

ALL IN SCHOOL كلنا في المدرسة

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA  
OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN INITIATIVE



SUMMARY

# YEMEN

COUNTRY REPORT ON OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN

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children

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# Summary

As one of the poorest countries in the world, Yemen requires an educated citizenry for its economic and social development. This means ensuring that all children have access to and can take advantage of a quality education. The difficulty of the task, with its myriad of economic, political and social challenges, is reflected in the 1.6 million children between the ages of 6 to 14 who are out-of-school. As part of the Global Out-of-School Children Initiative (OOSCI), this study examines the issue of out-of-school children in Yemen, and asks the questions who are they, why are they out of school and how can they be brought back to school.

A small country at the tip of the Arabian peninsula, Yemen has an estimated population of 25.6 million (2012) of whom 51 per cent are under 18 years of age and 17 per cent under the age of 5 years.<sup>1</sup> The majority of the population (71 per cent in 2004) lives in rural areas, mostly in the 160,000 villages scattered across Yemen's varied topography. Extending infrastructure and services (paved roads, electricity, piped water, education and health care) to scattered rural villages is an overwhelming challenge to the government.

Inspired by the pro-democracy movements in the region in 2011, Yemeni youth and other groups initiated a successful grass-root movement to overthrow the regime of President Ali Abdullah Saleh. Since then the country has been in a state of political transition and instability. Yemenis feel a growing frustration with the high rate of unemployment, severe poverty, and inequitable distribution of resources and basic services. This state of affairs is reflected in the Human Development Index (HDI, 2011) where Yemen placed 154 out of 187 countries.

## The education sector

In the last 30 years, the education sector has performed remarkably well in expanding coverage and increasing enrolment, yet, the country still has the lowest pre-primary gross enrolment rate (GER) among all low-income countries. Gender disparities are most pronounced at the lower secondary level.

The National Basic Education Development Strategy (NBEDS, 2003–2015) has set a goal of increasing enrolment in basic education, particularly of girls and in rural areas with a goal of 82.7 per cent, and closing the gender gap from 81 to 84 per cent. Impediments to achieving these targets are the Ministry of Education's (MOE) weak institutional capacity, inadequately qualified professionals, lack of technical skills, and a weak education management information system (EMIS). In addition, the Government of Yemen depends on international development partners for financial and technical support for the education sector.

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<sup>1</sup> UNICEF. Situation Analysis of Children in Yemen. (2014). pg. 57.

## The Five Dimensions of Exclusion Model

In line with the Conceptual and Methodological Framework of OOSCI, the Yemen Country Report applies the Five Dimensions of Exclusion model. This includes:

- Dimension 1:** Children of pre-primary school age who are not in pre-primary or primary school.
- Dimension 2:** Children of primary school age who are not in primary or secondary school.
- Dimension 3:** Children of lower secondary school age who are not in primary or secondary school.
- Dimension 4:** Children who are in primary school but at risk of dropping out.
- Dimension 5:** Children who are in lower secondary school but at risk of dropping out.

The most relevant to Yemen's current context are Dimensions 2 and 3.

## Profiles of out-of-school children and those at risk of dropping out

The large majority (92 per cent) of pre-primary aged children are not in school. One in three Yemeni children between ages 6 and 11 (30 per cent) are out of school (Dimension 2). This amounts to a total of 1.2 million children in that age group. One in five children between 12 and 14 years old (22 per cent) is out of school, which amounts to 400,000 children (Dimension 3). One in six students (16 per cent) currently in primary school are at risk of dropping out before reaching Grade 6 (Dimension 4) and roughly one in nine students (11 per cent) currently in lower secondary school is at risk for dropping out before reaching Grade 9 (Dimension 5).

The characteristics associated with the likelihood of being out of school include age, female, rural residence, low wealth quintile and parents' education. Child labour is also a characteristic and due to its high prevalence, is discussed separately with three other groups of marginalized children: children in conflict areas, children from a minority group and children with disabilities.

