised that the Movement cooperation and coordination mechanisms described above were not having a clear impact in strengthening coordinated support for its NSD agenda. The SAF assessments led to focus group discussions that allowed volunteers and branch staff to safely discuss challenging issues, such as neutrality and impartiality, and have any problems taken to the leadership. Because branches couldn't meet across the divided territory, they sometimes met out of country (e.g. in Djibouti), then shared unified messages with local authorities in the north and south to show they were part of a single organisation. The authorities and other parties to the conflict were very accepting of this, and even helped.

The idea for a YRCS NSD initiative began in November 2018, when the organisation held its annual planning meeting, attended by Movement partners. ICRC and IFRC agreed to join forces to scale up contributions towards YRCS's development, resulting in a trilateral Cooperation Agreement (August 2021) supported by



a pledge mechanism amounting to up to CHF 1.8 million within a two-year period (2021-2022). An NSD concept note/framework was subsequently developed outlining the purpose, strategy and key steps of the NSD initiative, and IFRC deployed an NSD delegate to provide technical expertise as part of its contribution.

To better coordinate the response to identified NSD needs, YRCS worked with ICRC and IFRC to set up an NSD technical working group (TWG) in 2022. With terms of reference that linked it directly to the first two levels of the MCA outlined above, the TWG aimed to provide a forum for coherent discussion, action planning and monitoring, which included all partners both inside and outside the country. An NSD evaluation<sup>14</sup> commissioned by ICRC and conducted in 2022, found that although some areas of NSD required further attention, a variety of NSD investments had delivered a positive outcome in terms of how disaster management programmes had significantly scaled up their ability to respond quickly and effectively.

*“Disaster and crisis management preparedness and response capacity (ranked 1st): the highest ranked NSD improvement area. Considered to be YRCS’s biggest strength following NSD support. The NS’s capacity to respond has improved significantly at both headquarters (HQ) and branch levels. Disaster Management (DM) department is considered to be well-equipped and proactive during emergencies, with efforts recognised by external partners.”*

Review of National Society Development Initiative in Yemen 2021–2022

The COVID-19 pandemic offered YRCS an opportunity to develop a Movement-wide plan, with integrated NSD elements, to build longer-term capacities. It was also another key turning point in YRCS’s shift towards strengthening its ability to be led by local needs, using its long-term localised human resource base.

However, despite these Movement coordination mechanisms, key questions and challenges remain, including:

- while NSD is an essential part of a partners’ support strategies, donors often ask for justifications for NSD interventions as opposed to directly meeting humanitarian needs. YRCS and the NSD TWG need to better articulate the qualitative and quantitative impact of NSD investments to show how they can lead to deeper localisation outcomes that deliver better, more relevant and more focused services in communities
- the need for YRCS to more clearly articulate its expectations for partners (both in country and abroad), and how these lead to sustainable characteristics in the longer-term
- the need to ensure accountability from TWGs, since the framework is not only for information exchange, but to collectively tackle and resolve existing and foreseeable challenges
- how some partners can be remote, but still involved processes and discussions how and when PNS can bring donors into the discussions
- how to describe key the localisation agendas as a means of increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of locally-led action.

The ownership of partnership meetings and their agendas changed over time. A senior leader in YRCS remarked that the 2019 meeting’s agenda, contents and management were organised and run by ICRC and *“felt very partner-driven”*. However, as remarked by the representative of a long-standing partner, the most recent Movement partnership meeting in 2022, which was led by YRCS, was hailed as a particularly transparent opportunity for everyone to *“put their clear issues on the table”*. As a result, the minutes contained nine commitments, which included the following three steps to address the majority of the challenges above:

- a YRCS plan of action for capacity strengthening that enabled all partners to play integrated roles
- a Movement strategic vision document for the next five years, integrating the goals and objectives of YRCS’s Strategic Plan 2023-2027
- a Movement humanitarian diplomacy document, integrating a number of the above elements for back donors.





## 10. Lessons learned on NSD strategies to adapt organisational relevance and capacities in fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected contexts

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*"It's not that we should not respect the Fundamental Principles, but we can't be naïve. There are contexts in which we must accept a different application of specific FPs in specific contexts."*

YRCS branch leader

With the aim of expanding services to communities not reached by other humanitarian institutions, YRCS's NSD investments have focused on building localised capacities for risk and vulnerability assessment, locally-led action, first response and proximity to affected populations. These efforts have brought widespread acceptance from, and access to, all parties to the conflicts, and communities in areas controlled by armed groups.

Headquarters, branch, sub-branch, staff and volunteer development strategies have brokered tensions between communities and led to continuous organisational reassessments. These provide the most appropriate duty of care to minimise injury and loss in life-threatening situations that have already tragically claimed the lives of 13 volunteers and staff between 2015-2018.

The priority NSD strategies developed by YRCS have helped it to remain a unified National Society, with a variety of support processes provided by its long-term Movement partners. These focused on:

- balancing a legal base and auxiliary status that ensured perceptions of organisational and personal neutrality, impartiality and independence that led to acceptance and access
- managing a centralised governance within a decentralised branch network that reflected more local tribal and cultural characteristics
- transitioning from a 'fire-fighting approach' that was needed in the first few years after the conflict escalated 2015, to a Strategic Plan-driven approach, with IFRC supporting better Movement coordination and the overall capacity strengthening of headquarters and branches for long-term work
- unified strategic planning processes based on active branch consultation and involvement, as BOCAs to start to build common capacities to implement new strategic directions in relation to their own specific contexts
- enhancing heightened negotiation skills and an 'interlocutor' network at all levels to navigate complex arrangements with multiple stakeholders and conflicting parties
- heightening risk and vulnerability assessment capacities, and adapting them to conflict-sensitive settings (e.g. VCA, and DRR in Conflict and Violence tools)
- localisation and the development of 'proximity' to affected communities
- approaches to assisting communities to prepare for, mitigate, and respond to violence and conflict
- blending first responder capacities with strengthening community resilience work, so these capacities were transferred to communities.

# **THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT**

## **Humanity**

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

## **Impartiality**

It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

## **Neutrality**

In order to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

## **Independence**

The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

## **Voluntary service**

It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

## **Unity**

There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

## **Universality**

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.



## **Yemen Red Crescent Society**

Head Office, Building N° 10 ,  
Al-Qa'a District, Near Minister's Office,  
26th September St Sana'a, Yemen  
Sanaa

**T** (967) (1) 278103

**E** [info@yemenredcrescent.org](mailto:info@yemenredcrescent.org)

**W** <https://en.yemenredcrescent.org/>