

Review of the
National Society Development Initiative
in Yemen
2021–2022

Final Report

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Mark Shepherd

Executive summary

In addition to providing funding and support for humanitarian response, members of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) that work internationally also have a responsibility to provide support for the institutional strengthening of National Societies: a process known as National Society development (NSD). NSD is largely concerned with enabling a National Society to become and remain “an organization that consistently delivers, through volunteers and staff, relevant country-wide services to vulnerable people sustained for as long as needed and that contributes to the strength of IFRC and the Movement”.¹

The idea to advance NSD for the Yemen Red Crescent Society – the object of this review – first arose in November 2018, when the Yemen Red Crescent Society held its annual planning meeting attended by all partners concerned within the Movement. Following this meeting, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the IFRC joined forces to scale up their contributions to the National Society’s development. A trilateral cooperation agreement was made on August 2021, supported by a pledge mechanism of up to 1.8 million Swiss francs within a two-year envelope (2021–2022). A concept note/framework was then developed that outlined the purpose, strategy and key steps of the initiative, including deployment of an NSD delegate by the IFRC and mobilization of technical expertise to support the Yemen Red Crescent Society.

In November 2022, the Yemen Red Crescent Society, IFRC and ICRC commissioned an independent review of the initiative, covering the period from January 2021 to August 2022. The specific objectives of the review were to determine:

- the extent to which NSD support had contributed to the Yemen Red Crescent Society’s overall development, based on priorities set when the initiative began
- how well the initiative achieved its objectives in terms of the overall indicators and deliverables described in the Yemen NSD framework
- the efficiency and quality of partnership arrangements.

The review method comprised a literature review, semi-structured interviews with nine ICRC staff, five YRCS staff, four IFRC staff and six partner National Society staff (24 staff in total: seven women and 17 men) and two online surveys. One survey was directed at primary key informants and received 17 responses (five from the Yemen Red Crescent Society, four from the IFRC, three from the ICRC and five from partner National Societies). The second survey, of Red Crescent branches, received no responses, suggesting it was not launched by the National Society’s headquarters.

In considering the review’s findings, it must be remembered that Yemen is a very challenging place in which to operate, for both the Red Crescent and its partners. The National Society is a developing organization with a modest base on which to build and, by its own staff’s assessment, it is in need of considerable support. The comments contained in the review aim to be supportive and should be taken in a spirit of constructive criticism promoting growth and development.

The review ranked priority areas in descending order of perceived improvement. The main findings by priority area are as follows:

1. Preparedness and response capacity for disaster and crisis management

This is the area with the most improvement and is considered to be the National Society’s greatest strength following NSD support. Response capacity improved significantly at both headquarters and branches. The Disaster Management Department is well equipped and proactive during emergencies, and its efforts have been recognized by external partners. Improved planning and implementation of activities is evident. Training is conducted at both headquarters and the branches. The department is considered to have a good team and is much better prepared and

¹ IFRC, NSD Framework, 2013, p. 10.

effective in its response to emergencies.

2. Strategic development

A significant amount of work and time was invested in developing strategic planning during 2021 and 2022, providing a solid base on which to build. This resulted in the National Society's governance and leadership teams having a clearer understanding of the organization's strategic directions. Good effort was also made in preparing strategies for water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), health and disaster management. However, the National Society's new strategy (2022–2026) is still in draft form and is taking too long to be finalized, which was attributed to delays caused by governance. The 2023 operational plan (under development) does not relate strongly enough to the Yemen NSD Framework. While each department has a plan to implement the framework, they tend to focus on disaster management, WASH and health in isolation with few cross-cutting actions across complementary thematic areas.

3. Planning, monitoring, evaluation and reporting

There has been noticeable improvement in planning, monitoring, evaluation and reporting (PMER) since the establishment of the PMER unit in mid-2022. However, PMER is very IFRC-driven and not well integrated overall into other aspects of the organization. Most of the information provided to the unit comes from the IFRC, and reporting is not reflective of the contributions of partner National Societies. The unit overlooks many branch activities and should better reflect the entirety of the National Society's work.

4. Volunteer management system

There are doubts as to whether there is a clear volunteer policy at the National Society's headquarters. The concept of voluntary service is poorly understood. Most volunteers receive some form of incentive, voluntary service is not promoted, and the volunteer management system is seen as a mechanism for managing day workers. While a database now exists and the Red Crescent is using it to monitor volunteer participation in activities, enrolling volunteers into the system may not be transparent. A good deal of work appears to focus on establishing incentives rather than management systems; little thought is given to using volunteers as a way to create more sustainable services.