### *Child labour*

Working increases a child's likelihood of being out of school. Twenty-one per cent of out-of-school children between the ages of 6 and 13 years work. Out-of-school child labourers are mostly unpaid or family workers. In rural areas the children are mostly working in agriculture and in urban areas services and manufacturing are the important sectors in employing children.

### *Marginalized children*

Three groups of children find it particularly difficult to access education: children in conflict areas, a minority group referred to as Al-Muhamasheen (*aka al-akhdam*), and children with disabilities.

Children in areas of conflict are likely to have reduced teaching hours. Al-Muhamasheen children face significant socio-economic barriers to education and may drop out of school early due to abusive treatment and discrimination in the school. As for children with disabilities, there is an estimate of 580,000 children with disabilities of school age (6-14 years) in Yemen. However, schools may not accept children with disabilities due to shortages in teaching facilities, learning materials and staff. The 2005 Household Budget survey states that 41 per cent of children with disabilities are out-of-school.

## Bottlenecks

Analysis of OOSCI profiles using the using the Five Dimensions of Exclusion Model identified the main characteristics that affect school participation. These are gender (female), wealth quintile, child labour, parents' education, and geographic residence (rural). These bottlenecks/constraints are embedded and linked to socio-cultural, economic and political norms specific to Yemen. They can be analysed in terms of four types of issues related to the enabling environment for education, to supply-side factors, to demand-side factors and to academic quality. Each type has sets of determinants that affect the number of out-of-school children. These include:

### *Enabling environment*

- **Poor health** of children including malnutrition and stunting exists in almost half the children in the country. Global studies show that poor health negatively affects student attention and performance, subsequently leading to failing grades, grade repetition and/or dropping out of school.
- **Social norms** include cultural and traditional beliefs and practices that influence people's attitudes and decisions. These norms often limit the awareness of possible long-term economic and social benefits of education. Traditions related to early marriage of girls and/or child labour are examples of practices that lead to early dropout.
- **Poverty** is a major cause of children being excluded from schooling. In making decisions about continuing education, caregivers often regard the expenses of children's education as a burden with low-returns and consequently of low priority.
- **The political** crisis has disrupted 1.2 million children from accessing schooling because of destroyed buildings and teachers being prevented from reaching school.

### *Supply-side bottlenecks*

The MOE faces difficulties in providing sufficient schooling opportunities because of external and internal factors. External factors include the high population growth rate that makes it impossible for the MOE to absorb the annual increase in new students. Also problematic are the difficult geographic terrain and limited infrastructure, and the authority of other ministries over the solution to these problems, meaning that the MOE is not the sole decision-maker in the sector.

Internal factors include poor management and limited human capacities – administrative and technical. The system also suffers from a lack of qualified teachers, especially female teachers, insufficient public education expenditure, lack of efficient monitoring and evaluation, including EMIS, and the lack of monitoring and evaluation capabilities to address problems as they arise and resolve them. One important often overlooked problem is the MOE's overly bureaucratic approach that relies on formal criteria for appropriate school buildings, teacher qualifications and credit that is only given when students have studied in the formal system.

In many cases, these external and internal factors combine to cause children to leave school. For example, a lack of paved roads and distance to schools seriously affect the delivery of education, making accessibility to existing schools difficult and causing children to leave school early. Paving roads is the responsibility of the Ministry of Public Works, while serving remote schools is the responsibility of the MOE. Resolving this problem requires creative solutions such as organizing programmes closer to children's homes and providing alternatives to the formal criteria described above.

## Demand-side bottlenecks

Parents demand certain conditions before they agree to enrol their children. For example, schools should be nearby and safe, they should be sex-segregated, and their daughters should be taught by female teachers, especially at the secondary level; classes should not be overcrowded; teachers should treat children with respect, and textbooks should be delivered on time. Parents also expect that the costs of schooling will not be prohibitive, especially given the usual case where there are several children in the family.

