

The Complexities of the Post-conflict Reconstruction in Yemen

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September 2021



While the conflict in Yemen is heading toward a new phase based upon the “first briefing” delivered by the fourth UN Envoy Hans Grundberg in front of the Security Council which carried various messages to all parties and actors involved in the Yemeni Issue, the horizons and challenges related to the reconstruction became more obvious in spite of many tangled and complicated handlings that impose themselves upon the whole matter. This stirs questions about Yemen's ability to engage in a successful reconstruction process in the post-conflict stage, and how it can achieve this in light of many interlocking complications and current challenges, In spite of the efforts and roles made by the international official institutions and the non-governmental organizations as well as the initiatives made by the regional and international powers for rebuilding or reconstructing Yemen in the post-dispute phases, there are “grey areas” which may hinder those efforts in one way or another, as shown in the following points:

Entangled\complicated handlings

There are local internal situations and regional interactions as well as recent international moves which necessitated different handlings of the “reconstruction” problem for the countries affected by the armed conflicts like the Yemeni pattern, the most important of which are:

1- Humanizing the reconstruction: is one of the most important treatments regarding the reconstruction of states in the post-dispute stages, as there is often a frequent prioritization mistake, where the focus is firstly directed towards fixing the infrastructure including health and educational facilities, sewage, transportation lines and getting rid of the war debris without exerting efforts to rehabilitate people/individuals who suffered the horrors of the conflict. It is worth noting that there are many writings which deal with the different dimensions of the psychologies of those individuals who have been classified as “the lost generations” who were born in the midst of these conflicts. Those people within the affected areas need more support to help them and their children to face the psychological destruction and shocks which have immense impact over their behaviour patterns, and detach them from their geographical surroundings. Therefore, the reconstruction efforts are not limited to the financial resources, but the humanitarian dimensions have to be considered.

2- The reconstruction timing: the second handling is related to selecting the appropriate times to start the reconstruction process, and whether it will be implemented during the conflict or after the political settlement. Some regional and international powers depend on the “reconstruction steps” as a proactive entrance for a political settlement, and do not wait for the post-settlement and peace establishment to adopt such moves. For example, the KSA and the UAE play parallel roles for reconstructing a number of areas devastated by the Yemeni conflict regardless of the Houthis’ continuous misleading and violation of all political settlement efforts. The “Saudi Development and Reconstruction Program for Yemen”¹ supported seven vital sectors in Yemen including health, education, electricity and power, agriculture, fisheries, water and dam, roads, ports and airports, and the governmental buildings. The positive results of those moves were presented in the last third of September 2019, on the sidelines of the 74th session of the UN General Assembly, headed by the General Supervisor of the Program, Ambassador Mohammed bin Saeed Al Jaber.

3- The reconstruction identity: This is related to the objective scope of the reconstruction process and the target determinants, as some think that this process is only connected to the material aspect and the regular financial allocations that it entails to rebuild what the conflict has destroyed. However, on the other hand, the reconstruction process requires other non-economic/financial mechanisms, the most prominent of which are reforming the security sectors, rehabilitating the security forces, promoting community reconciliation, and good governance related to setting standards for the post-deterioration stages of institutions in order to build their capacities and gradually develop their tasks.

4-The reconstruction funding: is one of the most significant barriers in the way of the reconstruction regarding how to provide the financial resources allocated to this operation, especially in light of the difficulty in the Yemeni situation to currently talk about the principle of “the national exclusive franchise of solutions” amid the deteriorating economic conditions, whether because of the outcome of the conflict, or related to the negative repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, the main challenge in the post-conflict phase is how to build real and effective partnerships to face all political and economic challenges.

¹ [SDRPY | The Saudi Development and Reconstruction Program for Yemen](#)

5- The reconstruction partners: this is represented in the qualitative problem related to the regional and international power conflict about sharing the investment allocations for reconstruction processes in the countries that witnessed internal armed conflicts or battles against non-state actors as in the case of “the Houthis”. So, the question is how to manage this issue without violating the national interest.

Experiences prior to the “reconstruction operation in Yemen

There are discussions among many of the forces involved in the Yemeni file about the recovery process and how to start reconstruction. However, so far, there is no clear and comprehensive plan to determine priorities and clarify the requirements for reconstruction. While the World Bank is working on developing a plan for recovery and reconstruction, it does not appear that there is any other international movement in this direction except in rare cases. On the other hand, the regional moves were translated into the comprehensive humanitarian operations program in Yemen, launched by the KSA and the UAE as it achieved little outcome including fixing some roads on a limited and short-term scale, and it is still limited in the areas controlled by the internationally recognized Yemeni government.