5. Organizational and capacity development at headquarters

Some progress has been made in terms of the Yemen NSD Framework, strategy outline and priorities. A stronger focus on systems, procedures, monitoring and reporting was also seen, with improvements in most areas. The existence of headquarters-driven branch organizational capacity assessments suggests that this area is moving forward, and there is a better understanding at headquarters of what needs to be done in terms of NSD and programmes. Health, disaster management and WASH functions have improved. However, real progress is being hampered by staff's inability to drive through change and make progress on initiatives. The lack of an organizational chart was seen as preventing effective decision-making and a failed attempt at restructuring was considered to have impeded greater improvements.

6. Communication management

There has been limited change in communication management. The Yemen Red Crescent needs to get better at sharing information, promoting its successes and communicating about its humanitarian work to Yemenis. There has been limited improvement in communication with partner National Societies, and communication channels between headquarters and the branches is considered poor. The lack of an organizational chart (complicated by overlapping roles and responsibilities) was cited as a major barrier to change.

7. Governance and leadership

There has been virtually no progress in this area. Governance and leadership are still very centralized, despite attempts by the National Society's secretary-general to make changes. The lack of a clear organizational chart and official designation of roles and responsibilities at headquarters and the branches significantly impedes effective governance, leadership and decision-making. Considerably more focus and investment are needed, specifically with respect to governance. Better staff inductions and training are also needed. The National Society's

leadership does not appear willing to take tough decisions, particularly related to wrongdoing.

8. Organizational and capacity development at the branches

Some branches were considered to be doing well, but others were struggling, mainly because of poor management approaches. The branches appear to lack the basic foundations needed to benefit from NSD, and development efforts seemed to conflict with many branch leaders' priorities and interests, resulting in resistance to implement plans for improving branch work. The branches are also considered to be overly dependent on support from partners, and easier-to-access branches benefit more from such support than hard-to-reach ones. Organizational capacity assessments have been undertaken in several branches, but there has been no meaningful follow-up. Branch staff need to be supported to see that NSD is not only about infrastructure, but also "soft" capacities and the effective introduction of policies, systems and procedures.

Overall, the review found the NSD initiative to be highly relevant to the Yemen Red Crescent and the people it serves. The priority areas are well targeted and reflect the National Society's development needs. However, investing in fewer, more strategic priorities might have been more beneficial. With only modest progress made in the priority areas, the initiative's effectiveness and efficiency at this mid-point review remains questionable. The initiative's wider impacts show promise, however: and there are encouraging signs that core operational functions (health, WASH and disaster management) are improving and bringing relevant humanitarian services to people who need them.

It is too early to consider if NSD approaches are sustainable, but there is every opportunity to plan for this aspiration more strategically going forward. Given the strong foundations that have been created for NSD work in Yemen, and the very good coordination and arrangements that exist between the Yemen Red Crescent and its partners, there is reason to believe that progress can be put on track, providing that the recommendations of this review are accepted, carried out and owned by the Yemen Red Crescent – particularly its leadership. This will require a level of cultural change, which will be challenging but not impossible if well strategized and effectively implemented.

The review contains ten recommendations for improving NSD work in Yemen (and elsewhere):

1. A Theory of Change should be developed to complement the Yemen NSD Framework.
2. Yemen's specific NSD framework should be revised, updated and made more realistic in terms of its main aspirations.
3. The revised framework should fully account for the Yemen Red Crescent Society's aspirations and options for sustainable humanitarian service.
4. The IFRC should provide more stable NSD technical support to Yemen.
5. The Yemen Red Crescent's Organizational Development Department should develop performance targets for advancing NSD initiatives.
6. The IFRC should strategize how it will move forward with NSD at the National Society.
7. The quality of documentation (reports, log frames, etc.) should be improved.
8. The NSD Technical Working Group should take a more proactive coordinating role and develop an approval mechanism for existing and future NSD initiatives.
9. The NSD Steering Committee should be activated with a revised composition that includes the National Society's senior management and appropriate terms of reference.
10. The IFRC and ICRC should agree on a clear framework approach for how NSD is implemented at the country level(s).