## Quality

In relation to international standards, TIMSS (2007) results ranked Yemeni students lowest among 36 countries in both tests. The poor performance was partially attributed to student inability to read test questions.<sup>2</sup> A recent (2012) USAID study evaluated the reading capabilities of students in the first three grades in three different governorates and found most students had still not acquired the basic skill needed for literacy and comprehension by the end of Grade 3.<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, the MOE and its development partners seldom mention student performance as an objective in education policies and programmes. Instead quality is referred to in terms of inputs needed in the education system. The MOE's investment in quality education has included training of teachers and school principals in school administration and management, in establishing father and mother councils (FMCs), development of a new curricula and textbooks, and social counselling. However, there has been no effort to measure the impact of these inputs on student performance, and it is quite possible that they have had little effect, at least partly because they have not been directly linked to improving student performance.

## Policies/strategies

The National Basic Education Strategy (NBEDS) sets the agenda for all education policies, strategies, programmes and activities. There are no specific policies/strategies targeting out-of-school children. In addition, if children drop out of school, it is difficult for them to re-enrol mainly because the system lacks support mechanisms to help them catch-up with their peers. On the other hand, the MOE with the support of its development partners have developed policies/strategies that indirectly address some of the bottlenecks affecting out-of-school children in Yemen. These are described in more detail in the full report and include:

- Abolishing school fees
- Offering conditional cash transfers (CCTs)
- Providing school grants (SGs)
- Giving free school kits and food rations
- Raising awareness

## Recommendations and conclusions

The following recommendations respond to bottlenecks on two critical levels – national-level delivery and school-level learning. The focus is on these levels because the limited resources available require that priorities be selected that are likely to produce the best results, in this case student learning, which in turn will affect enrolments and children staying in school longer. In addition, the recommendations should be low cost and build on on-going efforts.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid. pg. 182.

<sup>3</sup> Research Triangle Institute. Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA). 2012. Pg. 25.

## Enabling environment recommendations

1. The issue of out-of-school children is a multidimensional problem that requires an integrated inter sectoral (a body of inter-ministerial and non-governmental organizations and institutions) and holistic approach. In the best of all worlds, all aspects of the problem would be addressed together but in Yemen's case its limited resources must be used in ways that ensure results in the most cost-effective way possible. Two options have the potential to support the MOE's efforts:
  - i) To establish a higher council for basic education similar to the Higher Council for Motherhood and Childhood (HCMC) that would respond to the different needs of children in basic education grades. Such issues could include health, poverty and appropriate basic infrastructure (i.e., access to water, school facilities and roads). Establishing a Higher Council for Basic Education (HCBE) would expand the efforts of the HCMC. Already the HCMC's responsibilities include pregnant mothers and children in the first three grades of basic education. The HCBE would include children in the remaining primary school years from Grades 4 to 6 and the lower secondary Grades 7 to 9. The HCBE would formulate policies, enact legislation and develop strategies with crosscutting effect, i.e. across sectors; and, top-bottom, bottom-up.
  - ii) A second alternative would be for the MOE to collaborate with different relevant sectors and form partnerships with responsible ministries, development partners, non-governmental institutions and organizations in designing programmes and activities that target exclusionary factors.

Hence, both options emphasize improving the enabling environment in Yemen by addressing factors affecting non-enrolment and school leaving. It is these options that the MOE should be considering when it prepares the National Education Vision for Yemen (NEVY).

2. Awareness-raising campaigns implemented at different levels. This includes:
  - A national level media campaign using different mediums (television, radio and printed matter) needs to be mounted to cover the entire country. Messages should be directed at parents and children to explain the benefits of education as they relate to their families and children. Parents do not respond to messages related to national-level benefits and priorities. The messages should include that education is compulsory and that there are penalties for non-compliance.
  - A community-level awareness-raising campaign needs to employ several outreach methods. For example:
    - i) The village shaykh at the mosque (masjid) can be involved. This is where villagers, particularly men, congregate to discuss local issues and the shaykh can be asked to include appropriate messages in his Friday sermons (khutba).
    - ii) FMCs should be asked to advocate for two priorities: 1) to persuade caregivers and children to enrol in school; and 2) to reinforce the importance of staying in school to parents and children, especially those who are enrolled in school but at risk of dropping out.
    - iii) School administration should keep records of students who did not re-enrol at the beginning of the year and those who dropped out during the year. This should help keep records at the school level in identifying out-of-school children. At the community level, school staff and parent's councils need to identify out-of-school children at the beginning of the school year (i.e., children who did not return to school) and those who drop out during the school year. The principal or a social worker can visit these children's homes to persuade the parents and the children to return to school, not only because it is important but also because it is the law.