Accordingly, there are many experiences prior to the reconstruction operation in Yemen, most prominent of which are five initiatives that formed the vital history of such reconstruction processes as shown below:

1- The initiative launched by the Dhamar Reconstruction Council, after the 1982-Earthquake.

2- The initiative launched by the Sa’dah Reconstruction Fund after the Third Sa’dah War in 2007.

3- The initiative launched by the Hadhramaut and Almahra Reconstruction Fund after the 2009-floods.

4- The initiative launched by the Reconstruction Executive Office after the 2011 Uprising.

5- The initiative launched by the Abyan Reconstruction Fund after the AQAP seized control of Abyan in 2012.

On the other hand, evaluating the previous efforts to achieve reconstruction reveals that they lack independence, transparency and adequate funding in addition to the poor coordination among all participants in the reconstruction efforts in each of these initiatives.

The “reconstruction” challenges in Yemen

The successive developments of the political and field conflict in the Yemeni file led to more complexities which forced special handlings, top of which are creating specific mechanisms to connect the humanitarian file, the financial challenges confrontation mechanisms, the social protection structure, resetting of the infrastructure and enhancing the rule of law along with the endorsement of strategies that strengthen the local governance pattern and the participation of local residents in the reconstruction operation, especially in the process of planning and setting priorities, in a way that poses many challenges when completing reconstruction treatments as shown below:

1- The humanitarian situation challenge:

The widespread food insecurity crisis has become one of the most pressing humanitarian challenges in Yemen, along with the destruction of sanitation infrastructure, in addition to the worsening economic conditions, as well as the negative repercussions of the Corona pandemic on all humanitarian, health and economic sectors, as Yemen suffers from unprecedented humanitarian crisis which made several Yemenis depend on aids and financial transfers. Moreover, the devaluation of the currency, trade turmoil, high food prices, severe shortages in fuel supplies, disruption and downsizing of humanitarian activities have led to

the deterioration of social and economic conditions, in a way that indicates the possibility of Yemenis being exposed to the risk of starvation.²

Accordingly, when talking about the structuring of “reconstruction” priorities, it is better to consider measures of combating the inflation in the Yemeni food security strategy which directly related to the importance of adopting moves that secure the economic growth with all its dimensions and direct impacts on paving the way for aid and fulfilling food security’s requirements.

2-The financial challenges:

It is one of the most important challenges in the way of the “reconstruction operation”, as according to the World Bank Report, issued in April 2021³, the Yemeni economy has been severely reduced in after the suffering of the oil sector-which is the biggest source of Yemeni exports- due to the decline of the global oil prices. On the other hand, the non-oil economic activities suffer from the trade slowdown related to the repercussions of the Corona pandemic, as well as the deeper lack in foreign currency along with the lack of oil revenue, and the reduction of humanitarian aid volume after the inflation rate was accelerated in 2020.

The weakness of the local currency played a major role in the intensification of the financial crisis, in parallel with the turmoil that directly reflected on the Corona pandemic, such as insecurity, trade restrictions/protectionism, supply chain crisis, etc.

Therefore, getting out from this problem requires a number of moves, top of which are:

The first move: is to restart the oil and gas sector’s activities as the return of production and the growing export curve contribute to accelerate the wheels of economic growth, as a result of the return of foreign exchange in the face of the disruption of payments balance and severe cash deficits in the public budget.

² [Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan 2021 \(March 2021\) \[EN/AR\] - Yemen | ReliefWeb](#)

³ [18-mpo-sm21-yemen-yem-kcm2.pdf \(worldbank.org\)](#)

This move will also contribute effectively to cover some of the huge reconstruction costs.

The second move is to “adjust the financial aids” by reconsidering the sudden financial flows of the foreign aids which could disrupt the local market, causing high inflation rate and severe food prices, This could push towards adopting more precautionary measures, especially related with “protecting the local currency” and “passage of external funding” through the channel of the Yemeni Central Bank to enhance its Foreign Reserves.

3-The social protection challenge:

The current Yemeni conflict in Yemen inflicted a lot of losses, especially those related with the decreasing quality of the educational and health facilities which already suffer from significant deterioration, in addition to undermining the social protection for the weak and marginalized groups, etc. This leads to talk about the possible efforts for reconstruction and reform, like forming Inclusive social programs for everyone. The recovery and reconstruction efforts have to address all individuals including children, women, youth and old people, as well as to focus on the “quality” of the programs and not limited to the “quantity”. For example, one of the most important challenges is relevant to the educational programs, as the reconstruction efforts should not be limited to rebuilding the affected schools, but they should include structuring plans for more inclusive and serious education investments which suit the requirements of building the state in the post-conflict phase.