3. Fees for schooling in poor areas need to be abolished and schools should be prohibited from substituting other fees. To make up the shortfall, parent councils or student groups might lead fundraising efforts. Or zakat money might be used to help students with these extra fees.
4. There needs to be a process by which out-of-school children can return to school. This is especially needed for the largest populations of out-of-school children: child labourers, girls, children who dropped out of school and children with special needs. One option, where resources or volunteers are available, is to provide remedial classes for children 8-15 years old. Local councils could be asked to find locations, such as community centres, and teachers for these classes, and perhaps even raise money to support them. An alternative option is for NGOs to provide remedial education classes.

### *Supply-side recommendations*

5. Strengthening the institutional capacities of the MOE to focus its energies on bringing children into school and keeping them there. A major part of this is making sure all its inputs are geared to increasing student learning/performance. Building these capacities may encompass training in management, monitoring and evaluation, EMIS, governance, coordinating activities, etc., but only if the training can be shown to achieve increased participation and learning.
6. Capacity for data collection needs improvement at three levels: at the MOE level, at the school level and at the national level. We will only address the first two here, knowing that until more accurate information is available it will be difficult to know the proportion of the population out-of-school children. At the school level, it is important that all schools report the same categories of information and this data is copied from actual school records and not from the memory of senior staff, and that the coverage is adequate to assess not only participation but also elements related to student achievement and the inputs made available to improve instruction. This can be achieved by the MOE determining the indicators, for example, enrollees, children who dropout, children who repeat grades, and exam scores by subject, level and individual). A section on students with disabilities and/or special also needs to be included. Developing standard forms for all schools that uses these indicators is critical. It is equally important to ensure that school administrators are able to collect this information; therefore, the involvement of school principals in the development of these forms is necessary.
7. At the MOE level, the capacity of the Department of Statistics (DOS) needs strengthening, especially in research survey skills and monitoring. A cost-effective approach is to recruit experts to provide the DOS staff hands-on training in questionnaire design, data collection and in analysing the data to ensure it is mined for the kinds of information that can improve both the quality and quantity of education outcomes. Once data has been entered and analysed, it should be subject to a quality review. Existing partnerships between UIS or EMIS could be mobilized to carry out this review. Another option could be having a third party hire of an NGO to monitor data collection and carry out repeat visits to a selection of schools. Another alternative is for MOE to outsource data entry, cleaning and some analysis to the Central Statistical Organization (CSO), which has very strong capacities. This would mean that another institution compiles education statistics with no direct interest in the findings.
8. To make the system more accountable, reform is needed at the legislative level to streamline budgeting and recruitment. More autonomy and decision-making needs to be delegated to appropriate levels of the MOE so staff there can be held directly accountable for the areas of their responsibility.

9. Teacher training should be geared to producing teachers whose students achieve the learning expectations of the MOE. This includes ensuring that teachers are sufficiently knowledgeable about subject matter content, that they know what they are expected to teach (learning objectives) and that they are taught alternative ways of instilling learning through various forms of practice. Teachers may also need preparation in classroom management and student assessment to know whether their students have learned what they need to know. None of this should be left to chance; rather the impact of the training needs to be measured to see if there is increased student learning. Up until now, no effort has been made to make this link between teacher training and student performance, and, unless it is, training will continue to produce poorly qualified teachers.
10. There is a need to revamp the curriculum of the Faculty of Education (FOE) and Teacher Training Centers, but not before better understanding the aspects of training that lead to better student learning (see above). Teacher training programmes should include a period of practice teaching to familiarize teachers with the teaching context of Yemeni classrooms and the instructional materials they will be using. There should also be a component about how teachers can interact positively with children, which has proven to be important in improving student academic performance.
11. In order to make the best use of its limited resources, the MOE needs to prioritize what it wants to achieve rather than just focusing on what it needs. Important in this respect is to design more flexible, less formal approaches to the delivery of schooling. There are several low-cost “drivers of reform” that will give more flexibility while still retaining important controls with the MOE – such controls as what is learned, how it is measured, and who is qualified to receive certificates and diplomas. To implement such a programme the MOE would:
  - Determine the learning skills accepted at each grade level and subject matter to qualify for credit.
  - Develop exams (with test items) to measure students’ attainment of these skills.
  - Determine at which levels and by which exams diplomas would be given to those who demonstrate the skills.
  - Develop the capacity to implement such a programme through the existing MOE system. One practical tool could be wall-charts in classrooms to remind teachers of the subject learning objectives they should be teaching at their grade level. This gives transparency to the learning process and ensures everyone knows the learning goals.
12. Female teachers are needed. With more flexible venues for schooling as described above, alternative options can be tried to solve this problem, such as small home schools where teachers are paid according to their academic and professional qualifications (and are given the opportunity to upgrade them) or alternatively are paid on a scale related to the success of their students. Sometimes a trusted elder or a literate relative could teach girls, or a female teacher accompanied by a mahram can rotate weekly to classes where older girls teach themselves until teachers come.<sup>4</sup>

### ***Demand-side recommendations***

13. The community and parents should be involved in supporting their schools. This should include building the capacities of Father and Mother Councils (FMCs) in the management of their schools, academically and administratively. This is being piloted in the Whole School Improvement project.

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<sup>4</sup> *Mahram* is a relative male companion, for example, a husband, father, brother, or son.

14. The MOE needs to focus on the most vulnerable out-of-school children, such as those in the poorest governorates, children with disabilities, Muhamasheen, child labourers and internally displaced children in areas of emergency. One way would be for the MOE district offices to partner with local development associations and NGOs to reach out to these children to provide them with remedial education. Volunteer teachers could be recruited to teach these children in the masjid, or the local shaykh's home. With the incentive of obtaining diplomas as described above, these children could offset the difficulties they have had in entering or staying in formal programmes.

### *Quality recommendations*

Quality in the academic programme has been described above. The following section addresses other elements related to quality. To reiterate: quality refers to the achievement of student learning – at the core learning to read, write and comprehend and attain math skills. Children go to school to learn and a quality programme is one where children learn what they are supposed to learn.

15. Quality education must be result-based, affordable and expandable. This means defining quality education. We suggest the following definition: "A quality education is one which accomplishes the education goals and objectives of the Government of Yemen." This would mean that children would master the academic skills put forth in government documents. An education system that produced these results, as measured by academic performance, would be considered a quality one.
16. Curriculum improvement requires that the MOE address the issue of coverage, which means that all topics in the curriculum are taught and the official total hours of instruction per academic year are met. Currently, for example, the actual 'taught' mathematic topics cover only 46 per cent of all items in the curricula; and in about 70 per cent of the time are used only by high-performing systems. This teaching time is further compressed by teacher absenteeism and the late delivery of textbooks. Another possibility is that teachers may not themselves have sufficient knowledge of the content. Changing the curriculum by itself will not contribute to improving the quality of education if these other issues are not also addressed.
17. The MOE needs to devise a system to deal with teacher absenteeism. This includes keeping records on teachers' school attendance. The school principal should be held accountable for teacher absenteeism and 'ghost' teachers. Involvement of school administrators and FMC would help but also critical is the use student performance data to determine whether the system is effectively delivering education. When all the parts of the system are working well – including teachers being present, instructional time being sufficient and books being delivered on time – students will be learning. When students are not learning, school principals need to look for why this is and, if, for example, the problem is teacher absenteeism, then they need to take action to correct the problem. Again the focus needs to be on performance rather than rules.



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