It is worth mentioning that there is another dilemma related to “bridging the rift of social formation”. This challenge, in light of the conflict, constitutes a barrier that hinders the reconstruction success and the economic development, and rebuilding the state institutions. This pushes for considering establishing social programs which aim to denounce the negative ideologies and the extremist ideas, in addition to looking into the disarmament problem, and the methodology of reintegrating fighters into the society.

4- Rehabilitation the infrastructure challenge:

This problem is similar to a number of topics that should be looked upon and reconsidered when talking about “resetting the infrastructure by searching for three main targets:

- The first target is the human development projects such as those associated with education and health.
- The second target is Medium sized projects such as roads and bridges.
- The third is infrastructure and mega projects, such as building airports and seaports.

This could be clarified in the following points:

- The challenge associated with rebuilding the affected infrastructure during the conflict such as the service and vital facilities, from hospitals, schools, sanitation to roads and airports, as well as rebuilding roads, power networks, water facilities, houses, etc.
- The rehabilitation of ports, especially those which overlook the Red Sea. Fulfilling this point would enhance the geopolitical prioritization of Yemen in the post-conflict stage on the map of the main basic points of regional and international trade, as well as strengthening the linking of Yemen's economy to the regional and global economy, given the transit movement of Yemeni imports and exports to and from global markets.
- The challenge of rebuilding the power network in Yemen, and focusing on the renewable energy sources such as solar power rather than relying on the expensive and weak national network energy, as the possible sources of energy at the national and local levels have to be evaluated.

- The airport rehabilitation challenge: This starts with looking at short-term repairs, which enable airports to resume their work, and then looking at building new airports in the long term. The costs of building new airports will be included in the reconstruction budget.

- The challenge of building and managing the “Information technology and communication file in Yemen which is considered a precondition to fulfil the requirements of the economic development in the digitization age, and by being a tool that allows saving and quick transfer of data. For example, developing data centers will facilitate the tracking of social security numbers, benefits provided to beneficiaries, and targeting categories.

- The challenge of aligning between the “local contribution ” and “the regional and the international contributors” by preventing the foreign donors from imposing conditions that provide privileges to the regional and international companies, and looking at the role the private sector can play in creating a supportive environment for entrepreneurship as well as small and medium enterprises such as establishing a financial sector to support reconstruction operations, as well as focusing on developing a system that guarantees productivity and sustainability, on the basis of which the private sector can participate in mega projects such as rebuilding airports, ports, and highways, without neglecting establishing strict measures to fend off corruption channels.

5- The engagement of the local governments challenge:

This can be achieved through activating the role of institutions and local authorities, and to decentralize all reconstruction phases such as determining the necessities, planning, implementation, follow-up, evaluation and accountability. In spite of the local institutions’ weakness and their lack of the capabilities required to assume a role and an executive responsibility in the restructure directly, but on the other hand, there are a number of prior experiences that proved the local governments’ efficiency as shown in Aden, Hadhramaut. Al Hudaydah, Taiz and Marib, where the local authorities proved their efficiency in managing crises- before the conflict- in comparison with others.

6- The rule of law challenge:

This could be achieved by rebuilding trust in the central authority and the rule of law in light with the steps of post-restriction moves. For example, there is a challenge which is relevant with fulfilling the requirements for building the main institutions of the country, improving the general public and financial administration, and rehabilitating the security and judicial agencies. The significant contribution of these achievements to the recovery and reconstruction process should not be marginalized through binding legal determinants within the framework of what is known as the “rule of law,” without neglecting the specificity of Yemeni society and the drivers of conflict, in order to avoid any tensions that would complicate matters further.

Finally, Reconstruction is a political and economical operation that includes two main dimensions, the first is rebuilding the state, while the second is to reshape the relationship between the state and the society after the end of conflict. Therefore, the interaction between the political and economic factors are one of the stability determinants in the post-conflict stage.

It is worth noting that Yemen is among the countries with limited resources. This forces it to make a number of moves regarding the “reconstruction” top of which is related to the feasibility of making more progress at the institutional level. This means that it has to establish reliable bodies to enforce the law, enhance the individual security and protect properties. Those measures would increase the possibility of achieving sustainable economic recovery after the war that contributes in pushing and controlling the reconstruction operation. This depends on the current moves, based upon the qualitative breakthrough after the first briefing, delivered by the fourth UN Envoy, and his different engagement with all disputing parties, in an attempt to complete structuring of the political operation and reaching common consensus about the peaceful settlement to pave the way for launching the reconstruction process.

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